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# The Long Life of the Humanist Tradition: The Amsterdam Athenaeum Illustre in the Golden Age\*

*Dirk van Miert*

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## Central question and sources

The early modern ‘illustrious school’, ‘athenaeum’ or ‘gymnasium illustre’ remains a somewhat evasive educational phenomenon. This is due largely to the fact that individual schools show a variety of social and intellectual profiles, which in many cases have not been sufficiently studied. One of them in particular, the Amsterdam Athenaeum, predecessor of the current University of Amsterdam, has until recently managed to draw only little attention. In this article, I will analyse seventeenth-century opinions on the phenomenon of the ‘illustrious school’ and then test these with an analysis of the contents of teaching at one of them, the Amsterdam Athenaeum, framing the results in the wider context of Dutch higher education and, especially when it comes to the teaching of philosophy, also in the still wider context of European philosophy. I will take into account notably France and Portugal, as philosophical traditions originating in these countries seem to have been the main influence on the philosophical teaching in Amsterdam, but also Central Europe, because it was the German ‘*gymnasia illustria*’ which provided the institutional model of the Athenaeum. I will try to locate the Athenaeum in an intellectual tradition rather than in a social context.

In an attempt to do so, we are confronted with a major problem: the lack of proper archives for the first century of its existence. There is no list of matriculations (*album studiosorum*), nor are there any timetables (*series lectionum*) or curricula. There was no senate of professors and no minutes were taken at meetings of the board of curators. This explains the scant attention which has been paid to the Athenaeum in the Dutch Golden Age. Scholars in the past limited themselves to going through



the municipal archives, especially the resolutions of Burgomasters (some of whom were curators of the Athenaeum) and of the City Council (*Vroedschap*). Nevertheless, many sources have been overlooked, probably because they are in Latin: the orations of professors, scholarly correspondences and, above all, the almost three hundred disputations. Travel diaries supply additional information. Because of the disparity of the sources and the contingency of their survival, the general picture remains unbalanced; but it is possible, at least to a certain extent, to reconstruct teaching methods, timetables, and, above all, the content of the teaching, most notably when it comes to philosophy.

For this purpose, disputations form a rich source. Laurence Brockliss's work on French disputations has shown their value for the assessment of the actual contents of academic teaching. Although it is becoming increasingly clear that, at the time when the Aristotelian world view was disintegrating, disputations were transformed from a didactic tool into something similar to a scientific article,<sup>1</sup> they remain largely unstudied. In Germany, for example, much work remains to be done. Major bibliographical sources will guide future researchers through the sources there, although the thirteen thousand disputations listed may constitute only half of the material available.<sup>2</sup> For institutes in many other countries, lists of disputations are now printed regularly, facilitating future comparisons between different institutes.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, a recent survey of the transformation of the early modern disputation allows us to frame this important source in a historical setting.<sup>4</sup> On the basis of Dutch disputations, Rienk Vermij in his book on the Calvinist Copernicans and several others in smaller publications have managed to map individual opinions of professors and differentiate between the many and various Aristotelianisms.<sup>5</sup>

The present survey is in part a contribution to the discussion of the relation between the Aristotelian umbrella and the 'new science', with the aim of taking into account the humanist tradition and the peculiar institutional setting of the illustrious school, and ultimately to integrate these various parameters into an organic picture, which may serve as a response to the central question: what was the character of the Amsterdam Athenaeum?

## **Introduction**

The history of higher education in the Dutch Golden Age followed an unusual pattern. In the period 1575–1648 no fewer than eleven institutions

of higher education were founded in the Northern Netherlands: five universities and six which had the name 'illustrious school' or 'atheneum'. Two of the five universities, moreover, originally had the designation *atheneum*.<sup>6</sup>

This mushrooming of academic institutions can be explained partly by the political history of the Northern Low Countries. From the beginning of the Dutch Revolt in the second half of the 1560s, the university geographically closest to the rebellious provinces, the university of Louvain, was Catholic and on ground hostile to the north. These two factors explain two of the motives explicitly mentioned by the founding fathers of the academies in the north: the new schools were meant to be '*seminaria reipublicae et ecclesiae*'. In other words, the northern provinces were in need of both magistrates and Calvinist ministers.<sup>7</sup>

These were the explicit intentions and, on the whole, they were genuine. There were, however, less apparent motives. One of these was the desire to assert municipal identity. Having an institution of academic learning within its walls contributed to a city's reputation. There might be a second, implicit, explanation for the flourishing of the illustrious schools in the 1630s, in contrast to the success of universities in the previous decades. The illustrious school or *atheneum* in many cases was an urban initiative: its expenses were paid by the city, and in most cases the board of curators was made up of a committee composed of representatives of both the city and the local church. Illustrious schools, more than universities, were attended by the local population.<sup>8</sup> Most of the students of the Amsterdam *Atheneum*, for example, came from Amsterdam.<sup>9</sup> As a distinctively *urban* phenomenon, the illustrious school was a more flexible institution than its academic counterpart, the university. As such, it may have been able to react more quickly and appropriately to specific urban circumstances.

Willem Frijhoff has depicted the wider social context in which the illustrious schools proved to be so popular with city magistrates, focusing on the rise of a civic culture to which the Amsterdam *Atheneum* could easily respond.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, it is possible to place the *Atheneum* in an even wider intellectual context: the advance of Cartesianism and the rise of the new science. Is it merely a coincidence that Descartes published his *Discours de la méthode* in the same decade that witnessed the foundation of so many illustrious schools? Apart from responding to the particular necessities of the urban economy, might these schools not also have responded to a growing interest in the 'new science', which, on account of its revolutionary character, had as yet made little impact

on the academic curricula of the universities? Seen in this light, we might wonder whether the athenaeum was not merely an urban enterprise but also a 'modern' one.

Some of the motives for founding illustrious schools and universities were similar: to serve the interests of the state, the church, and the city. There were, however, a number of features which contemporaries attributed specifically to illustrious schools.

### **The character of an athenaeum**

#### *A 'seminarium reipublicae'*

Although in armed conflict with King Philip II of Spain, the Provincial States of Holland, in order to give the University of Leiden a proper foundation, were careful to draw up statutes in 1575 which took him into account; for, as sovereign of the Low Countries, the king still possessed the legal authority to dispense the *ius promovendi*: the right to grant degrees. After the Act of Abjuration of 1581, when the States General renounced Philip, each province in the Northern Netherlands considered itself to be the lawful heir to his royal sovereignty and therefore invested with the right to establish a university.<sup>11</sup> The public authorities of the provinces struggled with a shortage of officials and no one was in doubt that it was the task of universities to supply the state with trained people. The public authorities in most cases were more concerned about securing the appointment of a professor in law than of a theologian.<sup>12</sup>

The new institutes were normally financed and governed by state authorities. For illustrious schools, this role was in many cases played instead by cities. There were other possibilities, as in the cases of Bois-le-Duc (initiated and financed by the States General), Breda (initiated and financed by the stadholder, Prince Frederic Henry), Deventer (initiated by a private source), and Zutphen (founded by the States of one of the three Quarterly districts of the duchy of Guelders). The Illustrious School of Harderwijk could be established only after the stadholder, Maurice, persuaded the Quarter of Veluwe (another of the three districts of Guelders) to finance it.<sup>13</sup> The University of Utrecht, which had started off as an illustrious school, was governed and paid

for by the city. Nijmegen took full responsibility for its own, short-lived, university, which was founded as an athenaeum. All other universities were financed by the states of the province in which they were located.

In many cases, the municipal authorities also provided scholarships for local students to facilitate their study of theology at the university, on the condition that afterwards they would serve the city as ministers. The decision of the church to organise its own scholarships remained no more than a pious wish. The church simply did not have the means.<sup>14</sup> It was, for example, the cities which owned the premises where most of the academies were lodged: the former Catholic monasteries which were confiscated during the Revolt. What then was the role of the church in the foundation of institutes of higher education?

### *A 'seminarium ecclesiae'*

The church's role in this process was often confined to providing additional authority. This authority was, in any case, rather limited, as the church did not bear any financial responsibility. The secular government overruled the church on the national, provincial, and municipal level. After the Synod of Dordrecht (1618–1619) the Dutch Reformed church made a systematic attempt to tighten its grip on the faculties of theology throughout the country by vetting the orthodoxy of the professors.<sup>15</sup> It managed to place the supervision of the so-called proponent-exams, which granted graduates in theology the right to act as ministers, under the jurisdiction of the local church authorities. Nevertheless, the secular government and the church were unable to come to an agreement regarding the representation of professors of theology on the provincial church synods: the provincial states required all 'their' professors to be present at every synod, whereas the church, fearing government interference, only allowed them to attend if the synod happened to take place in the city in which their university was situated.<sup>16</sup> Despite the rather restricted control which the church was able to exercise over the organisation of academic institutions, these were imbued with orthodox Calvinism. All over the Northern Low Countries, professors of theology and ecclesiastical history, including those who took an interest in unorthodox intellectual trends such as Cartesianism, were considered members of the Dutch Reformed church. Moreover, liberal Calvinists did not constitute a religious community of their own, and did not have their own churches, unlike the Remonstrants and the Mennonites, not to mention the Lutherans, Catholics, and Jews.

The university and athenaeum therefore both had strong confessional profiles.<sup>17</sup>

The specific religious configuration of each city determined the level of control the church could exercise on a given educational institution. Depending on the local situation, different interests were highlighted. The illustrious schools of Bois-le-Duc and Breda were intended to strengthen the position of the state church in an environment which was predominantly Catholic, with Breda having an additional role as a kind of *Ritterakademie* for the young nobility. In Leiden and Utrecht, the religious character of the institution of higher education was less strong than in Franeker, Groningen, Harderwijk, Middelburg, and Deventer. In Rotterdam, the Cartesian professor Pierre Bayle was fired in 1693 at the instigation of the local church.<sup>18</sup> The city of Maastricht granted local ministers the title of professor, as a means of preventing them from leaving the city, probably because the Calvinists were there forced to share power with the Catholic party.<sup>19</sup> Maastricht was not the only city to make local preachers professors 'honoris causa' in order to prevent them from accepting a professorship elsewhere.<sup>20</sup> In Amsterdam, in turn, the curators of the Athenaeum paid little attention to the church's concerns over the Remonstrant sympathies of its professors; but they did dismiss the German mathematician Bernard Varenius as a candidate for the chair of mathematics on account of his Lutheranism.<sup>21</sup> To conclude, the church was inclined to stress different aspects of educational institutions from those favoured by the cities.<sup>22</sup>

### *The interests of the city*

It was by no means evident that cities were eager to have a university within their walls. Ever since the rise of the universities, the *societas academica* had been a source of suspicion and irritation for the local populace. Scholars were notoriously independent-minded, and the often overweening self-confidence of students was strengthened by the *privilegium fori*, an academic courtroom, and their exemption from paying taxes on alcohol. Numerous accounts of misbehaviour by students have been studied and published.<sup>23</sup>

Although students were widely believed to cause trouble, the actual level of their criminal behaviour was not very high: Franeker University, for instance, was said to have a predominantly criminal student population, but the number of student crimes was in fact relatively small.<sup>24</sup> Because of their distinctive dress, students attracted attention

in public areas and were an easy target for popular prejudice. The comedies of the Roman playwright Plautus had established the stereotype of the young man wasting his parents' money in idleness instead of dedicating himself to his studies.<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, the academic community was believed to contribute to the local economy. Its members were relatively rich and were in need of food, shelter, and amusement. Bars, taverns, landlords, sports facilities, and brothels therefore stood to benefit from their presence in a city.

But the economy was not the best argument in favour of universities. Academic communities numbered a few hundred people at most. For a small city like Harderwijk the advantage would have been greater than for Amsterdam; but even there the financial input of a few dozen students cannot have been very significant. An eighteenth-century economist's optimism on this front is now perceived to be excessive. Throughout the early modern period, the economic contribution of universities to their host cities was not substantial.<sup>26</sup>

Another economic argument put forward at the time was the possibility of cutting down the cost of scholarships.<sup>27</sup> If students could study theology in their home town, there would be no need to fund such scholarships, on which Amsterdam spent about a thousand guilders each year.<sup>28</sup> But financing an entire school was far more expensive for a city: it would have to pay, not only for a professor of theology, but also for teachers of the liberal arts. Even a small illustrious school had to have at least two or three professors, a beadle, and a place of residence; all this would entail a larger expenditure than giving a handful of students an annual stipend of one hundred or two hundred guilders each.

The desire of cities to host a university or an illustrious school cannot therefore be explained solely on the basis of economic motives. One might even argue the opposite position. Since the flourishing of illustrious schools coincided with an economic boom in Dutch cities,<sup>29</sup> this suggests that they now had enough money to invest in schools, rather than expecting profits from them. In many cases, the fate of an illustrious school was linked to the financial situation of its city. An athenaeum was more of a burden on the city's budget than a contribution to its economy.

The reasoning was often less direct. Universities contributed to the prestige of a city, attracting not only students and professors, but also tourists and merchants. In addition, they strengthened the city's political position within the province. Those who benefited most from having a university in their own city were the students' parents.

*The interests of the parents*

When plans were made to set up a university or illustrious school, the argument was frequently made that parents would have to spend less money if their sons could study in their native town.<sup>30</sup> Students could carry on living with their parents, which would save the family some three or four hundred guilders a year: almost half the salary of an ordinary professor.<sup>31</sup> The letters of Pieter Cornelisz Hooft to his son in Leiden are filled with financial advice concerning, for example, buying a book for his studies: 'Please save the money and see if you can borrow it from someone'.<sup>32</sup>

Moreover, parents would be able to exercise more control over the behaviour of their sons. Boys left the Latin school when they were about fifteen years old, sometimes even earlier. They were then 'promoted to academic lectures'. But if they had to move to another city in order to proceed, they ran the risk of being corrupted: the debauchery of students was proverbial. It is hard to assess whether the bad reputation of students was merely a commonplace; but even if it was largely exaggerated, there was sufficient anecdotal evidence to make parents anxious. A worried Polish envoy arranged for his son to board in the Amsterdam house of Gerard J. Vossius instead of sending him to the University of Leiden because, as Vossius reported to his friend Hugo Grotius, 'of all the foul acts against women and even youngsters which took place there in the past month. It is embarrassing to refer to them. Alas, how much that place has changed since the time when both of us spent our youth there!'<sup>33</sup>

All these arguments were valid for both universities and illustrious schools. But contemporary sources ascribed additional and distinctive advantages to the latter.

*The specific function of the illustrious school*

In 1640, the first professor of law at the Amsterdam Athenaeum, Johannes Cabeliau (1600–1652), gave his inaugural speech, entitled *Oratio de praeparamentis ad studium iuris* (*Oration on the Preparations for the Study of Law*). He reiterated some of the common arguments for establishing an illustrious school. In the first place, the city did not want to lag behind other European cities.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, the boys were not yet intellectually ready to attend classes at university, since they left the Latin school too early, that is, after completing six years and not after

completing the course itself. Therefore, they still needed to acquire basic knowledge when already at university, leading to a waste of time and money. According to Cabeliau, many students had to return to their parents without completing their course, leaving them with no alternative but to embark on a career as a merchant or a soldier.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, if students did remain at university, they ran the risk of sliding into criminal behaviour because of the '*libertas academica*'. 'Who would be capable of describing all the misfortunes of the university!', Cabeliau inquired.<sup>36</sup> Similar points were made by an eighteenth-century professor at the Illustrious School of Bois-le-Duc: competition between cities, the need for a more thorough moral and intellectual preparation for university, the possibility of spending less on scholarships and promoting better contact between student and professor. The emphasis on preparation is typical: it was considered the most important reason for setting up illustrious schools and was regarded as a more important distinction between them and universities than such formal features as names and juridical status.

When it comes to determining the difference between an athenaeum and an academia, an illustrious school and a university, names can be deceptive. In addition to athenaeum and *schola illustris*, other names were used by contemporaries: gymnasium, lyceum, and academia, all three of which were sometimes accompanied by the adjective 'illustrious'. Modern terminology is often dependent on a tradition silently agreed on over the course of centuries. So, the Amsterdam Athenaeum is usually called the Athenaeum Illustre or, in Dutch, the 'Doorluchtige School', while the Athenaeum of Harderwijk is known as the Gymnasium Velavicum ('Veluws Gymnasium') and 'High School of Guelders' ('Gelderse Hogeschool'). On the other hand, it was common to refer to a university as an 'athenaeum' or a 'lyceum', as did Vossius, who spoke of 'the status of our Gymnasium and of the Leiden Lyceum'.<sup>37</sup> Samuel Maresius called Groningen University 'Athenaeum nostrum'.<sup>38</sup> It has been pointed out that the term 'gymnasium' was usually restricted to a Latin school with an extended curriculum of two preparatory academic years.<sup>39</sup> Sometimes, an illustrious school was closely connected to a Latin school, with or without a curriculum consisting of grades or forms.<sup>40</sup> On other occasions, as with the Amsterdam Athenaeum, the illustrious school constituted an independent organisation. In Germany, the usual expression was 'gymnasium illustre'.<sup>41</sup> Clearly, contemporary nomenclature, rather than providing clarity, causes more confusion.<sup>42</sup>



The juridical status of illustrious schools differed from that of universities in that they did not have the right to grant academic degrees. Some contemporaries thought that this was merely a formality. Cabeliau complained of parents who only seemed content when their sons studied at famous universities. 'Indeed, whatever is called "academic" is believed to confer some kind of dignity and erudition. . . . Universities have the particular distinction of turning people into doctors. But they do not always make them learned'.<sup>43</sup> The doctorate was the only academic degree in general use at Dutch universities. Baccalaureates and licentiates were seldom awarded.<sup>44</sup> Nevertheless, for German gymnasia illustria it has been suggested that printed disputations, defended for the sake of exercise, sometimes functioned as an alternative.<sup>45</sup> According to Cabeliau, this was also the case with certificates awarded by the Illustrious School of Harderwijk.<sup>46</sup> A second more or less juridical distinction was the absence of faculties in illustrious schools. They had a number of chairs in a variety of disciplines, but not institutionally divided faculties. In some cases, this difference remained a formality.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, the system of four faculties was adopted as a model: professors were appointed in the disciplines of theology, medicine or law, and for the arts in either history and eloquence or philosophy (sometimes subdivided into logic, physics, metaphysics, and ethics). Not all illustrious schools offered teaching in the complete range of academic subjects. Amsterdam started off with two professors in the arts. The 'higher' faculties were only gradually introduced in the course of the seventeenth century. The Athenaeum of Deventer, by contrast, had professors in the disciplines of all four faculties right from the beginning, probably because its initiator, already deceased when the institution was founded, had wanted it to be a full-fledged university, a plan which the city government might have expected to be blocked by other cities in the province. This gives the impression of a 'failed university'.<sup>48</sup>

It was frequently maintained that illustrious schools provided a useful bridge between Latin school and university. Many university professors and administrators complained about the scant abilities of students who attended lectures in the faculties of theology, law, and medicine.<sup>49</sup> These complaints were eagerly seized upon by the promoters of illustrious schools, who were able to claim that their institutions provided a solution to this problem. The official aim of the Amsterdam Athenaeum was noted in the resolutions of the city council

when the first plans for the establishment of the Athenaeum were discussed:

[The burgomasters] have informed the City Council of the manifold complaints submitted to them, uttered both by the heads of schools and by other private persons, that the children who attend the Latin schools in most cases leave for university at too young an age, before having grasped the fundamentals of philosophy which are required to proceed with their studies. Due to their young age and the fact that they are beyond the reach of their parents, some of them are subject to no control whatever and fall into debauchery.<sup>50</sup>

The Athenaeum thus had to provide a basic knowledge of philosophy to young men, who would become more responsible in the meantime. This purpose was echoed by Barlaeus in one of his letters: the behaviour of the students was so bad 'that they seem to be sent, not to schools, but to taverns and bars'.<sup>51</sup> Vossius's son Dionysius reiterated the same reasoning in January 1631.<sup>52</sup> The idea remained alive at least until 1686, when the Amsterdam professor of eloquence Petrus Francius proclaimed that Latin school did not sufficiently prepare students for university study. In his opinion, there was a solid connection both between Latin school and athenaeum, and between athenaeum and university. The task of the athenaeum was to polish the knowledge of students who had left Latin school, and either to complete their education or to hand them over to others for this purpose.<sup>53</sup>

Because of their propaedeutic nature, illustrious schools could be expected to focus on teaching the *artes liberales*; and they could gain a more solid reputation as arts schools than as universities.<sup>54</sup> Henricus van Diest, professor at Harderwijk, proclaimed: 'For laying the foundations, I would prefer a gymnasium to the universities'.<sup>55</sup> Cabeliau praised the German illustrious schools of Altdorf, Bremen, and Herborn; and he noted that students who had taken an exam at the Illustrious School of Harderwijk were well regarded elsewhere.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, the Illustrious School of Herborn was highly esteemed.<sup>57</sup>

The diversity in nomenclature, juridical status, and organisation in the academic world was thus a source of confusion. Willem Frijhoff has drawn attention to the existence of a guide for students on their 'peregrinatio academica', which assessed the character of various educational institutions.<sup>58</sup> Apparently, students needed a compass in the increasingly overgrown academic landscape. But did contemporaries also ascribe to illustrious schools not only a position between the Latin school on one

hand and the university on the other, but also the task of teaching distinct subject matter, not on the programme of Latin schools or universities?

### *The utility of knowledge*

There are many passages in inaugural orations which touch upon the practical use of the arts. Humanist thinking was imbued with a formal type of utilitarianism, in which erudition in general, linked with morality, was considered to be useful to both state and church. But at the turn of the sixteenth century interest in the arts and sciences could be observed in a new social stratum. During Middelburg's failed attempts to found an athenaeum, Jacobus Gruterus gave lectures 'for a large and learned public of students and others, as well as merchants eager to learn new things'.<sup>59</sup>

The mention of merchants calls to mind the 1632 inaugural address by the Amsterdam professor of philosophy Caspar Barlaeus: *Mercator sapiens, sive Oratio de conjungendis mercaturae et philosophiae studiis* (*The Wise Merchant, or an Oration on the Bringing Together of the Study of Commerce and Philosophy*).<sup>60</sup> According to the professor of mathematics Martinus Hortensius in his Amsterdam inaugural speech of 1634, *Oratio de dignitate et utilitate matheseos* (*Oration on the Dignity and the Usefulness of the Mathematical Sciences*), members of the city council and Senate 'wanted the mathematical sciences to be taught here also, not only so that the youth might soak up this branch of knowledge along with the study of philosophy and letters, but also that they might satisfy not a few *inhabitants of the city, who have directed their assiduous and now hardly presumptuous wishes for a long time to this end*' (my italics).<sup>61</sup> In 1630 in Deventer, David Scanderus spoke publicly 'on the union of philosophy and politics', an inaugural oration which applied philosophy to the daily affairs of at least some of those in his audience who were not regular students.<sup>62</sup> Gisbertus Voetius celebrated the inauguration of the University of Utrecht in 1636 with a speech on the ways in which the *scientiae* could serve all sorts of practical needs in the society. Voetius ran through a whole range of subjects which should be taught in the arts faculty: chronology, optics, refraction, perspectives, statics, mechanics, architecture, geography, hydrography—an unusually broad perspective compared to the traditional arts disciplines.<sup>63</sup> These subjects echo the educational program of the engineering school which was founded in Leiden in 1600. This so-called *Duytsche Mathematique* was attached to the university and taught,

in Dutch, disciplines such as fortification, geometrics, and navigation: practical knowledge to be applied in the army, the building trade, and the fleet. In Amsterdam in 1617 another academy which taught in Dutch opened its doors: the *Nederduytsche Academie* was aimed at adults who had never been to university, but who were nevertheless eager to learn mathematics, astronomy, algebra, navigation, history, Hebrew, philosophy, letters, and playwriting.<sup>64</sup> The intended public seemed to have been the same one Barlaeus addressed in his *Mercator sapiens*. Indeed, if one looks across the borders of the Dutch Republic, it turns out that after 1650, at French institutes of higher education, lessons about fortification and navigation in the vernacular were aimed at future officers of the army, navy and merchant marine.<sup>65</sup>

Barlaeus's *Mercator sapiens* was enthusiastically received by the Amsterdam patriciate,<sup>66</sup> and Vossius stressed that

the Amsterdam regents are of the opinion that the founding of a university, which requires privileges and inviolable conditions from the supreme sovereignty, is different from establishing a gymnasium in which youths and other lovers of the muses, without such privileges, are liberally imbued with learning; such a right belongs to individual cities.<sup>67</sup>

Vossius mentioned two reasons why Amsterdam wanted an athenaeum. In the first place, there was concern over the dangers to which students of a tender age were exposed at the university. Moreover, in Amsterdam there were many people who had studied at university two or three decades before but who were still eager to attend public lectures on the sciences, history or other serious matters. Numerous strangers in the city had the same desire. Amsterdam not only had learned citizens, but also merchants who were as much interested in arts and sciences as in wealth. Amsterdam as a city, according to Vossius, was richer than all other cities, but now it desired to be famous because of the glory of its letters. That was why, Vossius continued, they hired eloquent professors of some standing, who would be able to attract and retain a large audience.<sup>68</sup>

The orations by Gruterus in 1595, Scanderus in 1630, Barlaeus in 1632 and Voetius in 1636 all celebrated the inauguration of municipal enterprises: three illustrious schools and a university, the latter springing from an illustrious school founded two years earlier. All four institutions were funded and governed by the city magistrates. It is tempting to assume that they responded to the needs of merchants, a social class which determined the outlook of the Dutch Golden Age but which had never before shown any particular interest in higher education. According

to Frijhoff, the proliferation of illustrious schools in the 1630s was not due only to growing municipal self-consciousness; it was also the expression of a changing vision of the role of higher education. Civic culture began to play a part in the area of academic knowledge. In this sense the illustrious school went in a different direction from that of the university, which was more tightly organized and recruited its students from geographically more widespread regions.<sup>69</sup> From Frijhoff's analysis, there seems to have been a relationship between the athenaeum, the teaching of practical disciplines, and a broader lay public. Seen in this context, an athenaeum was quite different from a propaedeutic school intended to fill the gap between Latin school and university.

Willem Frijhoff has analyzed the proceedings of the case argued before the Court of Holland in 1631, when Leiden University sued the Amsterdam regents on account of their plans to establish an institute of higher education, which Leiden claimed to be against their exclusive privilege of hosting the only university in the provinces of Holland and neighbouring Zeeland. It is not necessary to treat these proceedings here again in detail. In the past, Leiden had successfully frustrated the attempts of Middelburg to establish an illustrious school. According to the Leiden lawyers, there was no room for intermediate schools in the current educational system. Amsterdam, on the other hand, claimed only to want to strengthen the highest classes in the Latin school, without having plans to introduce theology, law or medicine. It did not intend to establish a university, but rather an institution which would guide students to university. Leiden responded that this was not necessary, as Latin schools, with the help of universities, already produced administrators, ministers, and judges.<sup>70</sup> Yet, by stating that the illustrious school should not have a propaedeutic character, but instead should be an autonomous school without privileges, Leiden in fact acknowledged its *raison d'être*.<sup>71</sup>

It is clear that Leiden feared competition from Amsterdam. But the argument that the illustrious school would not compete with the university as long as it provided teaching in the liberal arts was contradictory, because Leiden University itself offered education in the *artes*. Could it be that Leiden feared that the athenaeum would introduce a curriculum for which Leiden itself did not present an alternative: the kind of broad range of subjects Voetius would present in his Utrecht oration?

This seems highly improbable if Leiden took into account the profile of the first professors in Amsterdam: Gerard Vossius and Caspar Barlaeus.

Both had formerly been professors in Leiden. Though of Remonstrant sympathies, neither was particularly known for any intellectual or academic innovation. On the contrary: Vossius and Barlaeus were likely to give lectures similar to those delivered in the Leiden arts faculty. Indeed, Amsterdam's ambition of guiding youths to university already implied competition at least on the level of the arts. Vossius, for instance, was well aware that the Athenaeum worked in a highly competitive field. When Martinus Hortensius was often absent, Vossius expressed his fear that the interest of the public in mathematics would either wither away, or else they would turn to 'other lycea'.<sup>72</sup> We have seen how Cabeliau in his oration was concerned about students bypassing the Athenaeum after Latin school and setting straight out for university.<sup>73</sup> When the Amsterdam professor Francius was given the task of teaching Greek, he congratulated his audience because 'your children will now have the opportunity to get something which they will no longer be forced to look for elsewhere'.<sup>74</sup> Although Amsterdam had stated that it would not introduce any discipline beyond the arts, Vossius wrote in a letter at the time of the lawsuit that: 'there was a rather painstaking enquiry about law, medicine, and especially theology. But the Amsterdammers deny that that issue should be discussed before they have invited people to lecture on these subjects'.<sup>75</sup> If the regents had wanted to be more convincing, they should have stated that they had no intention at all of inviting such professors.

The acknowledgement of the fact that Latin school on its own provided insufficient instruction, therefore offered new perspectives. For many cities, having a university of their own was an impossible dream; but some kind of pseudo-university, in the form of an illustrious school, an academic gymnasium or a lyceum illustre, was a respectable second best. Seen in this light, the mushrooming of illustrious schools in the 1630s was a response to a real problem as well as to a growing self-consciousness of the urban patricians, but not necessarily due to a public of interested burghers rather than regular students.

The arguments and solutions brought forward by contemporaries are indicative of their ideas about the seventeenth-century educational system. But the arguments need to be seen in the particular context of the interests of a variety of players: city magistrates, parents, churchmen, professors, and curators. If we want to understand how these ideas were put into practice and to analyze how the athenaeum functioned in reality, we need to look at both the method and the content of the teaching.

**Methods of teaching**

The Amsterdam Athenaeum, as we have seen, started with two professors, Barlaeus, who lectured on history and philosophy respectively; they were soon accompanied by a third, Hortensius, who lectured on mathematics. In 1640 these three were joined by Cabeliau, the aforementioned professor of law. Apparently, the regents had their personal needs in mind, as the study of law was the most obvious choice for their own children. Medicine was introduced in 1660, but a professor of theology was not appointed until 1686. This late introduction in Amsterdam was atypical: in all other Dutch universities and illustrious schools, theology was among the first subjects introduced. In short, in the early history of the Amsterdam Athenaeum, we see the gradual development of a small city-based university, though without the right to grant degrees. There were three methods of teaching: private lessons, public lectures, and semi-public disputations and performances.

Private education took place in the homes of professors, usually in a group of five to ten students. In the history of the Amsterdam Athenaeum, some twelve of these so-called *collegia* can be identified.<sup>76</sup> These were modelled on the customary practice at universities. When speaking about his collegium in 1686, Francius referred to those which Justus Lipsius and Petrus Cunaeus had organized in former times at Leiden University.<sup>77</sup> Vossius and Barlaeus thought these private lessons were more useful for students than public lectures:

When speaking in public, I practise philosophy, and the audience practises philosophy with me. And in a private exam, I support the students as if I were a midwife. You know very well that young people get more benefit from domestic teachings than from public lectures. The latter are established for the glory of the teachers rather than for practical exercise. The former are accommodated to the understanding of the students.<sup>78</sup>

This view was generally supported by pedagogues throughout the century. Another characteristic of private teaching was that it offered better opportunities to discuss innovative issues, such as new developments or practical knowledge.<sup>79</sup>

The curators of the Amsterdam Athenaeum were almost always, as indicated above, current or former burgomasters, and they made sure that their own children benefited most from the private lessons. In this sense, the Athenaeum was an instrument in the hands of the local

regents. Besides regular students, in the first period there were many students visiting from abroad. Opportunities to participate in private education also attracted teachers who were not always formally attached to the Athenaeum, thus adding to the prosperous educational environment of the institute. As such, the public Latin schools and the Athenaeum were the focus of the network of Amsterdam teachers. Teachers were increasingly dependent on the local market of students, partly because the 'Grand Tour' became less popular in the course of the seventeenth century. The growing attention paid to disputations shows that there were possibilities in the local market. At the same time, the Athenaeum had established and maintained itself. It was no longer dependent on the personal network of the first professors and instead attracted students because of its institutional reputation.<sup>80</sup>

The *lectiones publicae* took place on a daily basis. Reconstructions of the timetables show a gradual increase in public lectures: from two a day in 1632 to at least six in 1690. The lectures lasted for an hour, as was customary at universities. During these lectures, a key text (preferably by a classical author) was usually explained word by word.<sup>81</sup> They attracted not only students, but also occasional visitors, such as members of the students' families, merchants, ministers, physicians, and sailors. Although admission was free, the lectures were delivered in Latin, except for two weekly ones given in Dutch for the benefit of seamen. The public lectures had a representative function for the city of Amsterdam, even though most travellers and tourists did not bother to attend. During the second and third periods (i.e. after 1649, as discussed below), this representative function was increasingly directed towards the local population.<sup>82</sup>

The third method of teaching was through semi-public disputations and performances. At a disputation, a student defended certain theses before a public composed mainly of fellow students, but also including friends, family or interested professionals. Disputations provided training in public debating skills and enabled students to gain useful practice for the inaugural disputation or dissertation which they were required to hold in order to obtain a doctorate. Disputations at the Athenaeum had the same purpose as at, for instance, Leiden University.<sup>83</sup> Their format was similar to those at the universities and as in the universities, theses to be defended were distributed before the defence, in order to give the audience an opportunity to prepare itself to mount a public opposition. As at universities, disputations took place on Wednesdays and Saturdays, in most cases at ten o'clock. From the 1650s



onwards, disputations started to be published (by the ‘Typesetter of the City and the Illustrious School’), which points to a growing desire on the part of the Athenaeum to assert itself as an academic institution. The Athenaeum had an increasingly local character: some eighty per cent of the students defending printed theses were born in Amsterdam. Most disputations were written by a presiding professor (*praeses*) rather than his students, especially those belonging to a series known as a ‘*collegium*’ (not to be confused with the series of private classes also known as a ‘*collegium*’, although these sometimes reflected the disputation series). These series of disputations were occasionally bound together. Professors such as Arnold Senguerdius (Philosophy) and Gerard Blasius (Medicine) published the main body of these disputations as didactic works, leaving out the original title-pages, dedications, names of students, and laudatory poetry by fellow students. These collections in turn supplied new students with recycled material. The same practice existed at German institutes.<sup>84</sup> Separate disputations were sometimes written by students themselves, as were the additional theses, generally called *corollaria*. This type of disputation presumably took place on the initiative of the students, whereas disputation series were initiated by presiding professors, who only allowed their best students to act as defenders. One should be aware that apparent contradictions between theses in different disputations defended under the same professor might be explained from the training purpose of the disputation: sometimes theses were inserted which the student should either defend or oppose, depending on what his public urged him to do. Most of these theses, followed by the remark *quodlibet*, are harmless evergreens. They are often found in the corollaries.<sup>85</sup> A total of 324 disputations from the Athenaeum have been preserved, along with evidence that at least 87 more were defended.

A second type of semi-public teaching was organized by the professor of eloquence Petrus Francius, who encouraged his students to recite in public Latin orations which they had learned by heart. In this way, he intended to familiarize students with the language and inculcate the proper use of words and style. In focusing on this so-called *exterior eloquence* of performance (as opposed to the *interior eloquence* of writing and speaking), Francius presented to the city a form of ‘rhetorical theatre’, open to at least students and family members of the performing students. A third type of semi-public performance consisted of clinical and anatomical lessons organized by Blasius and Petrus Bernagie, in which they taught students at the bedside of hospital patients or dissected the bodies of patients who had died.

In the course of the century, students in Amsterdam became an ever more visible part of the urban population, publicly defending theses, delivering orations or accompanying their professors on hospital visits. The growing visibility of the students kept pace with the increasing number of public lectures. Although Barlaeus, Vossius, and some of Vossius's early successors were often unable to teach due to chronic illness, the form of teaching did not differ from the way things were organized at universities. The same holidays and *series lectionum* were observed, and the same didactic practices were followed.<sup>86</sup>

We can therefore conclude that the formal methods of teaching at the Amsterdam Athenaeum were modelled on those at universities and rooted in a centuries-long tradition. We must now turn to the content of what was taught in order to establish whether the instruction itself was comparable to what the universities provided.

### **The content of the teaching**

Two main questions spring to mind when assessing the teaching program of the Athenaeum. First, was it 'traditional' or 'modern'? Second, did the Athenaeum provide a basic (propaedeutic) or more advanced level of instruction?

A basic chronology of the history of the Athenaeum in the seventeenth century will help to clarify the situation with regard to both questions. The sequence of professorial appointments can be divided into three periods. In the first phase, from 1632 until the end of the 1640s, personal reputation was a criterion for the curators in appointing candidates. The deaths of Barlaeus (1648) and Vossius (1649) marked the end of this period. The local background of the candidates became important in the second phase from 1650 to 1670, which saw the printing of many disputations, mainly philosophical, supervised by Arnold Senguerdus (from 1648 to 1667) and Johannes Klenckius (from 1647 to 1668). The third phase, covering the final three decades of the seventeenth century, began in 1669 with the appointment of the Cartesians Louis Wolzogen for church history and Johannes de Raei for philosophy. They were joined in 1674 by the afore-mentioned successful professor of history and eloquence Petrus Francius. The deaths of De Raei (1702) and Francius (1704) marked the end of the Golden Age of the

Athenaeum. A period of gradual decline followed until the school's revival in 1730.

Special attention should be paid to the teaching of the arts, since the Athenaeum was founded with the official and explicit goal of providing the sons of Amsterdam citizens with the basic knowledge they needed in order to set off for university with adequate intellectual and moral preparation. In the broad spectrum of subjects belonging to the arts, we may distinguish between, on the one hand, the rhetorical arts: Latin, Greek, history, and rhetoric or eloquence, and, on the other, the philosophical subjects: logic, physics, metaphysics, and moral philosophy. 'Philosophy' as a subject had no place in the medieval tradition of the seven liberal arts, although logic may be identified with dialectic in the trivium, and parts of physics corresponded with astronomy in the quadrivium. Humanists had tried to integrate philosophy more fully into the arts curriculum, especially in the Quattrocento educational program of the *studia humanitatis*, which included moral philosophy. But it excluded the other philosophical subjects, which in some secondary literature has given rise to the idea that universities were mainly concerned with theology and physics, whereas the humanists claimed moral philosophy as their field.<sup>87</sup> Although it has been shown (and will be shown again in this article) that moral philosophy was a well established part of academic philosophy, it should be noted that morality pervaded the teaching of language, rhetoric and history, although it appeared in a much less systematic way than when it was taught in the framework of Aristotelian philosophy. Rhetoric was the binding force of humanist instruction in the arts: medieval logic was not relevant to daily life, and scholastic philosophy in general did not meet the stylistic demands of classical Latin.<sup>88</sup> Emphasizing the need for communication, humanists concentrated on the 'example' as the main feature in rhetorical texts, because they believed that examples had greater demonstrative and persuasive force than the logical structure of an argument. Examples were usually drawn from history, based on texts from antiquity. Politics, which was treated as part of moral philosophy,<sup>89</sup> was also closely associated with the study of history, ancient texts, and rhetoric. During the first two phases of the Athenaeum's seventeenth-century history, these subjects were linked in the curriculum. This division may reflect a Dutch situation. In France, in contrast, 'logic and ethics were considered practical subjects in that they provided knowledge that could be applied. Metaphysics and physics, in contrast, were deemed purely speculative and as such far superior'.<sup>90</sup> In Central Europe, numerous textbook

classifications were proposed for the subdivisions of arts and philosophy, many of which, although they claimed to be more or less Ramist, show a variety of patterns, reflecting the individual needs of the schools where these books were used.<sup>91</sup>

### *The arts: history and eloquence*

History was, above all, a literary activity, based on ancient authors such as Livy. But seventeenth-century humanists, from Vossius to Francius, did not see the study of history as merely an aesthetic activity: for them, it was a guide to life. From history, one could learn lessons about moral responsibility in the realm of private life ('ethica'), public life ('politica'), and faith (theology). Ethics and politics also belonged to the discipline of moral philosophy; but history made moral philosophy visible by means of examples. Moreover, for the public and ecclesiastical life of lawyers, ministers, and government officials, another subject, closely connected to history, was vital: eloquence. History, eloquence and the classical languages were all of practical use for daily life.

Vossius called himself 'professor of history and politics'.<sup>92</sup> For him, 'historia' coincided almost entirely with 'politica' or 'doctrina civilis'.<sup>93</sup> He focused on what he called 'historia civilis', which consisted basically of a 'narratio' from which, in a typically humanist fashion, moral lessons could be drawn. In this kind of history, the reader learns about the causes of particular events because the facts are organized and described with literary and rhetorical intent. Although some new contributions can be discerned in Vossius's historical writings, he 'cannot be ranged among the more original minds [of his time]'.<sup>94</sup> His renown derived mainly from his ability to structure a vast amount of bookish knowledge into clear and useful reference works.<sup>95</sup> His 1632 *Oratio de utilitate historiae*, though less systematic than his larger theoretical treatise, the *Ars historica* of 1623, contains an analysis of 'historia' in which the subject is subdivided into ever narrower specialisations, all of which are defined and discussed. What is distinctive about Vossius is the emphasis he places on the salutary effect of history, not so much on civil as on religious life. Given that he was also supposed to teach 'doctrina civilis', this stress on religion is somewhat unexpected.<sup>96</sup>

Vossius's emphasis on ecclesiastical history is shown by his decision to devote his public lectures to the early history of the church,<sup>97</sup> establishing a tradition that was to be continued by David Blondel and Alexander Morus in the 1650s and 1670s. Although we have no evidence

concerning their teaching, both of them were appointed as professors of ecclesiastical history. No professor of history in the second period remained in post longer than Johannes Keuchenius (from 1661 to 1667), who concentrated on Roman history. After him, the Athenaeum tried, but failed, to attract well-known philologists such as Johannes Georgius Graevius, Johannes Fredericus Gronovius, and Marquardus Gudius. It ended up instead with Marcus Meibomius, who was hired to teach the ‘litterae humaniores’. This whimsical scholar was fired after one year because he was reluctant to give private lessons to the regents’ children. Next, the untalented Johannes Faber was appointed ‘professor historiarum et eloquentiae’ or ‘litterarum’.<sup>98</sup> He was transferred to the chair of law in 1674.

The appointment in 1669 of Louis Wolzogen to teach ecclesiastical history marks the beginning of the third phase of arts teaching. Little is known about what this Cartesian minister taught. He had become famous, or infamous according to some, on account of his role in the pamphlet war following the publication in 1666 of the Spinozist work *Philosophia Sacrae Scripturae Interpres*. Wolzogen had reproached the anonymous author (Lodewijk Meyer) for crossing the boundaries between philosophy and biblical criticism. In turn, Wolzogen himself was attacked by the orthodox Calvinists.<sup>99</sup> He was apparently successful in the private lessons he gave on preaching. He was required to teach both ecclesiastical and secular history from 1686 onwards, when Greek instruction was assigned to Francius. Francius continued to lecture on eloquence as well, but was dismissed from secular history, which he had been teaching since his appointment in 1674.

Little remains from Francius’s lectures on history. From one of his orations, intended as an introduction to a course on Livy, he rehearses the standard humanist view of history as a treasure-house of moral examples.<sup>100</sup> Francius gradually shifted away from history to eloquence. From 1686 onwards, he made his students learn classical orations by heart and publicly perform them in the Athenaeum.<sup>101</sup> In this way, they became acquainted not only with the orations of Cicero but also with those of Demosthenes and with his own Latin translations from speeches taken from P.C. Hooft’s *Nederlandsche Historien*.<sup>102</sup> He especially fostered panegyric oratory, as this genre gave the best opportunity to exercise oneself in *amplificatio*, that is: expanding a theme through an abundance of words and tropes. These performances show some resemblance with the *declamatio*, a one-time favourite exercise in humanist pedagogy, which was also revitalized in eighteenth-century France,

replacing student theatrical performances. Accordingly, sessions like these may be linked to Francius' interest in stage acting. As a regent of the municipal theatre he saw a clear link between acting and oratorical delivery. He thus might have wanted to compensate for the lack of theatrical performances in the Dutch institutes of higher education. It should be noted, however, that Latin schools in the Low Countries in fact had a tradition of performing Latin plays, which again stresses the link between the function and level of Latin schools in the United Provinces and the arts curricula at the French colleges, especially the Jesuit ones, where this practice was well established.<sup>103</sup> In fact, on 9 October 1690, Francius let his students recite the speeches of Ajax and Ulysses, transposed by himself from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* into a prose version. The same speeches were to be delivered thirty-three years later in the Paris Collège de Mazarin. As in France, Francius acknowledged the public relations importance of these performances: in many cases, he put in the spotlight the sons of local magistrates.<sup>104</sup>

Francius also gave his students exercises in poetry, making them transpose poems from classical authors, mainly Horace, into another metre, or having them turn prose fragments into poetic couplets. These exercises again show resemblance with the arts curriculum of the more advanced years at French *collèges de pleine exercise* and thus show that Francius expected his student to have already mastered the basics of Latin at the Latin School. With this practice he lived up to his above-mentioned vision of the Athenaeum as having links with the curriculum of the Latin school.<sup>105</sup>

For oriental languages, Christianus Ravius had been attached to the Athenaeum as early as 1646–1647. According to his 'harmonic method', Hebrew was not the mother of all languages, but rather a dialect, along with Syriac, Samaritan, Arabic, and Ethiopian, of one and the same language. His works show him to have been a relatively open-minded philologist, taking a stance independent from the pressure of religious orthodoxy.<sup>106</sup> Although the professor of mathematics Alexander de Bie had been teaching Arabic privately from 1653 onwards, presumably until his death in 1690, it was not until 1686 that Stephanus Morinus was appointed as professor of oriental languages. He was rooted in the same tradition as Ravius: for a complete understanding of the Bible it was not only necessary to have knowledge of Hebrew, but also of other oriental languages. The relatively late introduction of oriental languages to Amsterdam as compared to other academic institutions of education was due to the fact that theology was only introduced into the curriculum in 1686.

It was external circumstances, not any internal developments within the various branches of the disciplines, which in 1686 had led to the grouping of ecclesiastical and profane history, on the one hand, and eloquence and Greek, on the other. Increasing specialisation in the realm of historical disciplines, apparent in the course of the seventeenth century, was possible due to the growing number of professors in the field. But as the financial situation worsened in the early eighteenth century, this process was halted, and the teaching of history at the Athenaeum was 'dominated by continuity'.<sup>107</sup>

The decline of history and eloquence during the second phase of the Athenaeum's seventeenth-century history was by no means representative of other subjects taught in the school: philosophy, for instance, flourished during the 1650s and 1660s. It is now time to turn to the teaching of philosophy, since this discipline underwent the major paradigmatic shift of the century.

### *The arts: philosophy*

The traditional philosophical subjects were conceived at the Athenaeum in a hierarchy which reflected the ordering of the Aristotelian corpus into logic, physics, metaphysics and moral philosophy.<sup>108</sup> It may come as a surprise that this order, maintained at a protestant institute, reflected the Jesuit *Ratio studiorum* of 1599. But this was not the only feature in which protestant education in philosophy was influenced by the Jesuit tradition, as will be shown. Moreover, the hierarchy mentioned does not necessarily imply a chronology. It does not mean that moral philosophy was taught in the latest stage of a course, as was the case in sixteenth century Oxford and Paris and at the universities of central Europe, where this ultimate position also reflected the great importance attached to the subject.<sup>109</sup> One gets the impression that students were introduced to all of the four subjects at roughly the same time, as is implied by those disputations which contained *theses miscellaneae* from all of these subjects in the established order. Not all students who defended theses in physics had previously defended theses in logic. Unfortunately, even if several disputations defended by one and the same student remain, they do not show a cross-section of the entire curriculum, but only some highlights of an individual educational history that is bound to have been more comprehensive.<sup>110</sup>

Professors in Amsterdam were appointed for the whole range of philosophical subjects, although it will be shown that metaphysics seems hardly

to have been taught at all. There was, however, a separate chair for mathematics, held by professors who treated subjects as astronomy, navigation and optics. Although this institutional bifurcation between mathematics and philosophy manifested itself rather early as compared to for instance France, where the same split took place only at the end of the Ancien Régime, it should be noted that the *professor mathematicae* Alexander de Bie in the second period presided over many *disputationes physicae*. Therefore, mathematicians are included in this section on philosophy.

Caspar Barlaeus, the first professor of philosophy at the Athenaeum, remains of interest to scholars because of the intriguing title of his inaugural oration, *The Wise Merchant*.<sup>111</sup> Yet, though the linking of cultural and financial capital in this title may sound novel, the oration itself is rather traditional. In the first part Barlaeus claims that while money is important, *scientia* and *virtus* are more valuable. He is closer to Aristotle's ethic of tempering desires than to the Stoic ideal of *apatheia* (freedom from desire), although he agrees with the Stoics as well.<sup>112</sup> By means of a host of citations from classical sources (sometimes taken completely out of context), he shows that wisdom creates judgement, enabling the merchant to distinguish between honest and dishonest profit. By means of eloquence, merchants are able to sell their products. Barlaeus also stresses the role of luck: wealth is due to time and circumstances, not to virtue. The wise merchant becomes more humble as his profit grows, and he uses his profit for the common good and the benefit of the poor. Utility and honesty are indissolubly linked. At the core of Barlaeus's argument is 'prudencia civilis', an Aristotelian concept in which are bound together the philosopher's responsibility for judging the behaviour of rulers and for defining the moral principles of trade, the politician's task of making laws, and the economist's duty to warn against unwise trade. Barlaeus then moves on to the second part of his oration, which deals with 'philosophia speculativa'.<sup>113</sup> This type of philosophy turns out to be the knowledge generated by the physical sciences; more specifically, by geography. It concerns knowing about foreign countries, customs, and languages. Such information can be obtained from studying classical literature. Apparently the link between geography and history current in France at the time, where these subjects were taught as part of the rhetoric class, was not felt by Barlaeus: he avoids the term *historia*, which belonged to the task of Vossius.<sup>114</sup> Moreover, 'speculative' philosophy in Barlaeus's mental framework appears to have been a very practical brand of knowledge, without the theoretical notions usually associated with it.<sup>115</sup> David Scanderus, in his



inaugural speech at the Illustrious School of Deventer also maintained the practical value speculative philosophy, but, for him, this is rather an ethical value than one concerned with the kind of practical knowledge presented by Barlaeus.<sup>116</sup>

By leaving out logic and metaphysics altogether and by boiling the physical sciences down to geography under the guise of speculative philosophy, Barlaeus clearly reveals his personal preference for ethics. Although he assured his audience that he was foremost a follower of Aristotle, he acknowledged that he had a special love for Stoic ethics.<sup>117</sup> For Barlaeus, Cicero's *De officiis* is an authority on a par with the Stoic philosophers Panaetius and Antipater. The modern editors and translators of the *Mercator sapiens* have rightly concluded that the merchant merely functions as an example of man in general.<sup>118</sup> The emphasis on the utility of moral philosophy in *The Wise Merchant* stems from a well-established humanist tradition in which ethics were meant to be of direct relevance for the daily life of both private individuals and those carrying political responsibility for others. What is new, of course, is addressing merchants from the lectern. As a humanist steeped in classical rhetoric and a Neo-Latin poet experienced in writing occasional poetry, Barlaeus knew exactly how to score a bull's eye with a clever *captatio benevolentiae*.

In spite of his clear preference for ethics, Barlaeus taught all the Aristotelian branches of philosophy. The private lessons he gave to two nephews of Hugo Grotius began with logic, then moved on to physics and concluded with ethics, following the established order of disciplines in the Aristotelian corpus.<sup>119</sup> How did this Neo-Latin poet-orator approach Aristotle? Did he take refuge in the humanist method of 'enarratio' applied to Aristotle's text, in Greek or in Latin translation? Or did he comment on Aristotle with the help of scholastic philosophy? Part of the answer is found in his *Orationes*. Barlaeus started each new course by presenting an introductory oration as a counterweight to what was offered from the 'depressing lecterns of the Philosophers' at the Athenaeum, where Barlaeus himself was in fact the only philosopher. Putting aside the 'rough professor's language', filled with 'overly subtle comments of Thomas Aquinas, Duns Scotus, Cajetan, and others, which lack the Greek and Roman charm', he took refuge in 'the ancient study of letters' and 'the language of aspiration, which is unfamiliar to and unsuitable for chairs of philosophy'.<sup>120</sup> In other introductory lectures as well, Barlaeus expressed his disgust at the language with which scholastic philosophers had polluted theology and philosophy.<sup>121</sup> Since these addresses are presented as a temporary but welcome escape from

scholastic philosophy, we may draw the conclusion that Barlaeus did, in fact, teach philosophy in a scholastic manner. It is revealing that scholastic philosophy continued to be taught in seventeenth-century Amsterdam, even by a Remonstrant Neo-Latin poet, skilled in humanist rhetoric. Professional Calvinist theologians in Barlaeus's time, especially those concerned with a thoroughly orthodox Calvinist confessionalization of society (a conservative programme generally referred to as the 'Further Reformation'), were steeped in scholastic philosophy. In light of this context, it is perhaps not surprising that Barlaeus described himself as a follower of Aristotle and never mentioned Agricola, Erasmus, Melancthon, or Ramus. In his 1617 Leiden oration on logic, *De ente rationis*, he uttered his aversion to terms such as 'ens' and 'quidditas' which were unknown to Cicero and had been introduced into Latin by Duns Scotus and Thomas Aquinas. But after explaining the different species of *entia*, he admitted that the logical concepts invented by the scholastics were necessary for theologians, physicists, physicians, and lawyers.<sup>122</sup> The metalanguage of logic was an instrument of thought, an *ars*, a notion which was frequently defended by later students of the Athenaeum, in line with Aristotle's division between *res* (things, concepts) and *verba* (the language in which they are addressed) and with the common opinion at European universities throughout the century.<sup>123</sup>

Barlaeus lectured on Aristotle's *Physics*, but the only extant evidence for his teaching are two inaugural orations: *De animae humanae admirandis* (*The Wonders of the Human Soul*) and *De admirandis coeli* (*The Wonders of Heaven*). His oration on the soul was meant to introduce a course on Aristotle's *De anima* and largely follows this work.<sup>124</sup> Like Aristotle, Barlaeus recapitulates what ancient authors had written on the soul. At times he admits that he is staggered by what Aristotle himself had written: 'that the soul is enclosed in the body and moves the body into motion without first having to move itself may be believed by the teacher of Alexander the Great; to be frank, it is beyond my comprehension'.<sup>125</sup> Barlaeus was reluctant to take a stand on issues disputed by other scholars. In discussing the eye, for instance, he outlines the opinion of both Plato and Aristotle, adding: 'As yet, I do not have any definition'.<sup>126</sup> Barlaeus's description of the soul as an unmoved and care-free entity is reminiscent of the Stoic view, but he does not mention the Stoics, presumably because their notion of the soul was in conflict with the Christian belief in its immortality. Pythagoras and Epicurus are said to be wrong, because their account of the soul did not lead to the conclusion of the existence of an eternal God.