

Introductory Notes

The philosophical climate in the Arts Faculty was pre-dominantly Aristotelian, but it left room for the discussion of new ideas. Reneri offered the usual Aristotelian curriculum in physics, but being influenced by Bacon and probing Descartes' *Essais* with his students, he should best be described as an eclectic.¹⁵⁰ Ravensberger publicly discussed the works of Copernicus and Galileo, and even refers to Descartes, but he and Reneri sought to be delicate, whereas Regius was less scrupulous in his disputations and lectures. Regius' radicalism dismayed even Ravensberger, perhaps for the justified fear that it would spoil any chance to air new opinions at all. Indeed, the Utrecht crisis provoked by Regius and fuelled by Descartes himself, induced the stipulation in the university's statutes (1643) that Aristotelian philosophy and Aristotelian philosophy alone was to be taught within the walls of the Utrecht Academy.¹⁵¹

2.1. Disputations

Next to public and private lectures, disputations played an important role in the academic curriculum.¹⁵² There are, generally speaking, two kinds of disputations. First, disputations *pro gradu*, submitted in order to obtain a doctoral degree, and second, disputations *exercitii gratia*, to practice the skills of students. These disputations differed qua form and authorship. Ordinary disputations were submitted *sub praeside* of the student's professor, who drew up the texts, whether or not in consultation with the *respondens*, but the professor was in any case responsible for its contents.¹⁵³ In case of disputations

150 Cf. SASSEN 1941; DIBON 1954, 197–202; DIBON 1990, 206–218; VERBEEK 1993C. A letter by Saumaise reveals that Reneri examined Descartes' *Essais* at the university (cf. AT X 556–557). For the reception of Bacon's works in the Netherlands between 1620 and 1650, see DIBON 1990, 191–220.

151 *Resolutiën*, 173, 198. The effect of the ban on the New Philosophy did not last very long. During the 1640s, Cartesian physics remained a topic of public debate — Johannes de Bruyn (1620–1675), for example, defended the Cartesian explanation of the tides in his dissertation (DE BRUYN 1644). In the 1650s, Cartesian philosophy had become a normal part of university routine, especially after the appointment of De Bruyn in 1652 (*Resolutiën*, 274; cf. DIBON 1954, 212–216; VERBEEK 1992A, 87–88). The 'Utrecht crisis' is the subject of numerous studies and articles, but few authors offer a more or less complete picture, among whom DUKER 1861, DUKER 1989, II, DE VRIJER 1917, MCGAHAGAN 1976, 153–204. These studies are superseded by *Querelle* and VERBEEK 1992A. For the philosophical issues at stake, see VAN RULER 1995.

152 For the phenomenon of academic disputations, see DIBON 1954, 33–49, AHSMANN 1990, 274–341, and TREVISANI 1992, 45–53. For an outline of the situation at Utrecht University between 1636 and 1815, see KERNKAMP 1936, 147–170.

153 Students could 'personalise' the theses by adding corollaries. If a student was allowed to compose the text himself, such is usually indicated on the title page (by the note 'auctor et respondens' or similar expressions). The *praeses* would nevertheless still be responsible. Ahsmann points out that, over the years 1575–1630, it was common practice in the Faculty of law of Leiden University that students formulated the texts themselves, without this being stipulated on the title page (AHSMANN 1990, 311–323). It needs to be examined if this conclusion is also true for the other faculties or other universities. Disputations that were part of a series, the collection of which was afterwards published under the name of the *praeses*, were always the intellectual work of the professor (AHSMANN 1990, 323). In the early years of Utrecht University, this kind of disputation was the most common one in the Faculties of Arts, Medicine and Theology (for example, REGIUS 1641A and REGIUS 1641B).

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pro gradu, the candidate had to defend the theses, which he had formulated himself, without the aid of his *promotor*.

Because no records were held of the Senate's meetings during the first five years, we have no detailed description of the rules on disputations in Utrecht.¹⁵⁴ In later years, however, the subject recurred in the *acta* of the Senate and in the resolutions of the Vroedschap, which provide us with the following picture. Disputations *pro gradu* took place in the choir of the Domchurch, in public and *sine praeside*. These inaugural disputations would begin at nine o'clock sharp, and last till ten or a quarter past ten. Students would take care of the first round of opposition, followed by the graduates. Those in whose faculty the graduation took place, had the priority.¹⁵⁵ Disputations *sub praeside* would be submitted in one of the auditoria. Theological disputations were scheduled on Saturdays, juridical and medical disputations on Wednesdays, and philosophical disputations took place on Wednesdays or Saturdays. There were to be no two disputations at the same time, unless they were juridical and medical. Disputations should be announced two weeks in advance to the rector. Of each disputation 200 copies were printed; the printer should distribute 130 among the students, the *praeses* received 20 copies, the respondent 30, and the beadle (*pedellus*) delivered the remaining 30 copies to the professors and members of the Vroedschap. The copies should be ready three days in advance, and the registrar would nail the title pages *ad valvas academiae*.¹⁵⁶

Despite regulations on the way disputations should be conducted, they were more often than not a noisy happening. In 1648, the Leiden professor Adriaan Heereboord stated that during a disputation the public should not 'shout, laugh, pull faces, bleat, whistle, stamp, or make fun of the proceedings', which implies that this behaviour was in fact the order of the day.¹⁵⁷ Both the Vroedschap and the Senate tried to counter the mischief by imposing restrictions — for example, no drinking before a disputation — and in 1661 they even decided to place a fence around the respondent's chair to prevent the most serious misconduct.¹⁵⁸

2.2. Academic holidays

Several of Regius' letters to Descartes bear references to an academic holiday, and in some cases these indications enabled me to determine their correct date.¹⁵⁹ In the early years, the university had five holidays: a summer recess ('hondsagen') from 15/25 July

¹⁵⁴ *Resolutiën*, 102.

¹⁵⁵ WIJNNE 1888, 58–59, 64; *Resolutiën*, 160, 174, 220, 241; KERNKAMP 1936–1940, I, 526. Disputations *pro gradu* were supervised by a *moderator*, who would have been either the *promotor* or the rector.

¹⁵⁶ WIJNNE 1888, 58; *Resolutiën*, 220; *Acta*, 177–178.

¹⁵⁷ HEEREBOORD 1648; cited from VERBEEK 1992A, 65.

¹⁵⁸ WIJNNE 1888, 59; *Resolutiën*, 220; *Acta*, 354–355.

¹⁵⁹ R/D 1, R/D 3, R/D 6, R/D 8, and R/D 14.

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until 15/25 August; an autumn half-term holiday ('vervaertijd') in October; a winter vacation from 24 December/3 January till 1/11 February; an Easter holiday from eight days before till eight days after Easter; and finally Whitsun holiday, which lasted a week from the Thursday before Pentecost. The dates of these vacations were decided upon *ad hoc* by the Utrecht Vroedschap in the years 1634 and 1635, and registered in the minutes.¹⁶⁰ Except for the autumn half-term holiday, there is no indication that changes with respect to date and length of these holidays were made during the years 1636–1650.¹⁶¹

Baillet records that two academic holidays were related to annual fairs in Utrecht.¹⁶² This is indeed true for the summer recess. Since 1614, the annual fair was centered around the feast of St Mary Magdalene (22 July), beginning on 15/25 July till 4/14 August.¹⁶³ The academic summer holiday thus coincided with the start of the fair-festivities. According to Baillet, the Utrecht Alma Mater also paused during a second annual fair in March. There is, however, no evidence for this fair, but even if Baillet is right, it did not affect academic life: the collection of Voetius' disputations (VOETIUS 1648–1669) shows no interruptions for March.¹⁶⁴

3. DESCARTES' WHEREABOUTS 1635–1650

In early 1635 Descartes settled down in Utrecht, probably at the invitation of his intimate friend Reneri, who was appointed professor at the Illustrious School the year before. His presence in Utrecht in March 1635 is attested by a letter of Anna Maria van Schurman.¹⁶⁵ Descartes stayed in Utrecht until early 1636, when he, probably to escape the plague, moved to Leiden where the disease had subsided.¹⁶⁶ In Leiden, he found a publisher for his *Discours de la Méthode*, Jan Maire, and he stayed there to watch over the printing

¹⁶⁰ *Resolutiën*, 71, 73, 75, 76, 77, 82; KERNKAMP 1936, 59, 170. In March 1635, the Vroedschap asked for a regulation of academic vacations, but it failed to occur (*Resolutiën*, 73).

¹⁶¹ In 1634, it was provisionally decided that the autumn half-term holiday would last from Wednesday 29 October/8 November till 5/15 November (*Resolutiën*, 71). In 1636, 1637 and 1638, however, Voetius presided over several disputations during that period (cf. VAN ASSELT/DEKKER 1995, [170]–[172]), and lacking further information, the most plausible explanation is that its date varied every year.

¹⁶² *Vie*, II, 9, 10, 19, 34–35.

¹⁶³ AT II 569. VANDE WATER 1729, III, 843–844. Cf. EVERS 1938.

¹⁶⁴ See also my commentary on R/D 3.

¹⁶⁵ 'Porro nolui te latere nuperrime me invisisse D. de Cartes, magnae, imo inauditae (ut aiunt) eruditionis virum: qui de communi sive recepto litterarum progressu parum magnifice sentire videtur, nihil horum, inquam, quicquam facere ad veram Scientiam; sibi autem aliam viam, qua longe celerius tutiusque eò perveniatur, repertam esse', Van Schurman to André Rivet, Utrecht 18 March (OS?) 1635. In: VAN DER HORST 1984, 282, 283 (DIBON 1971, 116). Descartes' stay in Utrecht is documented in VERBEEK 1993D, 7–8, 21–23. Kramm recorded the oral tradition concerning Descartes' house at the Maliebaan (KRAMM 1874), which probably stems from the Utrecht Cartesian professor Reinier van Mansveld (1638–1671).

¹⁶⁶ For Utrecht, see the following letters: 16 April, 19 May, 1 November, 8 and 11 December 1635 (AT I 316, 320, 332, 596, 601).

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process.¹⁶⁷ When the book was ready, Descartes went to Alkmaar and then we lose track of him for a year.¹⁶⁸ Perhaps he stayed for a short while in Alkmaar, or he moved directly to the vicinity of Haarlem, where his presence is attested in the middle of 1637.¹⁶⁹ It is certain that by January 1639 he had taken up lodgings in Santpoort, a village just north of Haarlem,¹⁷⁰ and he may have been living there since the summer of 1637. Descartes stayed in Santpoort till April 1640. From May 1640 till March 1641, Descartes lived in Leiden once again.¹⁷¹ In March 1641, the castle of Endegeest became his new residence.¹⁷² In May 1643, he moved to Egmond aan de Hoef.¹⁷³ After a journey to France from June till November 1644, he returned to Egmond, but now settled in Egmond-Binnen, a few kilometers south of Egmond aan de Hoef.¹⁷⁴ Apart from two journeys to France, in 1647 and 1648, Descartes continued to live in this village close to the North Sea till he decided to exchange the Dutch Republic for Sweden. In September 1649, Descartes embarked a ship for Stockholm, where he died on 11 February 1650.

167 Descartes' first letter from Leiden is of 28 March 1636 (AT I 603). The last letter from Leiden with a certain date is of 20 April 1637 (AT I 631).

168 Descartes' letter to Constantijn Huygens of 20 May 1637 is from Alkmaar (AT I 634). In June Descartes returned to Leiden for a short while to distribute the copies of the *Discours* (AT I 380, 639). In early July Descartes is back again in Alkmaar (AT I 641). In the summer of 1637 Descartes made some arrangements for his daughter Fransintgen (1635–1640) and her mother Helena to join him, cf. AT I 393–394; GAUKROGER 1995, 332–333.

169 During his summer leave of 1637, the Leuven professor of medicine Plemp visited Descartes *in praedio circa Harlemum* (AT I 401). Evidence from Descartes' correspondence that he lived near Haarlem is found only in letters of 1638, cf. to Mersenne, [29 June] 1638, AT II 191/CM VII 311; to Mersenne, 23 August 1638, AT II 338/CM VIII 65.

170 Cf. Descartes to Huygens, 29 January 1639, ROTH 1926, 88/AT II 676.

171 Initially with the intention to print his *Meditationes* there (AT III 35–36), but he changed his mind during the summer, and indecisive what to do with the manuscript, he stayed in Leiden (cf. AT III 126–127). Finally, in November 1640, he sent Mersenne the manuscript to have it printed in Paris (AT III 235).

172 Descartes to Mersenne, 31 March 1641, AT III 350/CM X 579–580.

173 Cf. Descartes to Colvius, AT III 647; to Mersenne, AT III 672, CM XII 196 (autograph); to Huygens, ROTH 1926, 199/AT III 815. Baillet, referring to a letter to Picot, relates that Descartes rented a house in Egmond aan de Hoef from 1 May 1643 till 1 May 1644 (*Vie*, II, 199; AT III 616). In the 17th century, the village is commonly called Egmond op de Hoef.

174 Descartes to Huygens, 21 December 1644 (ROTH 1926, 234–235/AT IV 774–775). On just one occasion Descartes specifies he is living in Egmond-Binnen, his usual subscription is simply Egmond (AT IV 390; for a possible identification of the Utrecht advocate to whom the letter is addressed, see my commentary on D/R 34, n. 7).