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On Hemsterhuis's *Letter on Desires* and *Letter on Man and his Relations*

Two Notices by Ludwig von Schrautenbach

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Introduction: Two Examples of the Early Hemsterhuis-Reception in Germany

In 1772, the *Frankfurter gelehrte Anzeigen* published anonymous notices of two books by François Hemsterhuis. Rather than critical reviews, they were something like abstracts or paraphrases intended to familiarize the reader with their overall content without providing much in the way of evaluation or commentary. From a contemporary perspective, what is most intriguing about these notices is that they were for a long time attributed to Herder,[1] having been published in a journal to which both he and the young Goethe contributed that year. On this basis, Jörg-Ulrich Fechner has argued at length for their decisive influence on the early Goethe, particularly his *Von deutscher Baukunst*.[2] Even if research from the last sixty years has shown the Herder-ascription to be a misattribution and that they are, instead, by Ludwig Karl

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[1] Max Morris, *Goethes und Herders Anteil an dem Jahrgang 1772 der Frankfurter Gelehrten Anzeigen* (1909), p. 128, 282; Leendert Brummel, *Frans Hemsterhuis, een Philosofenleven* (Haarlem: H.D. Tjeenk Willink & zoon, 1925), pp. 285-6.

[2] Jörg-Ulrich Fechner, '"du neufranzöscher philosophirender Kenner": Hemsterhuis', in Marcel Fresco *et al.* (eds), *Frans Hemsterhuis (1721-1790): Quellen, Philosophie und Rezeption* (Munich: LIT Verlag, 1995), pp. 507–25.

Freiherr von Schrautenbach (1724-1783),[3] it remains true that the notices influenced figures who would go on to be significant readers of Hemsterhuis at the very moment his German reception-history was getting underway. That is, they are key documents for understanding the 'first wave' of Hemsterhuis's German-reception, which includes more broadly Christian Garve, F. H. Jacobi, Sophie von La Roche and C. M. Wieland.

The *Frankfurter gelehrte Anzeigen* was a continuation of the *Franckfurter gelehrte Zeitung*, which had appeared from 1736. In 1772, it not only gained a new name and a new appearance (in octavo format, instead of quarto), but more importantly a new editor-in-chief: Johann Heinrich Merck (1741-1791). Merck gathered together a group of collaborators, including Herder and Goethe, and created such a controversial magazine that the project failed after just a year. The 1772 volume is, therefore, a singular monument to German intellectual life of the late eighteenth century.[4]

In his youth, Schrautenbach, a German nobleman, had befriended Count Ludwig Nikolaus von Zinzendorf (1700-1760), founder of the pietistic community of the Moravian Brothers in Herrnhut (*Herrnhuter Brüdergemeine*). While their friendship cooled after Schrautenbach withdrew to his estate, he did note down his experiences of the Herrnhuters, published posthumously as the first critical biography of Zinzendorf. Merck and Schrautenbach knew each other from political circles in the Landgraviate of Hesse-Darmstadt; for example, they both travelled in the retinue of countess Caroline von Hesse-Darmstadt to the court of Empress Catherine II in Saint Petersburg from May to December 1773. They probably met Diderot there, who was also staying at court at that time,[5] and may have discussed Hemsterhuis's *Lettre sur l'homme* with him.

It is unknown how Merck and Schrautenbach became acquainted with Hemsterhuis's writings: editions were rare and circulated only among Hemsterhuis's close friends. Only after Hemsterhuis became friends with Amalie Gallitzin in 1775 did a line of dissemination into Germany open up. Nevertheless, at the time of his death, Schrautenbach's personal library contained five texts by Hemsterhuis: four in print (*Lettre sur les désirs*, *Lettre sur l'homme et ses rapports*, *Sophyle ou la philosophie* twice, and *Alexis ou de la*

[3] Hermann Bräuning-Oktavio, *Herausgeber und Mitarbeiter der Frankfurter Gelehrten Anzeigen 1772* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1966), pp. 73-5, 162-3. See the discussion in Heinz Moenkemeyer, 'François Hemsterhuis: Admirers, Critics, Scholars', *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 51.3 (1977): 503.

[4] William F. Roertgen, *The Frankfurter Gelehrte Anzeigen, 1772-1790: An Analysis and Evaluation* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1964).

[5] Adalbert Elschenbroich, 'Merck, Johann Heinrich', in: *Neue Deutsche Biographie* 17 (1994), pp. 117-20.

divinité) and two in manuscript (*Addition à la Lettre sur l'homme et ses rapports* and *Simon ou des facultés de l'âme*). This is in the context of a collection containing 832 titles (in about 1600 volumes), 110 of which can be classified as philosophy. After Plato, Hemsterhuis is the most represented author. And yet, Schrautenbach never otherwise published on philosophical topics.[6]

The most remarkable Hemsterhuis text in Schrautenbach's collection was the manuscript of *Simon* (written between 1779 and 1783). According to a record kept by Hemsterhuis himself, fourteen copies were sent to his friends (four to Gallitzin),[7] but he nowhere mentions Schrautenbach in his correspondence. However, Hemsterhuis did know Merck personally, for Merck had met Hemsterhuis while visiting Petrus Camper twice in the Netherlands in 1784 and 1785[8] and he had already gained possession of a handwritten manuscript of *Simon* in 1783, showing it to anyone who wanted it.[9] Yet, this still does not solve the mystery of how Schrautenbach had access to Hemsterhuis's texts in 1772.

All that can be said with certainty is that Schrautenbach is effusive about Hemsterhuis's early publications. His verdict in the *Frankfurter gelehrte Anzeigen* is a positive one, despite his pietist leanings which might have been thought to stand in tension with Hemsterhuis's reservations about revealed religion in the *Letter on Man*.

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[6] Hermann Bräuning-Oktavio, 'Die Bibliothek des Freiherrn Ludwig Carl von Weitolshausen, genannt Schrautenbach, Herr zu Lindheim in der Wetterau', *Börsenblatt für den deutschen Buchhandel, Frankfurter Ausgabe*, 43 (1969), pp. 1285-1314. See Hermann Arthur Lier, 'Schrautenbach, Ludwig Karl Freiherr von', in: *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie* 32 (1891), pp. 461-4.

[7] Jacob van Sluis, *Kringen rondom François Hemsterhuis: Vrienden, verwanten en passanten* (Berltsum: Van Sluis, 2018), pp. 80-1. It is possible that the Prince of Hesse-Darmstadt, mentioned in this list, may have been the intermediary with Schrautenbach.

[8] J.K. van der Korst, *Het rusteloze bestaan van dokter Petrus Camper (1722-1789)* (Houten: Nederlands Tijdschrift voor Geneeskunde / Bohn Stafleu van Loghum, 2008), p. 174, 210; Hemsterhuis, Letter 5.49 (25th June 1784).

[9] Siegfried Sudhof (ed.), *Der Kreis zu Münster. Briefe und Aufzeichnungen Fürstenbergs, der Fürstin Gallitzin und ihrer Freunde* (Münster: Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1962), I, p. 147.

On Hemsterhuis's *Letter on Desires* and *Letter on Man and his Relations*

Two Notices by Ludwig von Schrautenbach

Frankfurter gelehrte Anzeigen, no. XXXVIII, pp. 297-302 (12th May 1772).

Letter on Desires to Mr. T[heodorus] d[e] S[meth],[11] Paris 1770. Duodecimo. 53 pp.

This writing is by the younger Mr. Hemsterhuis from The Hague,[12] whom our readers will at the very least be familiar with from the Leipzig *Bibliothek der schönen Wissenschaften*.[13] In addition to the most profound knowledge of a man of state, he unites the most recent developments in astronomy and metaphysics with the warmest enthusiasm for the plastic arts, which he himself practises as a dilettante with genuine success.

He appeals to an experience from the *Letter on Sculpture* where he observed that, after long contemplation of the same object, the soul feels disgust and aversion within itself.[14] This property becomes the very ground on which he constructs his system of the activities of the human soul. The soul always seeks to enjoy the greatest number of ideas in the shortest space of time, and what prevents it [from doing so] is the necessity of employing certain organs in order to pass through a succession of time and parts. If the soul could be affected by an object without [the need for] organs, the time it took to form an idea of it would be precisely nothing. If the object were so constituted that [the soul] could be affected by the entire totality of its essence, then the number of ideas would be absolutely infinite. Moreover, if these two cases occurred at the same time, the sum of these ideas—without media and without any succession of time and parts—would represent the

[11] A Dutch banker to whom both the *Letter on Sculpture* and the *Letter on Desires* are addressed.
[12] 'Younger' to distinguish him from his equally famous father, Tiberius Hemsterhuis.
[13] A reference to a review of Hemsterhuis's *Letter on Sculpture*, anonymously published by Christian Garve in *Neue Bibliothek der schönen Wissenschaften und der freyen Künsten*, XI / 2 (Leipzig: Dyckischen Buchhandlung, 1771), pp. 296-329.
[14] The following paraphrases the whole argument of the *Letter on Desires* from the first to the last paragraph (*EE* 1.79-85), although it does not explicitly mention material from the appended 'General Remark' (*EE* 1.86-7) which is explicitly intended to forestall Spinozist interpretations of the work. The reference to the *Letter on Sculpture* here is to *EE* 1.67.

entire totality of the object: or this object would be united with the essence of the soul in the most intimate and perfect fashion. Then one could say that the soul enjoys this object in the most perfect way. The liveliness of the desire, or the degree of attractive force, is determined by the degree of homogeneity of the desired object [with the soul]; and this degree of homogeneity consists in the degree to which perfect union is possible. One will love a beautiful statue less than one's friend, one's friend less than one's lover, and one's lover less than the supreme being. It is for this reason religion forms greater enthusiasts than love, love greater [ones] than friendship, and friendship greater [ones] than the desire for merely material things. When I gaze at a beautiful statue, I seek nothing more than to unite my being with its essence; but after long contemplation, aversion arises within me, and this comes from no other source than the silent conclusion I have drawn over the impossibility of a perfect union. In friendship, the impossibility of union does not appear as great; and, in love, nature deceives us for a moment, yet the aversion which immediately follows clearly shows the impossibility of that union which, on the face of it, appeared so perfect to us. Among the means the soul employs to achieve this union, two in particular deserve consideration: the first is physical, the second intellectual. Everyone knows the special harmony that exists between our ideas and the reproductive parts of our body. Of all the physical means [the soul] uses to unite its being with the desired object, this is the strongest, manifest and intermixed everywhere. I call upon all enthusiasts in religion, love, friendship, and the arts, who have solely material things as their object, whether in the heat of their passion they have felt no alteration [in that place] where Plato long ago identified the seat of desire. Here belong all those debauches of impurity committed in all epochs on one's own sex [*Geschlechte*],[15] on marble and bronze. These errors of imagination arose from nothing but this universal attraction, and they would have continued forever if the soul did not, at the same time, have the faculty to check this force; not that it annihilates it, or diminishes its intensity, but [this faculty] hampers its progress by way of obstacles, and leads it from an object onto another path. This divine faculty is the pillar of all morality. It can be compared to what, in matter, is called *vis inertiae*. In friendship everything works towards the production of this homogeneity: from the very first moment among a group of strangers when we choose one person in particular, the soul labours incessantly to discover more points of agreement [with this person], and love or friendship grows in proportion to this

[15] Hemsterhuis gives the more specific example of 'pederasty' in the original text (*EE* 1.82). Of course, 'gender' is an equally possible translation here.

discovery. With what incessant effort do those who live alone work to [achieve] perfect homogeneity with their dog or other favourite animal: and with what caresses do they repay a well-understood word or a newly acquired common idea.

Among the Greeks, love and friendship had roughly the same meaning as they do for us; only their feeling and their extraordinary sensibility gave a strength to all their passions we cannot grasp, and [gave] a splendour to their virtues and vices which dazzles us. Religion, which really consists in nothing but the relation of each individual to the supreme being, and the end goal of which is the highest possible happiness of each individual, possessed nothing determinate [about it] among the Greeks: polytheism made from [this indeterminateness] an object of ceremony and parade. Civic virtue, or the faculty that directs the action of each individual to the highest good of society, was the only thing at which one had to work. Though for the most part convinced of the necessary existence of one creator and God, legislators saw that every form of society was a creature of human hands and that this particular form could have no other relation to God than any clock or machine. So, they assembled these machines according to the best possible design, and modified the governing powers of each individual as they pleased. [But] they left alone that kind of religion, even if occasionally making use of it skilfully, because they believed that, through association with the gods, the people would receive something sublime in their way of thinking. From this it followed that each individual was allowed a certain dose of freedom to determine its own actions for the highest good of society; and, consequently, [the individual] formed a more or less respectable part of the state itself. Since [the individual] regarded itself as the image of the state, its powers were doubled: and this necessarily gave rise to activity, industry, thirst for honour, and a patriotism that animates everything. For us, who possess a revelation, the individual was certain of its continued existence into eternity. Its relation to God became more determinate and better known; but its final purpose was different. It would soon see that its highest good was not to be found in a world of temporal succession; and, discovering that civic virtue was thereby slightly weakened, legislators sought the remedy in mingling [the state] with religion. The state, or the government which represents it, which has no right to the actions of the individual except insofar as they are necessary causes of certain definite effects, attacked [the individual's] intentions, thoughts, and every modification of his velleity,[16] which really still belonged solely to [the

[16] Schrautenbach uses *Velleität* to correspond to Hemsterhuis's *velleité*. For Hemsterhuis, the term signifies indeterminate willpower as it exists prior to being actualised in particular acts of will. It pertains, moreover, to the very essence of the subject.

individual's] relation to God. In contrast, the individual saw in his actions nothing more than the simple activity of his velleity, without considering its relations to the state. Religion and civic virtue, which should have remained separate, alternately weakened one another; and since man's inner freedom had now been oppressed and attacked, despondency and indolence naturally followed.

Everything we see and sense strives for union. However, everything is composed of individuals which exist absolutely for themselves; and, notwithstanding that beautiful semblance of a chain of closely united beings, it seems clear that each individual exists in order to exist, and not because of the existence of another. Since, therefore, the whole is in a forced state, it follows that there is an originator [*Urheber*] who allows it to strive toward union, or who by its power and nature has divided it into individuals. And I call this originator God.

We have not put our name to everything in this exceptional writing, the rarity of which (there do not exist more than 80 copies) will excuse this extended excerpt. The sequence of claims as they emerge from H[emsterhuis]'s mind, is always remarkable, even if it were to end up furnishing nothing more than new data on the genealogy of ideas for the psychologist.

Frankfurter gelehrte Anzeigen, no. XCI, pp. 721-726 (13th November 1772)

Letter on Man and his Relations, Paris 1772. Octavo. 65 pp.[17]

We are pleased to be able to announce this more recent writing by the younger Mr. Hemsterhuis. It is a continuation of the main ideas of his system, only briefly indicated in the previous *Letter on Desires*, which are further developed in this larger work "on the progress of the sciences."[18] We apologise for the fact that we proceed so quickly and superficially over the most important parts of this book and so must refer our readers back to the book itself.

No perceptive being can receive a sensation of any substance other than by means of the ideas or images arising from the relation [*Verhältniß*] in which this being stands to such a substance, or which separates [the substance] from

[17] Schrautenbach is not using the 'official' edition in duodecimo format published by Hemsterhuis himself, but a pirated edition in octavo, actually published by an unknown publisher in Liège. See Jacob van Sluis, 'Introduction', in: François Hemsterhuis, *Oeuvres philosophiques : édition critique* (Leiden / Boston: Brill, 2015), pp. 39-40.
[18] A quotation from *EE* 1.88.

this being. Hemsterhuis calls this [relation] the organ or medium: that is, he understands by this not only the eye that sees, but also the light that reflects on the object. Thus, the perceptive being behaves in a passive manner, and the way man receives ideas is common to animals. But, when there is a being that thinks and draws conclusions, then it possesses signs that are not the objects themselves, but that agree with the objects, and these signs are in [the being's] power. A perceptive being has three ways of obtaining ideas, 1.) through the action of the objects that set the media or organs in motion; 2.) through the accidental movement that is communicated by organs; 3.) and through the movement that is communicated to the organs by signs. An idea generated in the first way, through the presence of the object itself, undoubtedly has the greatest clarity. The second [way] is far less clear and very often confused, and [thirdly] those ideas which the velleity brings about through signs are weaker, but without the slightest confusion. Experience teaches us to take these different degrees of clarity into account. When we dream that we are in broad daylight and then wake up to suddenly see the true day itself, we notice the difference between the idea presented by the true object and the one presented by an accidental movement of the organs. If we play chess with our eyes closed, we once more see the difference between the signs and the true object. The animal lacks the [third] way of bringing about its ideas. But since all its ideas are almost equally clear, it has equally strong passions, and thus — so to speak — a more generic character [*Nationalcharakter*] than man.

We will now pass over the proofs of the differences between the soul and the body, of matter, of its necessary beginning, of an eternal originator [*Urheber*] of [this beginning], etc. They appear in a very interesting way through their sequence and language, so that Mr. Hemsterhuis has been able to convey them as an interesting novelty. Because of its great importance, we need only add one idea: "[The soul] senses that it acts only by the idea of reaction. Without the reaction it would have no idea of its velleity."[19] One can see in advance how fruitful this principle must become for morality, and that man considered as an island, without society, is merely a mutilated being. In encountering the objections from page 17[20] onwards, we were particularly pleased that Mr. Hemsterhuis does not just deny eternity to animal souls, but that he also believes that any demand to prove our velleity is as absurd as [the demand] to prove our own existence. Moreover, he

[19] A quotation from *EE* 1.96.
[20] Corresponding to *EE* 1.97

rescues [this velleity] (p. 20[21]) very shrewdly from the materialists, showing how different it is from the nature of the mere force of a coil-spring.

As long as the soul receives its ideas through media and organs, it will never penetrate into the true essence of things. In the gravity of the attractive force, man discerns the *vis inertiae*, a constant action and counteraction, and from this he concludes that there are more principles of action in the world as effects. H[emsterhuis] calls that which makes a thing what it is the *vis inertiae*; and what causes it to be in a certain place, or in a certain relation [*Verhältniß*] with other things, he calls the attractive force. Then he shows that, at bottom, these two forces work in the same way, that they are not opposed to each other, and that, if there were nothing in the world to oppose them, everything would soon be brought back to unity. Even the homogeneous and heterogeneous parts that compose all matter, and their reciprocal interaction, would not hinder this final unity without the universal assumption—as with the planets—of a *vis centrifuga*, opposed to the *vi attractionis*. Hemsterhuis does not reveal his thoughts on the propagation of souls, but on p. 26[22] he cites a strange experience that deserves to be examined and further considered. Since man is therefore aware of this eternal strife between two opposed principles, he must draw the necessary conclusion that the world does not exist through itself, but through another.

Just as the eye and light give me ideas of visible things, so does the heart, and society or community with thinking beings—with active principles—give me ideas of active velleities, or show me the moral side of the world. But this medium differs from the others in that it shows me a side [of the universe] of which my soul, my I, is a part. Hence, my I itself becomes an object of contemplation; for this medium not only enables us, like the other ones, to sense the relation of things outside of us, but also the relation we have to these things—that is, the first idea of duty. Next, the author comes to signs for making oneself understood by others, and here, from p. 31[23] on, the most remarkable observations concerning gestures and their necessary effects [*Würkungen*] are made, from which he draws the conclusion (p. 35[24]) that man, by his very nature, must possess communicative signs or a determinate language; not [a language] whose words imitate what is signified by their tone, but whose words, as necessary results of the movement impressed on the voice-organ from the beginning, serve to express the idea. If man did not possess this moral medium, he would merely imitate effects [*Würkungen*],

[21] Corresponding to *EE* 1.98.
[22] Corresponding to *EE* 1.102.
[23] Corresponding to *EE* 1.105.
[24] Corresponding to *EE* 1.108.

and [do] neither good nor evil. Good and evil are not opposed to each other; rather, the [current] modification of society and our actions with regard to it have placed us precisely in the middle between what we call good and evil. If one were to object that, in the case of duties and desires, this passive reception of ideas through a medium cannot occur, Hemsterhuis replies that this is precisely the case with pangs of conscience, where the I becomes an object of consideration. The [imperfect] irritability [*Reizbarkeit*] of the moral organ or its perfection thus determines the entire worth of men and their actions and duties. "The perfection of the moral organ differs in all individuals; and therefore any *two individuals* have in fact *different duties* to fulfil, not by way of relation to the artificial and mechanical laws of society, but by way of relation to natural laws and to the eternal order which derives from the coexistence of things. There are men whose moral organ is so sensitive, or whose conscience senses such distant relations, that, so to speak, they cannot be members of current society."[25]

Next follows the bright side of [Hemsterhuis's] construction, and, from this viewpoint, one discovers the most wonderful views of religion, law, and language, which we leave for our readers to enjoy for themselves. It is enough for us to have accompanied [this philosophy] through its obscure courtyard and the temple's wonderful colonnades. Here, too, the Christian religion loses nothing before the philosopher's calm, unwavering gaze, but rises above all [other] competitors [*Gespielte*] which have covered the earth before and alongside it. One should read pp. 49-55.[26] Permit us to place one more passage before our readers—at the very least, its tone shows how much the author cares for the truth. "There is nothing in the world more respectable than theologians and philosophers, such as they still exist in our day. But, on the one hand, [there are] the so-called Orthodox, whose stiffness, stubbornness, stupidity, lack of intelligence and outrageous ambition lead them to claim that all men should think and understand like they do, and who do not reflect on the fact that, *if there were any proof against the Christian religion, the strongest, no doubt, would be that the word of God is in need of their interpretation*."[27] And then [there are] the equally scabious clique of so-called philosophers who "have silenced their moral organ for a while […] who want to convert all men so that none could make them glimpse an all-present God whom they dread etc."[28]

[25] A quotation from *EE* 1.111-12; Schrautenbach's italics.
[26] Corresponding to *EE* 1.116-20.
[27] A quotation from *EE* 1.120; Schrautenbach's italics.
[28] A quotation from *EE* 1.120.