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# Review of: From Stevin to Spinoza: An Essay on Philosophy in the Seventeenth-Century Dutch Republic by Wiep Van Bunge

William H. Beardsley  
*University of Puget Sound*, [wbeardsley@pugetsound.edu](mailto:wbeardsley@pugetsound.edu)

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From Stevin to Spinoza: An Essay on Philosophy in the Seventeenth-Century Dutch Republic  
by Wiep Van Bunge

Review by: W. H. Beardsley

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tration with Erasmus' literary activism but also more impressed with the strength (or audacity) of spirit embodied in that activism.

WOOD BOULDIN

Villanova University

Wiep Van Bunge. *From Stevin to Spinoza: An Essay on Philosophy in the Seventeenth-Century Dutch Republic.*

(Brill's Studies in Intellectual History, 103.) Leiden and Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 2001. xii + 220 pp. index. bibl. \$80. ISBN: 90-04-12217-6.

In this short but impressively researched "essay with footnotes" (xi) Wiep van Bunge makes an important contribution to our understanding of the place of philosophy and philosophical controversy in early modern Dutch culture. For a variety of reasons, the Golden Age of the Dutch Republic has long been a period of intense interest to historians of early modern philosophy. For one thing, Descartes was associated with the republic during the two most philosophically productive periods of his life. His early and formative apprenticeship with the Dutch scientist Isaac Beekman occurred while Descartes served in the army of Maurice of Nassau and led directly to the development of his *mathesis universalis* and to a renewed commitment to natural philosophy. During his later extended sojourn in the republic (1630-49) Descartes produced most of his important scientific work (including his *Principia*) as well as his *Meditationes*, first published in 1641 in Leiden under his direct supervision. This was, however, a period of continual strife and turmoil in Descartes' professional life, broken only by his friendship and correspondence with Princess Elizabeth of Bohemia, herself in exile in the Hague. Descartes' quarrels with philosophical friends such as Henricus LeRoy and such powerful enemies such as Gisbertus Voetius grew from personal struggles to great and public controversies, pitting Aristotelians against Cartesians of various stripes, each side battling for control of the scientific and philosophical curricula of the republic's newly established universities.

All of this has received considerable attention, of course, but van Bunge, pursuing what he calls a "contextualist approach to the history of philosophy" (x), seeks to expand the focus beyond the main academic players. He examines in detail the writings, often pamphlets and broadsides in the vernacular, of a wide range of neglected, nonacademic figures. The result is a balanced and nuanced picture of the impact of these philosophical debates on Dutch culture.

The heart of the book is a suggestive explanation of this growing appeal of Cartesianism. Van Bunge argues that as the great Dutch universities were founded relatively late, in the midst of a violent struggle for independence, their scientific pursuits were therefore overwhelmingly practical, growing out of the siege mentality induced by relentless war and centered on engineering and navigation. While Aristotelianism, which never had the intellectual hold over the Dutch that it enjoyed in France, was attractive for largely pedagogic reasons, Cartesianism came by mid-century to dominate Dutch university life. Its influence in the republic was due neither

to Descartes' struggle with epistemological skepticism nor to the ease with which Cartesian natural science, in marked contrast with Aristotelianism, incorporated such scientific advances as the shift towards heliocentrism. Van Bunge argues that it was Descartes' reputation as mathematician that most attracted the non-academic writers he examines. The practical Dutch were taken with Descartes' emphasis on the special role of mathematics and his "exciting promise to deliver the groundworks for an explanation of the entire physical universe which would provide a degree of certainty and indubitability hitherto only achieved in geometry" (92). They were also tempted, van Bunge argues, to extend this promise metaphorically to the political realm and came to see Cartesianism as a potential foundation for political and social unity.

In the later chapters van Bunge considers the influence of Cartesianism on Dutch theology after 1650. Attracted originally to Descartes' delicate balancing act between the demands of philosophy and those of theology and biblical hermeneutics, Dutch writers associated with Cartesianism shifted away from this accommodationism toward a more radical conception of a rationalized theology. It is relation to such writers as the radical Cartesian and popular theologian Adriaan Koerbagh that van Bunge discusses the development of Spinozism. In contrast to some recent commentators, Van Bunge situates Spinoza squarely in the context of non-academic Dutch Cartesianism. Even debates concerning the metaphysics of substance and attribute are discussed in the context of mid-century political and theological controversy.

Van Bunge has produced an essay of great interest, drawing on hitherto neglected sources. The major flaw of the book is perhaps its length. The author has the material here for a more extended treatment of this exciting period.

W. H. BEARDSLEY

University of Puget Sound

Douglas Catterall. *Community without Borders: Scots Migrants and the Changing Face of Power in the Dutch Republic, C. 1600-1700.*

(Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought, 86.) Leiden and Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 2002. xv + 411 pp. index. map. bibl. \$126. ISBN: 90-04-12077-7.

Douglas Catterall takes what would seem to be a rather narrow topic, Scots migration to Rotterdam in the seventeenth century, to press a very broad and important point: migrant communities were integral to the formation of early modern societies. He demonstrates quite clearly that the small Scots community (only about two percent of a population of 51,000 in the 1690s) managed to put itself at the center of public discourse and social life in Rotterdam. More importantly for those whose interests range beyond Rotterdam, this book is a model for examining the dialectic between enduring migrant communities and their host environments.

The first four chapters offer an overview of Scots migration to Rotterdam and the Dutch Republic as well as an analysis of the economic strategies, social connections, and cultural adaptations that made survival possible. According to Catterall,