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Petrus van Mastricht (1630–1706): Text, Context, and Interpretation

With a Foreword by Carl R. Trueman

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Foreword

The last thirty years have witnessed a remarkable revolution in the study of Reformed Orthodoxy, that broad movement of theological consolidation which took place in the two centuries between the early breakthroughs of the Reformation and the reorganization of intellectual disciplines within the university world heralded by the arrival of the various intellectual and cultural developments known collectively as the Enlightenment. The old models which tended to prioritize one or two figures in the Reformation (typically John Calvin and Heinrich Bullinger) as the gold standards of Reformed theology, by which all future generations could be judged in terms of fidelity or deviation, has gone. So too has the narrow intellectual focus which tended to prioritize ideas or doctrines in the abstract without paying attention to the wider pedagogical or cultural contexts.

In place of this older scholarship, we now have a growing number of studies which seek to place Reformed thinkers of the period in a much wider context. Attention to the primary texts has revealed that exegetical, philosophical, and polemical concerns all helped to shape Reformed Orthodoxy, as did the more material conditions of its instantiation in the university context. And in place of older questions about whether the Reformed Orthodox stood in continuity or discontinuity with their Reformation forebears, we now have a wealth of scholarship which seeks not so much to evaluate the Orthodox in terms of anachronistic criteria, but rather to explain them in terms of their own particular historical context.

One of the results of this is that serious scholarly attention is now being directed at figures who were previously neglected. John Owen, the English Puritan, was for many years of interest only to pietistic strands of Protestantism. Now he is regarded as one of the most significant theological voices of the seventeenth century. And among the continental Reformed, figures such as Gisbertus Voetius and Johannes Cocceius have emerged as significant voices in shaping the Christianity of their day.

To these we can add Petrus van Mastricht, a German-Dutch theologian who was the author of a major system of divinity. This work is in the process of being

place, Mastricht can overcome his opponents, especially the Cartesian's sole emphasis on God's will, without reference to God's knowledge and essence. Furthermore, the conceptual understanding of an *ordine naturae* allows Mastricht to overcome his opponents' understanding and use of the terms *prior* and *posterior* in a causal sense of the decree and the thing decreed.

Another unique Reformed distinction, which expands the Reformed's ability to answer the Cartesian question of whether there are states of affairs that are unknown to God prior to his will, is that of the neutral proposition.[43] When a state of affairs is still in the state of possibility, prior to the decree of the will, God knows the state of affairs as a possible, but not as a realized state of affairs. The state of affairs does not have a time-indexed value, unless and until God passes it out of the state of possibility into the state of futurition. Furthermore, not all that is possible is passed out of a state of possibility into futurity. God is omniscient, omnipotent, "but not omnivolent."[44]

43 On the "neutral proposition," in Mastricht's predecessor, see Andreas J. Beck, *Gisbertus Voetius (1589–1676): Sein Theologieverständnis und Seine Gotteslehre*, Forschungen Zur Kirchen- und Dogmengeschichte 92 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), 271–272, 276, 303–304, 312, 327.

44 Ames, *Marrow*, Ch. 7, Th. 47.

Yoshi Kato

Petrus van Mastricht and Descartes's New Philosophy

Descartes and the Dutch

Barely turning twenty, the early modern philosophic *enfant terrible* Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1640–1716) once famously wrote, "the opinions of the so-called scholastic theologians and philosophers are not entirely to be disdained."[1] These words came well after the high esteem for such theologians and philosophers had greatly waned. The loss of this esteem can be attributed to various causes, but there is one singular cause that has contributed to this more than others. This is the impact of René Descartes (1596–1650) and his new philosophy.

Such impact was acutely felt in several intellectual centers of Europe, including two university cities in the Dutch Republic. During the seventeenth century, the young republic enjoyed unprecedented glory in politics, economy, and, most importantly for our discussion, science. Though the nation was still legally unstable in the world of international politics, Dutch cities such as Leiden and Utrecht attracted bright young minds all over Europe because of their relatively open attitude toward new ideas. Descartes was one such mind who decided to settle in the republic. In fact, the French philosopher ended up spending the most of his adult life there. Because of his long tenure in the low countries, his new philosophy gradually infiltrated the Dutch academy, which caused grave uneasiness among the academy's guardian theologians and scholastic philosophers.

This uneasiness finally resulted in open controversy.[2] The first major controversy took place in Utrecht. This was the city where Petrus van Mastricht (1630–1706) took up his studies under the famous university rector Gisbertus Voetius (1589–1676). Voetius, who was often derisively called "the pope of

1 Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Discourse on Metaphysics* (1686) in *Philosophical Essays*, ed. and trans. Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber (Indianapolis, IN; Cambridge: Hackett, 1989), §11, 43.

2 Theo Verbeek, *Descartes and the Dutch: Early Reactions to Cartesian Philosophy, 1637–1650* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1992); J. A. van Ruler, *The Crisis of Causality: Voetius and Descartes on God, Nature, and Change* (Leiden: Brill, 1995).

Utrecht" (*papa ultrajectinus*), in fact led the anti-Cartesian campaign in the city.[3] However, being very aware of the dangerous implications for such controversy, Descartes was not only hesitant to get himself involved, but even chided his friend Henricus Regius (1598–1679) who had taken his ideas into the open air. In addition to Utrecht, another controversy subsequently erupted in the city of Leiden in 1641. There it became much more theological, because the city's main defender of Cartesianism was Adriaan Heereboord (1613–1661), whose relation to young theology students was closer than that of Regius, who belonged to the faculty of medicine. To counter Heereboord's open propagation of Cartesianism, the Leiden theologian Jacobus Revius (1586–1658) wrote a treatise scathingly attacking various points of Descartes's new philosophy.[4] Descartes was quite upset at being forcibly made a public figure by these two incidents. Yet despite the Frenchman's desire to be left alone, no-one, regardless of which side they were on in the controversy, were willing to leave his philosophy and its implications in the private realm. This is primarily because many academics felt that the new philosophy would inevitably impact the core tenets of the religious confession held by the republic. Politicians, however, did not share the same sentiment.[5] They instead feared the controversy would further divide the young republic, risking the national unity that is often highly coveted in the midst of tumultuous international affairs. As a result, they decided to ban all discussions concerning Descartes's philosophy in the Dutch academy. This prohibition, however, was in name only. In reality, there were enough legal loopholes so that his new ideas would still be discussed and even openly taught by a new generation of young Cartesian theologians and philosophers.[6] Hence, the goal of the present chapter is to delineate Mastricht's relationship to the impact of Descartes's new philosophy disseminated primarily by these theologians and philosophers.

3 Aza Goudriaan, *Reformed Orthodoxy and Philosophy, 1625–1750: Gisbertus Voetius, Petrus van Mastricht, and Anthonius Driessen* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 7–14.

4 Aza Goudriaan, *Jacobus Revius: A Theological Examination of Cartesian Philosophy: Early Criticisms (1647)* (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

5 Herbert Harvey Rowen, *John de Witt, Grand Pensionary of Holland, 1625–1672* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 401–19.

6 In spite of the provincial States' negative decision against Cartesianism, the new philosophy was never officially suppressed. For example, even in 1652, the burgomasters of Utrecht still appointed the Cartesian philosopher Johannes de Bruyn (1625–1675).

Mastricht and the Heretical Cartesianism

Mastricht's career coincided with the rise of Cartesianism in the Dutch Republic. Having been thoroughly reared in the tradition of Reformed scholasticism under the guidance of rigorous theologians such as Voetius and Johannes Hoornbeek (1617–1666), Mastricht eventually launched his own campaign against one of the young, influential Cartesian theologians, Christoph Wittich (1625–1687).[7] This debate more or less continued until the anti-Cartesian theologians, led by Mastricht and supported by the newly installed stadholder Willem III (1650–1702), succeeded in silencing many Cartesians such as Wittich in 1676.[8] In the following year, Mastricht was installed in the chair formally occupied by Voetius and Andreas Essenius (1618–1677). He then begun to conduct a series of anti-Cartesian disputations, many of which later became a part of the polemical section of his systematic theology, *Theologica practica*.[9] Also, upon the request of a presbytery of Amsterdam, Mastricht wrote a very critical report of a book written by Cartesian pastor Balthesar Bekker (1634–1698). Bekker's work was called *The World Bewitched*, and it was known for its systematic attempt to use Cartesian dualism to deny the existence of immaterial beings.[10]

Among all the anti-Cartesian works written by Mastricht, his magnum opus, *Gangraena cartesiana* deserves a closer look.[11] Published in 1677, the book was intended to persuade the republic's political and religious elites that Cartesianism is not simply a different way of thinking about the world, but rather a religious heresy. Mastricht seemed to have written this work perhaps because a series of attempts to completely silence Cartesianism was not granted by Willem III to the extent that he initially hoped for. In fact, in spite of the hope of some anti-Cartesian theologians, the stadholder decided not to remove Cartesian

7 Chrisoph Wittich, *Dissertationes duae, quarum piro de scripturae in rebus Philosophicis abusu, altera de vera quiete et vero motu Terrae* (Amsterdam: L. Elzevirius, 1653); idem, *Disputatio theologica de stylo scripturae quem adhibet cum rebus naturalibus sermonem instituit* (Duisburg: Ravins, 1655); Petrus van Mastricht, *Vindicae veritatis et autoritatis Sacrae Scripturae in rebus philosophicis adversus dissertationes D. Christophori Wittichii* (Utrecht: Waesberge, 1655).

8 Caroline Louise Thijssen-Schoute, "Le Cartésianisme aux Pays-Bas," in *Descartes et le cartésianisme hollandaise*, ed. Eduard Jan Dijksterhuis (Paris: PUF, 1950), 183–260: 208–209.

9 Petrus van Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia qua, per singular capita Theologica, pars exegetica, dogmatica, elenchtica & practica, perpetua successione conjugantur* (Utrecht: Thomas Appels, 1699).

10 See Daniel Ragusa's chapter in the present volume.

11 Petrus van Mastricht, *Novitatum cartesianarum gangraena, Nobiliores plerasque corporis theologici partes arrrodens et exedens, seu Thelogia cartesiana detecta* (Amsterdam: Jansson, 1677). This work was also reprinted in 1678 and 1716 respectively. Petrus van Mastricht, *Theologia cartesiana detecta, seu gangraena cartesiana, nobiliores plerasque corporis theologici partes arrodens et exedens* (Deventer: Daniel Schutten, 1716).

professors from the Dutch academic institutions.[12] Being a pragmatic politician, he probably was aware that the rigorous confessionalism might stifle the advancement of science necessary for maximizing national interests. At the same time, Mastricht also knew that if he could be convinced that the heretical teachings of Cartesianism indeed endangered the health of society, the prince would have no other choice but to ban it.[13] Therefore, it was critical for Mastricht to demonstrate clearly and distinctly that Descartes's philosophy was, in fact, heretical.

During the early modern era, Dutch society was religiously tolerant, allowing even those who adhered to unorthodox ideas and confessions to coexist—so long as their worship services were held in private.[14] Therefore, it is important to remember that even though rigorous theologians envisioned a more thoroughly orthodox society, Mastricht's goal was not to banish every single Cartesian from the Republic. Instead, what he was concerned with and aimed to achieve was to brand Cartesianism as heresy, so that it would no longer be possible for Cartesians to hold public positions, especially in universities. After all, the Dutch republic still required university professors to subscribe to the confessional documents.[15]

In his *Gangrene*, Mastricht attempted to achieve his goal first by describing the nature of heresy.[16] According to him, heresy can best be described as gangrene, following the analogy used by the apostle Paul (2 Tim 2:17–18). Any gangrene, Mastricht states, begins very small. It then grows rapidly, eventually spreading throughout the host. Heresy also has these three traits. Examining a brief history of Cartesianism, Mastricht observes that it began very small, but it later grew rapidly and eventually contaminated every corner of the Republic as well as the rest of Europe. These traits can be seen in other heresies such as Roman Catholicism, Lutheranism, Socinianism, and Arminianism. Their beginning was very small, but they grew rapidly and eventually spread throughout other regions. Therefore, Mastricht urges that unless one takes immediate action against Cartesianism, the damage to the health of the body of Christ would be immeasurable, just as the previous heresies have done so.[17]

12 See Frits Broeyer, "William III and the Reformed Church of the Netherlands," in *Redefining William III: The Impact of the King-Stadholder in International Context*, ed. Esther Mijers and David Onnekink (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 109–23, especially 115–16.

13 Regarding the banning of philosophy in the early modern Dutch Republic, see Wiep van Bunge, "Censorship of Philosophy in the Seventeenth-century Dutch Republic," in *The Use of Censorship in the Enlightenment*, ed. Mogens Laerke (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 95–117.

14 Jonathan Israel, *The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall, 1477–1806* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 638–640; Rowen, *John de Witt*, 401–19.

15 F.G.M. Broeyer, "Theological Education at the Dutch Universities in the Seventeenth Century: Four Professors on Their Ideal of the Curriculum" in *The Formation of Clerical and Confessional Identities in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Wim Janse and Babara Pitkin (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 115–32.

16 Mastricht, *Gangraena*, 1.

Having defined the nature of heresy, Mastricht goes on to examine various theological topics and attempts to demonstrate how many of Descartes's philosophical precepts quickly burgeoned into unorthodox ideas in theology. The range of topics covered in *Gangrene* include the authority of Scripture, the divine essence, God's infinity, the relationship between the divine nature and space, the divine volition, the laws of nature, and many more. Since it is not possible to comprehensively examine Mastricht's discussion, I have chosen three main issues that paradigmatically represent the heart of the theological debate concerning Descartes's new philosophy.

Cartesian Doubt

In his effort to demonstrate the heretical nature of Cartesianism, Mastricht focuses on one of the most well-known teachings in the Frenchman's philosophy: methodical doubt. In both his *Discourse on Method* and *Meditations*, Descartes argued that in order to attain any knowledge with certainty, we must first doubt our opinions.[18] There are good reasons to doubt our opinions, since they are often based on faulty perceptions and reasonings. Therefore, Descartes bids us first to doubt our senses. He then even encourages us to doubt our mathematical knowledge, which seems to us most certain and true. According to him, we should even doubt the existence of God. Having doubted everything, we begin to realize that even in the act of doubting, we cannot doubt the fact that we are doubting. This is the critical moment, in which we attain the certainty of knowledge. By doubting everything, we discover that we as thinking beings indubitably exist because we cannot doubt the fact that we are doubting. Starting with this knowledge, Descartes reworks everything backward. He argues that in our thoughts, we find the idea that surpasses everything in its perfection. Since all we can be is imperfect even in our thoughts, the most perfect idea had to have come from outside. The one who inserted this perfect idea in our thoughts, according to the French philosopher, must be God. This perfect God, in turn, guarantees our mathematical knowledge. In this way, the methodical doubt establishes the certainty of human knowledge.

17 Mastricht, *Gangraena*, 2–7.

18 Descartes, *Discourse on the Method*, Charles Adam and Paul Tannery, ed., *Oeuvres de Descartes*, 11 vols. (Paris; Vrin, 1996) (hereafter AT), VI:18; idem, *Principles of Philosophy*, AT VIII–A:8; idem, *Meditation on First Philosophy*, AT VII:17–23.

Although it seems to be rather clear that the goal of Descartes's doubt was to secure the truth about the self, the world, and God, it did not seem so to a large number of rigorous theologians who reacted violently toward this innovative teaching. They exclaimed that God of the orthodox Christianity, first and foremost, demanded faith. So to doubt God even for the sake of accomplishing the certainty of knowledge, one would commit a sin of profanity, requiring repentance. The first generation of anti-Cartesians such as Voetius and Revius repeated this point over and over.[19] According to them, Descartes, already in the first step of his philosophical investigation, had failed to adhere to the orthodox tradition of Christian faith. Therefore, the rest of his teaching must be rejected.

In order to respond to this objection, the young followers of the French philosopher often evaded the criticism by emphasizing the aspect of "methodical" but not of "doubt." Just as it had become common place for anti-Cartesian theologians to attack Descartes's doubt as dreadful faithlessness, it was also common for these Cartesians to argue that what Descartes tried to achieve in doubting was simply to suspend judgment. For example, one of the most brilliant Cartesians, Johannes Clauberg (1622–1665) argued that Cartesian doubt was a suspension of judgement regarding uncertain opinions.[20] According to him, this was very evident, because once the knowledge of God was accomplished with certainty, Descartes had no need to doubt God at all. The doubt, in other words, is an epistemological tool, enabling the truth to appear when applied correctly.

By the time Mastricht wrote his *Gangrene* in 1677, a number of Cartesians seemed to have followed Clauberg's argument. Perhaps Mastricht was aware of this. Therefore, while he still regurgitated his teachers' argument, he launched another, which was somewhat more complex and sophisticated than that of his teachers. According to Mastricht, the problem of the methodical doubt did not merely consist in its rejection, however brief it may be, of the knowledge of God, but rather the problem lay in the doubt's impact on a variety of orthodox doctrines of God.

19 Goudriaan, *Jacobus Revius*, 17–20.

20 Clauberg, for example, replaces "doubt" (*dubitare*) with "suspending judgment" (*judicium suspendere*). See Clauberg, *De cognitione dei et nostri* (Duisburg: Wyngaerden, 1656), IV. §25, 43–44; Massimiliano Savini, *Johannes Clauberg: Methodus Cartesiana et Ontologie* (Paris: Vrin, 2011), 137, 171, 298; Theo Verbeek, "Clauberg et les Principles de Descartes," in *Johannes Clauberg (1622–1665) and Cartesian Philosophy in the Seventeenth Century*, ed. Theo Verbeek (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999), 116; Winfried Weier, "Cartesianischer Aristotelismus im Siebzehnten Jahrhundert," *Salzburger Jahrbuch für Philosophie* 14 (1970): 36–65, 48. Other Cartesians such as Allinga argued in a similar manner. See Ernestine van der Wall, "Orthodoxy and Scepticism in the Early Dutch Enlightenment," in *Scepticism and Irreligion in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. Richard H. Popkins and Arjo Vanderjagt (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 135.

According to Mastricht, Cartesian doubt provides a set of teachings that are fundamental to Descartes's philosophical system.[21] By doubting everything, we achieve basic knowledge regarding the human beings. Human beings are indeed the mind (*mens*). Therefore, the essence of human beings can now be seen as consisting in the thinking thing (*res cogitata*). This essence has nothing to do with corporeal things, whose essence consists in extension (*res extensa*). In this way, Descartes successfully built his case for the dualistic structure of the universe.[22] Thus far, there is nothing heretical about the Frenchman's philosophical system, but as soon as his dualism is applied to the idea of God, uncountable problems are brought forth, Mastricht argues. Indeed, Descartes defined God as being the infinite mind. Since God is the mind, his essence is said to consist in the thinking thing. But if God's essence is thought, he would have nothing to do with the physical universe whose essence consists of extension. How, then, can he be said to dwell in the person of Christ who once walked on earth? If God does not dwell in Christ, Christ is no longer divine. Mastricht also questions how, if God is indeed the thinking being, can he be said to be present everywhere? Still, the problem does not stop simply at the issue of divine omnipresence.[23] Since God's essence has nothing to do with extended things, he would not be able to occupy any space. Therefore, he is nowhere. Would not this conclusion, Mastricht asks, lead to blatant and philosophical atheism, worse than simply doubting the existence of God?

We now see how Mastricht further developed the argument against Cartesian doubt. According to Mastricht, the doubt is the key to attaining the knowledge of the universe that is fundamentally dualistic. In the dualistic universe, God simply turns out to be a set of mere ideas, having no real place of existence outside the mind. Therefore, even though Cartesian theologians such as Clauberg and Wittich repeatedly confessed their commitment to the Reformed Church, it was not too difficult to suspect their orthodoxy.[24] Some have considered it to be in words only, lacking substance. Elsewhere in *Gangrene*, Mastricht only tries to deepen

21 Mastricht, *Gangraena*, 8.

22 Marleen Rozemond, *Descartes's Dualism* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1998).

23 Mastricht, *Gangraena*, 8–9. Manstricht more fully develops this line of argument when he discusses *Spiritus* as God's essence. See Mastricht, *Gangraena*, 225–36.

24 See, for example, Wittich's public confession of his orthodoxy in his *Theologia pacifica, in qua varia problemata theologica inter reformatos theologos agitari solita ventilantur, simul usus Philosophiae Cartesianae in diversis theologiae partibus demonstratur, et ad Dissertationem Celeberrimi Viri, Samuelis Maresii, De abusu Philosophiae Cartesianae in rebus theologicis et fidei, modeste respondetur* (Leiden, 1671), "Praefatio ad Ecclesias Reformatas Foederati Belgii." Wittich writes, "I, in dealing the heavenly doctrines, rely only on the word of God which is like the polestar for the perfect faith and life. Also I shall not deviate from the consensus of confessions received by the reformers in order to benefit the church's interest."

this suspicion. Next, we shall turn to his discussion of the Cartesian concept of accommodation.

Scripture and Hermeneutical Accommodation

The philosophy of Descartes could be described as a methodological attempt to build a theoretical system, incorporating various scientific discoveries made in the end of the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth century. These discoveries, after all, made a commitment to the older scientific system based on the Aristotelian-Ptolemaian corpus and the Bible more strenuous. Among the discoveries, the most significant and controversial was Galileo's version of heliocentrism. While the controversy surrounding Galileo himself was a result of a series of unfortunate political missteps, the Dutch theologians led by Voetius took issue mainly with Descartes and his followers because they seemed to have embraced the theory not as a mere hypothesis but as the true alternative to the older cosmology, which to Voetius was not only scientific but also biblical.[25]

One of the most important defenders of the theory was the Dutch Cartesian Christoph Wittich. In the work called *Two Essays*, this young theologian argues that the theory did not contradict the biblical account, because the Bible was written in such a way to accommodate to the understanding of the common people (*ad captum vulgi*).[26] Since the common people in the ancient world had no way of knowing the scientific truth regarding the universe, God communicated to his people only the truth regarding the salvation of their souls in the Bible. The truth of Scripture, in other words, consists in the salvific work of Jesus Christ, not in the details about the universe and its natural workings.

Although the main point of Wittich's argument on the surface seemed to have consisted simply in the biblical hermeneutics and the theory of heliocentrism, it actually went much deeper. In fact, the real issue was regarding the relationship between theology and philosophy. Traditionally, philosophy had to submit to the authority of theology when contradictory conclusions were drawn. Ultimately, the official theology espoused by the church had the last word on every issue

25 Rienk Vermij, *The Calvinist Copernicans: The Reception of the New Astronomy in the Dutch Republic, 1575–1750* (Amsterdam: Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen, 2002), 156–187. Voetius called this type of natural philosophy "physica mosaica." See Ann Blair, "Mosaic Physics and the Search for a Pious Natural Philosophy in the late Renaissance," *Isis* 91 (2000): 32–58; Goudriaan, *Reformed Orthodoxy and Philosophy*, 85–141.

26 Wittich, *Dissertationes duae*, 3. See Hoon J. Lee, *The Biblical Accommodation Debate in Germany Interpretation and the Enlightenment* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 29–31; Antonella De Prete, "Y a-t-il une interprétation cartésienne de la Bible? Le cas de Christoph Wittich," in *Qu'est-ce qu'être cartésien?*, ed. Delphine Kolesnik-Antoine (Paris: ENS Éditions, 2013), 117–42.

concerning human begins, the world, and God. What the Dutch Cartesians such as Wittich did was to challenge this traditional and orthodox view regarding the relationship of the two disciplines. According to Wittich, philosophy was able to claim the truth about the world, independent of theology. Therefore, even if the church, basing her judgement on the Bible, might insist the sun moves around the earth, philosophers could say that the earth rolls around the sun and still be correct, without rejecting the authority of Scripture.

In *Gangrene*, Mastricht critically examines this innovative understanding, and becomes confident that he has indeed found in it a definitive proof of heresy. As seen above, Mastricht listed three traits of heresy, and he detects one of these, namely rapid growth, in the Cartesian discussion of the relationship between philosophy and theology. According to Mastricht, Descartes still submits his philosophy to the authority of the church and Scripture. The French philosopher even says that "whatever God has revealed to us must be accepted as more certain than anything else."[27] Mastricht observes in this statement Descartes's unwavering commitment to the authority of the divine revelation. However, his Dutch followers such as Johannes de Raey (1622–1702) denied theology any right to correct philosophy.[28] What the Cartesians end up doing, in Mastricht's opinion, is to further develop Descartes's philosophy in a more heretical direction.

However, the growth of Cartesian heresy did not stop at this point. Mastricht now presents the position of Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677) and Lodewijk Meijer (1629–1681) as the final and truly cancerous form of Cartesianism. Meijer was a friend of Spinoza, and he anonymously published *Philosophy as the Interpreter of Scripture* (1666) and argued that philosophy is indispensable for correctly interpreting Scripture.[29] Without philosophy, this physician friend of Spinoza suggests, those who try to interpret the Bible will be lost in its image-rich world, so to avoid such confusion, a full reliance on philosophy becomes necessary. Though this view espoused by Meijer is in no way orthodox, Spinoza's understanding of the relation was much more radical, for the latter simply rejects any philosophical truth in the Bible. In his *Theologico-political Treatise* (1670), the Jewish philosopher argues that the Bible must be strictly read in a historical

27 Mastricht, *Gangraena*, 34–35.

28 On De Raey's view, see Theo Verbeek, "Tradition and Novelty: Descartes and Some Cartesians," in *The Rise of Modern Philosophy: The Tension between the New and Traditional Philosophies from Machiavelli to Leibniz*, ed. Tom Sorell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 189–90.

29 Lodewijk Meijer, *Philosophia S. Scripturae interpres* ([Amsterdam], 1666). On Spinoza's radical circle, see Frank Mertens, "Spinoza's Amsterdamse vriendenkring: studievriendschappen, zakenrelaties, en familiebanden," in *Libertas philosophandi: Spinoza als gids voor een vrije wereld*, ed. Cis van Heertus (Amsterdam: In de Pelikaan, 2008), 69–81.

manner.[30] Since the Bible is an ancient document like any other, the correct interpretation requires the sufficient knowledge of its original language and context. Utilizing his knowledge of the biblical language and of its background, Spinoza concludes that the Bible contains no philosophical truths regarding the human beings, the world, and God. Instead, it simply exhorts every reader to love and be obedient to each other. While the Dutch Cartesians still regarded the Bible to be the source of truths regarding the supernatural and divine realm, Spinoza no longer finds in it any rational truths at all.[31]

Observing the very rapid growth of the erroneous idea, Mastricht again concludes that Cartesianism indeed is a heresy. He then goes on to identify the root of this heretical idea. According to this Utrecht theologian, the Dutch Cartesians, including Meijer and Spinoza, all reject one of the most fundamental tenets of the orthodox Reformed theology, namely the doctrine of the noetic effect of sin.[32] This theory teaches that human beings, due to sin, lost not only the proper moral faculties but also intellectual ability. Therefore, we must all submit to the authority of Scripture, not because our mind can conclude rationally that it is indeed divine, but rather, we must submit to the scriptural authority because our mind, due to the effect of sin, does not function in a normal rational way. Mastricht goes on to state that the impact of sin is such that it does not merely blind us from supernatural truths, but it even blinds us to natural truths. We accordingly must submit all areas of our knowledge to the authority of Scripture.

In Mastricht's opinion, Cartesians, having rejected the noetic effect of sin, failed to properly understand the relationship between philosophy and theology, either equating the two, submitting theology to philosophy, or wholly rejecting theology. A better way to conceive the relationship is to render the ruling role (*imperium*) to theology. If philosophy is thought of as a helper (*consiliarius*) of theology, it still yields too much authority to the faculty of reason. Even the Dutch Cartesians including Wittich would not disagree with such a view. Instead, Mastricht confidently exclaims that whenever there is truth regarding the natural

30 Anonymous [Spinoza], *Tractatus theologico-politicus* (Hamburg [Amsterdam]: Künrath, 1670). The work was published anonymously and hid the location of its printer. On Spinoza's knowledge of nature in relation to the Bible, see Steven Nadler, "Scripture and Truth: A Problem in Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 74 (2013): 623–42, especially 628.

31 On early reactions to Spinoza's infamous treatise, see Jonathan Israel, "The Banning of Spinoza's Works in the Dutch Republic (1670–1678)," in *Disguised and Overt Spinozism around 1700: Papers Presented at the International Colloquium held at Rotterdam, 5–8 October 1994*, ed. Wiep van Bunge and Wim Klever (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 3–14; idem, "The Early Dutch and German Reaction to the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus:* Foreshadowing the Enlightenment's More General Spinoza Reception?," in *Spinoza's Theological-Political Treatise: A Critical Guide*, ed. Yitzhak Y. Melamed and Michael A. Rosenthal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 72–100.

32 Mastricht, *Gangraena*, 36–37.

world that philosophy can make clear, theology can do so in a better and more accurate manner. Mastricht states this in the following manner:

> Divine revelation can cleanse the imperfect, dim-sighted, and uncertain knowledge attained through reason and turn it into what is clearly and fully known. Reason can demonstrate numerous things with certainty, if it is confirmed by divine revelation... The author of nature clearly corrects [reason] with his revelation.[33]

According to Mastricht, this position is in harmony with the tradition of the Reformed theology. He proudly recalls that influential predecessors such as Girolamo Zanchi (1516–1590) and Lambert Daneau (1530–1595) had taught in a similar manner.[34] Therefore, even regarding the issue of heliocentrism, Mastricht argues that we must submit reason to the authority of Scripture. According to the Bible, it is clear that the earth is immovable and that the sun moves around it. Therefore, anyone who opposes this biblical view and embraces heliocentrism instead must be corrected. In this way, Mastricht established the erroneous character of Cartesianism and also offered a viable and theologically orthodox solution to the problem.

Divine Omnipresence and God's Power

Mastricht did not merely attack Cartesianism for not aligning with orthodoxy. He instead closely associated the Frenchman's philosophy with the quintessential heresy of his day, Socinianism. Their founder, Faustus Socinus (1539–1604), was associated with the Italian humanist circle whose anti-papal, reformed tendencies were initially welcomed by important reformation leaders. However, because of Sozini's anti-Trinitarian beliefs, he ended up joining the radical wing of the reformation. Eventually, he helped to unify various dissenting groups in Poland, eventually forming the Socinian church. During the early seventeenth century, a large migration of Socinians came to the Dutch Republic, seeking religious freedom.[35] With the increased number of Socinians, their ideas had begun to be spread. Various important Socinian books were published, and the authority

33 Mastricht, *Gangraena*, 39: "Quam enim a Ratione, eorumdem Auctore, imperfecta, lusciosa, incerta, contrahunt incertitudinem, eam plane & plene abstergit divina revelatio. Neque enim dubitari potest, quin id cuius qualemcunque certitudinem e natura ostendit Ratio, plurimum confirmetur si accedat divina revelatio ... Auctor naturae plane corrigat sua revelatione."

34 Mastricht, *Gangraena*, 39; On Zanchius and Daneau, see Van Ruler, *The Crisis of Causality*, 77–83; Christopher J. Burchill, "Girolamo Zanchi: Portrait of a Reformed Theologian and His Work," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 15 (1984): 185–207.

35 John Rohls, "Calvinism, Arminiamism and Socinianism in the Netherlands until the Synod of Dort," in *Socinianism and Arminiamism: Antitrinitarians, Calvinists and Cultural Exchange in Seventeenth-Century Europe*, eds. Martin Mulsow and John Rohls (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 3–48.

moved immediately to ban these texts.[36] Eventually, both the political and religious authorities condemned Socinianism as heresy and banned its public presence in the 1650s.[37] Here we shall observe how Mastricht did so in the case of the concept of divine omnipresence.[38]

As we have seen briefly in the section of methodical doubt, Cartesian dualism made it very difficult to claim that God was present in the physical world, let alone omnipresent. For if God were the mind pure and simple, it would entail that his essence had nothing to do with the universe made of extension. This rejection of divine omnipresence, according to Mastricht, made Cartesianism very similar to Socinianism. However, we must not think that the Cartesians made the case for God as the infinite mind to purposely reject the orthodox teaching of divine omnipresence. Instead, they upheld their view of the divine infinite mind in order to combat another important heresy of the day.

During the late sixteenth and the early seventeenth centuries, several innovative thinkers had begun to argue that God was corporeal.[39] According to them, if God has a body, it would entail that he must have some location which he occupies. In fact, Socinians embraced this view and argued that God is not in this world but can be located somewhere beyond this universe. This was considered radical and heretical, so many fierce and critical responses by orthodox theologians were levelled against it. The Cartesians thus joined this tirade by insisting upon God's nature being the infinite mind.

It therefore seems strange that Mastricht considered the Cartesian view of the divine mind, which in fact was meant to function as a weapon against heretics like Socinians, to have committed the exact error of Socinians. How then did Mastricht make his case? According to him, the problem is not that the Cartesians denied *in*

36 Philip Knijff and Sibbe Jan Visser, comp., *Bibliographia Sociniana: A Bibliographical Reference Tool for the Study of the Dutch Socinianism and Antitrinitarianism* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2004), 22; J.C. van Slee, *De Geschiedenis van het Socinianisme in de Nederlanden* (Haarlem, 1914), 259–266.

37 Willem Frijhoff and Marijke Spies, *Dutch Culture in a European Perspective: 1650, Hard-Won Unity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 266.

38 In addition to the issue of divine omnipresence, Mastricht associates these two groups in the issue of God's essence. See Mastricht, *Gangraena*, 241–242: "Argumentum enim sic habet: Si Deus est Spiritus, tum est simplicissimus: at est Spiritus; Ergo est simplicissimus. Socinus & Vorstius, ex hypothesi Cartesiana, juste & Majorem & Mionorem propositionem negabunt: Nec enim major vera, quia Spiritus proprie est corporeum quid, & corporeum nequaquam est simplicissimum; Nec minor etiam, eo quod Deus, ex mente Cartesianorum, non sit proprie Spiritus."

39 The list should include, but not limited to, Jusutus Lipsius (1547–1606) and Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679). On Lipsius's concept of divine corporeality, see Brian P. Copenhaver, Charles B. Schmitt, eds., *Renaissance Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1992), 267–268; On Hobbes's view, see Cees Leijenhorst, "Hobbes' Corporeal Deity," *Rivista di Storia della Filosofia* 59 (2004): 73–95.

toto the concept of the divine omnipresence, but how they affirmed it. Mastricht's target is again Wittich. According to this Cartesian, while it is true that God as the mind does not occupy any location, this does not necessary entail that God is nowhere. A correct way to think about his presence in the universe is through his power. In other words, since God's power and work can be seen everywhere in the steady working of the laws of nature, it ought to be said that he is present everywhere. Since God is the sole cause, maintaining all the movements of the physical universe everywhere at all times, his power is indeed omnipresent. Wittich even states that God "works all things in all things, gives to all creatures their beings, conserves all things, lavishes to all things the power and strength to act, and concurs with all."[40]

Still, Wittich's claim cannot affirm that God is present everywhere in his essence, making him susceptible to the charge of heresy. Thus he completely redefined the way something occupies a space. Wittich states:

> Body is said to occupy a locality in a plenteous manner (*repletive*) insofar as space is filled with extension and mass, in which things fill space to exclude other bodies. In a definitive manner (*definitive*), body is said to occupy a locality insofar as we attend to its limit, which maintains between other masses. The determination is limited either by far away bodies or proximate connections. For example, the city is said to be near to mountains, river, and ocean. In a confining manner (*circumscriptive*), the body is said to occupy a locality when it attends to its boundary with adjacent bodies as fishes are in the water, birds are in the air, and water in a vase.[41]

In this way, Wittich limits the concept of space-occupation to the realm of extension. That is, except for extended things, nothing can occupy any space.

However, according to the medieval and early modern theological tradition, the first two types, *repletive* and *definitive*, were used to describe the occupation of space by spiritual beings.[42] In particular, God was said to occupy space in a

40 Wittich, *Theologia pacifica*, XV.216, 176; Van Mastricht, *Gangraena*, 286: "quoniam omnia in omnibus operatur, omnibus creaturis dat suum esse, omnia conservat, omnibus largitur potentiam & vires agendi & cum omnibus actionibus concurrit."

41 Wittich, *Theologia Pacifica*, §CLII, 123: "Sed revera hac definitio (scil: de ubi circuscriptivo definitivo & repletivo) si bene attendatur ad terminos, dicit tantum diversum modum, quo corpora alicubi sive in loc esse dicuntur, ita ut omnia istius distinctionis menbra corporibus proprie sint assignanda. Repletive corpus dicitur esse in loco, quatenus sua extensione & mole totum illud spatium in quo est, ita replet, ut alia corpora inde excludat, cum penetratio corporum manifestam implicet contradictionem. Definitive vero corpus aliquod dicitur esse in loco, quatenus non tam ad molem, & magnitudinem, quam ad situm eius attendimus, quem inter alia corpora obtinet, quae situs determinatio sit vel per corpora longius remota, vel per proxime juncta, ab una aut altera tantum parte; Ita Urbs sita dicitur prope montem vel flumen vel mare. Circumscriptive tandem corpus in loco esse dicitur, quando attenditur ad eius situm inter proxime juncta corpora, que illud undique circumjacent, quo sensu pisces sunt in aquis, aves in aere, aqua in vase, & c."

42 Edward Grant, *Much Ado About Nothing: Theories of Space and Vacuum from the Middle Ages to the Scientific Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 368.

replete or plenteous manner (*repletive*) since he fills all space without limiting other physical bodies. So against Wittich, Mastricht rehearses the traditional argument and asks Wittich how he could so easily deviate from the tradition and introduce an innovative teaching.

It is precisely on this point that Mastricht associates Cartesianism with Socinianism. According to him, if God is nothing but thought and relates to the world only in his power, it would be impossible to affirm that the divine nature exists in Christ's humanity in a substantial way. This is the same error that the Socinians had committed. Here he associates Wittich's view closely with that of Conrad Vorstius (1569–1622), the Leiden professor who was considered to be responsible for spreading Socinian ideas in the Dutch Republic.[43] Mastricht states:

> It is not difficult to infer that Vorstius thought thus: when Christ's humanity is united with the divine nature, the indivisibility of the two natures is not required. Instead, the union is established when the divine power somehow flows into Christ's humanity.[44]

In this way, Mastricht argues that Cartesians did not only reject the traditional teaching of divine omnipresence, but also embraced an unabashedly heretical position of antitrinitarianism. However, Mastricht suspects that this cancerous development will not stop with a few antitrinitarian ideas. He thinks that since Cartesians have denied that God occupied space in his essence, it would not be so difficult for the ordinary people who heard this teaching to conclude that God was indeed nowhere. According to Mastricht, this atheistic conclusion represents the terminal phase of the Cartesian gangrene.

Conclusion

We have noted in this chapter, among other things, how Mastricht attacked Cartesianism by associating the Frenchman's philosophy with Socinianism. We have also seen that Mastricht's main target was Wittich. However, Mastricht's attack was not the only problem with which this Cartesian theologian had to be concerned. In addition, Wittich was often accused of being a crypt-Spinozist. Under such circumstances, Wittich's solutions in a varying degree foreshadowed those of Leibniz, including the latter' theory concerning the best of all possible

43 Rohls, "Calvinism, Arminiamism and Socinianism in the Netherlands until the Synod of Dort," 25.

44 Van Mastricht, *Gangraena*, 304: "E quibus facile est colligere Vorstium sensisse, humanae Christi naturae cum divina natura *unionem* huius modi esse, quae non necessario requirat unitarum naturarum *indistantiam*, sed quae tantum consistat in *influxu* quodam *divina virtutis* in nauram Christi humanam." Cf. Conrad Vorstius, *Apologetica exegesis* (Leiden: Johann Patius, 1611), 87–88.

worlds.[45] Of course, their theories were not completely the same, but because both thinkers were trying to avoid the same pitfalls, they seemed to have shared many similarities. On the one hand, they had to avoid the overly transcendent view of God, espoused by Socinians, which placed the divine being completely outside of this world. On the other, they also had to avoid Spinozian immanentism, which could easily fall into a blatant atheism. In this way, by trying to avoid the Socinian Scylla and Spinozian Charybdis, Wittich and Leibniz ventured to harmonize the recent philosophical advancement with the orthodox Christian faith.

As observed in his systematic criticism of Cartesianism, it is clear that Mastricht's answer was not to offer a new version of Christian faith. In this way, he was different from Wittich or Leibniz who, regardless of its validity, had eventually done so. Instead, Mastricht seemed to have stubbornly held onto the old orthodoxy. In this sense, Ernst Bizer was correct.[46] Yet, as Leibniz suggested in the beginning of this chapter, the opinion of the old orthodox theologian should not be wholly despised. As became clear above, Mastricht's criticism uncovered many of the weak points of Cartesianism that the Cartesians such as Wittich could not dismiss casually. Rather, Wittich and other subsequent thinkers had to devise modified and improved versions of Descartes's philosophy to ensure they would be seen as remaining within the bound of orthodoxy. In this way, let us conclude by arguing that without Mastricht, there may have been little advancement of philosophy after Descartes and the Cartesians.[47]

45 Wittich, *Anti-Spinoza*, 367.

46 Ernst Bizer, "Die reformierte Orthodoxie und der Cartesianismus," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 55 (1958): 306–372, especially 358.

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