

Salomon van Til (1643–1713) *His Appropriation of Cartesian Tenets in His Compendium of Natural Theology*

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Abstract

In recent decades theologians and intellectual historians have given considerable attention to the dissemination of Cartesianism in the seventeenth century Dutch Republic. Scholars have focused primarily on the initial reception of Descartes's ideas, the early reactions from his major critics and the more radical expressions of Cartesianism later on. Only in recent years have scholars begun to realize the considerable impact that moderate second-generation Cartesian theologians exerted on the intellectual climate in the Netherlands of the eighteenth century. Salomon van Til (1643–1713) ranks high among these thinkers. Yet despite his international reputation at that time, Van Til has been almost completely neglected in current research. This article analyzes Van Til's appropriation of Cartesian tenets within his *Compendium of Natural Theology* (1704). Paying close attention to his intellectual context, it argues that the substantial usage of central elements of the Cartesian outlook, clearly manifested both in the method and in the content of the *Compendium*, should be interpreted in light of Van Til's apologetic goal: to defend the Christian faith against the perceived onslaught of unbelief.

Keywords

Reformed Orthodoxy – Early Enlightenment – Cartesianism – Cocceianism

* This article is dedicated to the memory of my friendly advisor Willem van Asselt (1946–2014). I thank Andreas Beck for helpful comments on earlier drafts of this article.

1 Introduction

Cartesian philosophy's ascendancy in Dutch universities during the seventeenth century is an important development in intellectual history. The new ideas of René Descartes (1596–1650) were well-received among mathematicians, philosophers, and prestigious members of theological faculties, despite fierce opposition from the adherents of traditional scholasticism. Moreover, “the Cartesian revolution” in the Netherlands significantly impacted intellectual developments far beyond the borders of the United Provinces, because universities like Leiden and Utrecht were flourishing at the time by attracting many students from all over Europe.¹

C. Louise Thijssen-Schoute (1904–1961) rendered outstanding service to the exploration of Dutch Cartesianism as the primary contributor in the past century with her seminal work on this movement. Yet, despite her efforts and the labors of those following in her footsteps, “this terrain still [lay] idle for the most part”² in 1989, when Theo Verbeek issued an updated edition of *Nederlands Cartesianisme*. Since then, scholars have carried out important research on the early reception and rejection of Cartesian thought, along with later related developments.³

However, there remains a glaring gap in the scholarship, specifically when it comes to later Cartesian theology that exerted a considerable influence towards the end of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth century.⁴ The present article seeks to help fill this gap by focusing on the appropriation of

1 See Paul Hazard, *The European Mind 1680–1715* (Harmondsworth, 1964), pp. 157–158.

2 C. Louise Thijssen-Schoute, *Nederlands Cartesianisme*, ed. Theo Verbeek (Utrecht, 1989), p. xi.

3 See e.g. Theo Verbeek, *Descartes and the Dutch: Early Reactions to Cartesian Philosophy, 1637–1650* (Carbondale, IL, 1992); J.A. van Ruler, *The Crisis of Causality: Voetius on God, Nature and Change* (Leiden, 1995); Aza Goudriaan, *Philosophische Gotteserkenntnis bei Suárez und Descartes im Zusammenhang mit der niederländischen reformierten Theologie und Philosophie des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Leiden, 1999); Jacobus Revius, *A Theological Examination of Cartesian Philosophy: Early Criticisms (1647)*, ed. Aza Goudriaan (Leiden, 2002); Aza Goudriaan, *Reformed Orthodoxy and Philosophy, 1625–1750: Gisbertus Voetius, Petrus van Mastricht, and Anthonius Driessen* (Leiden, 2006); Andreas J. Beck, *Gisbertus Voetius (1589–1676): Sein Theologieverständnis und seine Gotteslehre* (Göttingen, 2007); J. Martin Bac, *Perfect Will Theology. Divine Agency in Reformed Scholasticism as against Suárez, Episcopius, Descartes and Spinoza* (Leiden, 2010).

4 In this regard, Ernestine van der Wall's observation dating from 1994 is still valid. See E.G.E. van der Wall, 'De coccejaanse theoloog Petrus Allinga en het cartesianisme,' in *Een richtingenstrijd in de Gereformeerde Kerk: voetianen en coccejanen 1650–1750*, ed. E.G.E. van der Wall and F.G.M. Broeyer (Zoetermeer, 1994), pp. 131–145, there 131.

Cartesian tenets in the *Compendium of Natural Theology* written by the Dutch theologian Salomon van Til (1643–1713). Despite his fame in his own time Van Til has been almost completely neglected in scholarly literature on the subject. For this reason, we will start by sketching his life and intellectual context (part 2), then go on with some introductory remarks concerning his *Compendium* and its contribution to the discipline of natural theology (part 3). This then will form the background for our main investigation into the *Compendium* itself (part 4) and our final summary and conclusions (part 5).

2 Van Til's Life and Thought in Context⁵

Born in 1643, Salomon van Til studied philosophy, literature, oriental languages, and theology at the Universities of Utrecht and Leiden. There such prestigious professors as Gisbertus Voetius (1589–1676), Franciscus Burman (1628–1679), and Abraham Heidanus (1597–1678) were among his teachers. Principally it was the mature Johannes Cocceius (1603–1669), however, who exerted the most profound influence on the young student.

2.1 *The Conflict between Cocceians and Voetians*⁶

At the tender age of 23 Van Til received his first call to serve as a pastor of a small community in the very north of Holland. In 1672, however, the restoration of the stadtholdership dramatically changed the ecclesio-political situation in Holland and suddenly shattered Van Til's quiet life. Until then, the so-called *States party*—a faction within the governmental structures of the Dutch Republic that steered a more liberal course with respect to the toleration of those accused of heterodoxy—had protected the followers of Cocceius. Now, given the appointment of William III to the stadholderate, the *Orangist party*, with its concern for orthodoxy as defined by Voetius and his followers, seemed to have the upper hand again.⁷ In the years following, hostile Voetians published numerous pamphlets seeking to uncover and refute the allegedly unorthodox innovations in the theological outlook of the

5 On Van Til's life in general see the most recent account in Elsina Groenenboom-Draai, ed., *Oog om oog: De karaktermoord van Jan van Hoogstraten op de Dordtse coccejaanse predikant-theoloog Salomon van Til* (Zoeterwoude, 2013), pp. 91–156.

6 For an overview on this conflict see the collection of essays in the book mentioned in footnote 4.

7 On the political and social upheavals of the year 1672 see Jonathan Israel, *The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall 1477–1806* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 796–806.

Cocceians. The followers of Cocceius defended themselves by accusing their opponents of excessive contentiousness.

Van Til's own contribution to this debate appeared in 1678 under the title *Salem's Peace: Maintained in Love, Faithfulness, and Truth*,⁸ which addressed most of the issues at stake. Cocceius's controversial hermeneutical stance on the relationship between the Old and the New Testament had entailed a sharper salvation-historical differentiation than most Voetians would allow. In *Salem's Peace*, Van Til stood firmly with Cocceius, defending him and his teachings from accusations of heterodoxy. From this standpoint, he called on the Voetians to acknowledge the non-essential character of their differences with the Cocceians.

2.2 *The Ongoing Controversy over Cartesianism*

Intimately related to the battle between the Voetians and Cocceians was the controversy surrounding the philosophy of René Descartes. This debate ran high in the early 1640s, when scholars in Dutch universities began to promote Cartesian ideas in academic circles. The controversy reached its first high point in the so-called *Utrecht Crisis* of 1641–1643. Later, it also caused tremendous upheavals in Leiden (1647–1648) and elsewhere.⁹

Adherents of the traditional *philosophia christiana*,¹⁰ like Voetius in Utrecht or Jacobus Revius (1586–1658) in Leiden, did not hide the fact that they perceived Cartesianism to be a subtle species of atheism. They contended that it did so insofar as its method of doubt did not even spare the question of the existence of God.¹¹ Moreover, they charged Descartes with epistemic hubris, criticizing his epistemology for aiming at an ideal of perfect knowledge that allegedly took insufficient account of creaturely finitude.¹² In addition to

8 Salomon van Til, *Salems vrede, in liefde, trouw, en waerheyd behartigt* (Amsterdam, 1678).

9 For an overview of the debate see Willem J. van Asselt, *The Federal Theology of Johannes Cocceius (1603–1669)*, trans. Raymond A. Blacketer (Leiden, 2001), pp. 86–93. See also Verbeek, *Descartes and the Dutch* (see above, n. 3), pp. 13–33 and Beck, *Gisbertus Voetius* (see above, n. 3), pp. 60–90 on the *Utrecht* and *Leiden Crises*, respectively.

10 On the nature of this eclectically modified Aristotelianism see: Richard A. Muller, 'Reformation, Orthodoxy, "Christian Aristotelianism" and the Electicism of Early Modern Philosophy,' *Nederlands Archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis/Dutch Review of Church History* 81 (2001), 306–325.

11 See Beck, *Gisbertus Voetius* (see above, n. 3), pp. 60–90.

12 See Theo Verbeek, 'From "Learned Ignorance" to Scepticism: Descartes and Calvinist Orthodoxy,' in *Scepticism and Irreligion in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. Richard H. Popkin and Arjo Vanderjagt (Leiden, 1993), pp. 31–45.

methodological concerns of this kind, scholars identified more properly theological reservations regarding Descartes's doctrine of God, creation, and man.¹³

Yet there were also a significant number of scholars in the Netherlands, both theologians and others, who from the beginning took a more favorable approach towards the “new philosophy” of Descartes. They considered it to be superior to the prevalent modified Aristotelianism of their day. Interestingly enough, Cartesian ideas enjoyed popularity especially among those, who had strong affinities with Cocceius's theological outlook. This led what in more recent scholarship received the designation *Cartesio-Cocceian alliance*.¹⁴

When Van Til started his theological education in the 1660s, the controversy over Cartesianism was still raging. It was becoming increasingly clear, however, that the Voetian attempt to push back the influence of Descartes was experiencing only limited success. “After 1660,” Paul Dibon notes, “the dissemination of Cartesianism in the United Provinces is to be regarded as a *fait accompli*.”¹⁵

In the face of rising Cartesianism, Voetians kept insisting on the harmful nature of the philosophical innovations. They soon found confirmation of their fears in an anonymous publication with the programmatic title *Philosophy as the Interpreter of Holy Scripture* (1666).¹⁶ The undisclosed author argued for the priority of reason when it came to interpreting the Bible as opposed to the Roman-catholic reliance on tradition or the Protestant principle of scripture as its own interpreter (*scriptura sui ipsius interpres*). Most Cartesians in the Netherlands, however, refused to give their allegiance to the later identified author of the controversial book, Lodewijk Meyer (1629–1681). Instead, they accused him of deviating from the genuinely Cartesian principle which separated philosophy and theology.

13 See e.g. Gisbertus Voetius, *Nader openinge van eenige stucken in de Cartesiaensche philosophie raeckende de H. Theologie* (Leiden, 1656); Van Ruler, *The Crisis of Causality* (see above, n. 3).

14 See Ernestine van der Wall, ‘Cartesianism and Cocceianism: a Natural Alliance?’ in *De l’Humanisme aux Lumières, Bayle et le protestantisme*, ed. Michelle Magdelaine et al. (Paris, 1996), pp. 445–455; Van Asselt, *Federal theology* (see above, n. 9), pp. 81–86. The still debated question about the nature of this alliance lies beyond the scope of the present investigation, but as far as Van Til is concerned, Van der Wall's suggestion seems plausible: Both Cartesianism and Cocceianism favor a clearer distinction between natural and revealed theology as opposed to the traditional scholastic approach.

15 Paul Dibon, ‘Der Cartesianismus in den Niederlanden,’ in *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie. Die Philosophie des 17. Jahrhunderts. Frankreich und Niederlande*, ed. Jean-Pierre Schobinger, 2 vols. (Basel, 1993), 1: 349–374, there 367 (The translation is my own).

16 [Lodewijk Meyer], *Philosophia S. Scripturae interpres* (Eleutheropolis [= Amsterdam], 1666).

2.3 *The Case against Spinoza and the Spinozists*

In view of Van Til's adoption of Cartesianism, the third major development in the history of thought of the seventeenth century to sketch out is the emergence and dissemination of Benedict de Spinoza's (1632–1677) philosophical convictions. Spinoza was the son of an Amsterdam merchant who had been excommunicated from the Jewish synagogue because of heterodoxy; he remained a social outcast for the rest of his life, as he never gained a foothold in the academic world of his time. Instead, his philosophical works fell victim to the censorship of authorities, who regarded his ideas to be both heretical and subversive in nature.¹⁷

Unlike Cartesianism, Spinozism was rejected by Cocceians and Voetians alike (as well by Remonstrants and Socinians) for several reasons: its metaphysical identification of the divine with the world (*deus sive natura*), its denial of miracles as an implication of his necessitarian world-view, and its rationalist approach to the Bible that stripped Scripture of its divine authority in all matters beyond practical piety.¹⁸

As a biblical scholar in the tradition of Cocceius, Van Til was especially concerned about how Spinoza in his *Theological-Political Treatise* (anonymously published in 1670) undermined the traditional understanding regarding the divine nature of the Bible in general and the Pentateuch in particular. Accordingly, Van Til went to great pains to defend the Mosaic books against this “attacker of the faith,” publishing no less than three books to this effect in the 1690s.¹⁹ While writing these apologetic texts, he likely drew upon earlier work he had done as a member of a “joint commission of inquiry established in 1678 by the university and the magistrate of Leiden that was to prepare or review the condemnation of Spinoza's works.”²⁰

17 See Jonathan Israel, ‘The Banning of Spinoza's Works in the Dutch Republic (1670–1678),’ in *Disguised and overt Spinozism around 1700*, ed. Wiep van Bunge and Wim Klever (Leiden, 1996), pp. 3–14.

18 See Wiep van Bunge, *From Stevin to Spinoza: An Essay on Philosophy in the Seventeenth-Century Dutch Republic* (Leiden, 2001), pp. 108–122; Theo Verbeek, ‘Wittich's Critique of Spinoza,’ in *Receptions of Descartes: Cartesianism and Anti-Cartesianism in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Tad M. Schmaltz (London, 2005), pp. 113–127.

19 *Het voor-hofder heydenen* (Dordrecht, 1694); *Vervolg op't voor-hofder heydenen* (Dordrecht, 1696); *Eerste weerelds op- en onder-gang* (Dordrecht, 1698).

20 Carl Gebhardt and Manfred Walter, eds., *Baruch de Spinoza: Lebensbeschreibungen und Dokumente* (Hamburg, 1998), p. 284 (The translation is my own).

3 Van Til's *Compendium of Natural Theology*

Published in 1704, the *Compendium of Natural Theology*²¹ belongs to Van Til's mature work dated towards the end of his life, when he held a chair in theology at Leiden University (1702–1713). Although it can legitimately be described as a coherent entity, the *CTN* never appeared as an independent publication. It was always published in combination with a *Compendium of Revealed Theology*²² forming together the *Compendium of both Natural and Revealed Theology (TuC)*.²³

This twofold compendium was well received. In the year 1734 the fourth Latin edition of the *TuC* was released, while still during Van Til's lifetime, i.e. in 1712, a Dutch translation was obtainable from Van Til's former publisher in Dordrecht.²⁴ This undoubtedly increased the popularity of the work among non-academics.

According to the note on its title page, the *TuC* was originally written for a narrower audience, namely for the students, who attended Van Til's private classes, or *collegia privata*. Yet in his dedication to the Leiden city council members, he notes, that two years after his appointment to the professorship, he deemed it proper to give an open account of his teaching endeavors, to demonstrate his own orthodoxy and his zeal to put to silence all "Atheists, Spinozists, and Libertines," who "seek to corrupt inborn notions." In light of the ongoing debates within the academic world outlined earlier, this objective comes as no surprise.²⁵

Accordingly, he immediately set out to give an explanation and justification for the peculiar twofold structure of his handbook with its strict separation of natural and revealed theology. This feature will be discussed further below together with its philosophical underpinnings. Here it shall suffice to note that the often remarked novelty of the *TuC* lies not so much in the separate

21 *Compendium Theologiae Naturalis* (henceforth: *CTN*).

22 *Compendium Theologiae Revelatae* (henceforth: *CTR*). Unlike the *CTN*, the *CTR* was published independently by a Swiss student of Van Til's in Bern one year before the bipartite *TuC* rolled from the presses in Leiden: *Υποτύπωσις τῶν ὑγαινόνητων λόγων sive Compendium Theologiae* (Bern, 1703; repr. Frankfurt & Leipzig, 1726).

23 *Theologiae utriusque Compendium cum Naturalis tum Revelatae* (henceforth: *TuC*). In the present article, the third edition (Leiden, 1719) of the *TuC* will be used. All English translations are mine.

24 Salomon van Til, *Kortbondig vertoog der beyder Godgeleerdheyd zoo der aangeboorene als der geopenbaarde* (Dordrecht, 1712).

25 See the *Dedicatio* at the beginning of the *TuC*.

treatment of both kinds of theology *per se*,²⁶ but rather in its plain juxtaposition of the two. This is what made the question of their mutual relationship as well as their differentiation so pressing.

Various independent treatises dealing with (aspects of) natural theology from different philosophical perspectives had already made their debut on the academic stage in the seventeenth century.²⁷ Consequently, when Van Til introduced his *CTN* in 1704, he could appeal to a scholarly consensus that acknowledged the basic legitimacy and usefulness of his enterprise.²⁸ Yet Van Til's compendium was more than merely another contribution to a growing body of works on natural theology. It was special in that it sought to assemble all the relevant knowledge of the field into a concise, systematic treatise whose structure resembled the outline of a dogmatics handbook to a considerable extent. Henceforth, natural theology could be treated as a well-defined body of truth, distinct both from metaphysical principles on one side and revealed theology on the other.

Only a few years after the *TuC* saw the light of the day, the Franeker professor Ruard Andala (1665–1727) published his own handbook on natural theology (1711) explicitly mentioning his indebtedness to Van Til's work in the preface.²⁹ Indeed, the parallels to the *TuC* can hardly be overlooked. Andala clearly follows the same overall outline, builds on Cartesian principles, and comes to similar conclusions. Even after the philosophical climate had changed dramatically in favor of Newtonian and Lockean empiricism towards the second half of the eighteenth century, Van Til's contribution (along with that of other

26 A.J. van der Aa, *Biographisch woordenboek der Nederlanden*, 21 vols., ed. G.D.J. Schotel and K.J.R. van Harderwijk (Haarlem, 1852–1878), 18: 131; Van der Wall, 'Cartesianism and Cocceianism' (see above, n. 14), 452.

27 See Ferdinand Sassen, *Johan Lulofs (1711–1768) en de reformatorische verlichting in de Nederlanden* (Amsterdam, 1965), pp. 9–13.

28 "Hujus pertractationem modestam non esse plane omittendam nemo Reformatus inficias ibit; qui eam dari contra Socinum defendit, aut qui τὸ γνωστόν τοῦ θεοῦ à Deo naturaliter manifestatum, et legem Dei eodem auctore etiam gentium cordibus inscriptam fuisse ex Paulo didicit." See the 'Praefatio ad lectorem' of the *CTN*. On the various ways of appropriating natural theology in the Reformed tradition see: Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids, 2003), 1: 270–310.

29 See the *Praefatio ad lectorem* in Ruardus Andala, *Syntagma Theologico-Physico-Metaphysicum* (Franeker, 1711). Andala's *Compendium Theologiae Naturalis* was republished in 1724 in Berlin, where it was used in the Gymnasium Regium Joachimicum.

Cartesians) was still remembered as foundational for the emergence of the discipline of natural theology.³⁰

4 The Reception of Cartesian Ideas in the *CTN*

4.1 *The Relationship of Theology and Philosophy*

Discussions concerning the proper relationship of theology to philosophy have accompanied the Christian church ever since the times of the Apostles.³¹ But of the various solutions that had been proposed over time, one model prevailed in the scholastic discourse. Both before and after the Reformation philosophy was subordinated to theology like a handmaiden to her mistress (*philosophia ancilla theologiae*). In the seventeenth century Descartes challenged this consensus when in his *Discours de la méthode* of 1637, he hinted at a sharp distinction of the disciplines, allocating to each its own (limited) sphere. Theology, according to him, was concerned with “revealed truths” which “are beyond our understanding” and therefore cannot be subject to reason. By contrast, philosophy and the other sciences needed to be built on a purely rational basis.³²

In accord with their teacher, Dutch Cartesians³³ advocated and defended the fundamental separation of philosophy and theology in the face of their Voetian critics.³⁴ This certainly holds true also for Van Til, who applied this Cartesian principle in the *TuC* by strictly separating natural theology (as a certain segment of philosophy) from revealed theology (theology in its proper sense). In the dedication he explains: “I stated it [i.e. Natural Theology] *separately* from *Revealed Theology*, because I am of the opinion that it is to be treated separately, having an aversion for any intermingling of the two. Indeed the intermingling

30 See f.i. Johannes Lulofs, *Primaе lineae Theologiae Naturalis theoreticae* (Leiden, 1756), p. 8.

31 See Jan Rohls, *Philosophie und Theologie in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Tübingen, 2002).

32 *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, eds. John Cottingham et al., 3 vols. (Cambridge, 1984–1991), 1: 114 (hereafter cited as *CSM*).

33 See f.i. Abrahamus Heidanus, *Consideratien over eenige saecken onlanghs voorgevallen in de universiteyt binnen Leyden*, 2nd ed. (Leiden, 1676), pp. 17–18. Not all followers of Descartes adhered to this principle of separation, which is evident from the controversies concerning the doctrine of the Eucharist in seventeenth century France. See Tad M. Schmaltz, *Radical Cartesianism: The French Reception of Descartes* (Cambridge, 2000). In the Dutch Republic, however, it even received official support by a decree issued in 1656 by the States of Holland and West Friesland, to which Van Til refers in his *Dedicatio* to his *CTN*.

34 See f.i. Petrus van Mastricht, *Novitatum cartesianarum gangraena* (Amsterdam, 1677), pp. 34–49.

of the two has, inasmuch as it causes confusion, displeased the wiser thinkers who notice that both rest on their own principles sufficient for themselves, and that the knowledge taught by Natural Theology differs to such an extent from the faith, which Scripture engenders in its hearers, so that they will not stay together in the same place.”³⁵

As he comments further on, he directs this argument explicitly against “scholastic theology” (*Theologia Scholastica*). According to Van Til scholastic theology is guilty of intermingling natural and revealed theology thereby exalting its philosophy as the interpreter of Scripture. This assertion is, of course, highly reminiscent of the debate surrounding the controversial book by Meijer mentioned earlier. Here Van Til turns the tables. He implicitly charges his Voetian critics who adhered to the scholastic approach with the very same evil they used to point out in their Cartesian adversaries. There is only one way, Van Til argues, to escape this corrupting influence of erroneous philosophy—be it scholastic or other—that is, to follow the genuine Cartesian approach of separating it altogether from (revealed) theology.³⁶

The positive foundation of Van Til’s approach of separating natural and revealed theology or philosophy and theology is his conviction that each of them has its own self-sufficient principle of knowledge. Whereas the latter is based solely on biblical revelation, the former exclusively draws on the light of reason (*lumen rationis*).³⁷ Yet, although the source of truth is twofold, truth itself is one.³⁸ Because God, who cannot contradict himself, is the author of reason as well as Scripture, they cannot but be in harmony with one another.³⁹

35 *TuC* (see above, n. 23), *Dedicatio* (unpaginated, italics follow the Latin original).

36 *Ibid.* This assertion might not only be leveled at his scholastic opponents, but also against Spinoza and his followers, who likewise did not share the Cartesian principle of separation. In fact, Spinoza’s ideas regarding the relationship of theology and philosophy can be interpreted as a conscious repudiation of it. See Alexander Douglas, ‘Spinoza and the Dutch Cartesians on Philosophy and Theology,’ *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 51 (2013), 567–588.

37 *TuC* (see above, n. 23), *CTN*, p. 8.

38 In accord with the majority of Protestant scholastics, Van Til rejected the medieval concept of “double truth” that was advocated in the sixteenth century by the Lutheran Daniel Hofmann (1538–1611). See Richard A. Muller, ‘duplex veritas,’ in *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology* (Grand Rapids, 1985), pp. 97–98; *idem*, *After Calvin: Studies in the Development of a Theological Tradition* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 122–135 and cf. *TuC* (see above, n. 23), *CTR*, p. 3.

39 See the *Dedicatio* to the *TuC* (see above, n. 23).

Accordingly, in his earlier work *Vervolg op't voor-hof* (1696) Van Til had used the image of a singing performance, wherein two voices join together in perfect harmony.⁴⁰

In light of these observations, we are now able to address why Van Til chose for the first time to publish his two compendia (*CTN*, *CTR*) in one volume (*TuC*). The reason is clearly apologetic in nature. By placing his treatment of natural theology side by side with his work on revealed theology, he sought to demonstrate by way of example that the Cartesian approach of separating philosophy from theology does not produce a state of competition ultimately detrimental to theology (as claimed by the Voetians). Rather, according to Van Til, it would help people to see clearly the fundamental agreement between reason and Scripture. This would facilitate a willing adoption of the biblical doctrines as held by the Reformed church.⁴¹ It is this strong apologetic intent that is unique to Van Til's appropriation of the established Cartesian emphasis of separating the two realms of theology and philosophy in the *TuC*.

From what has been stated thus far, one might conclude that Van Til's endorsement of a clear separation of theology and philosophy implies the utter independence and equality of both sciences. This is, however, not the case as his discussion of possible disharmonies among them (to use the given metaphor) shows.⁴² In debates among philosophers, Van Til holds, the oracle of God (*oraculum Dei*), that is, God's revelation in Scripture, is to be taken into account in order to solve the issue.⁴³ This regulative role of theology with regard to philosophy derives from the fact that the doctrines of the latter are not equal in perspicuity (*evidentia*) to those of the former.⁴⁴ Moreover, theology is superior in that it closely observes things that reason would not or could not take into consideration because of its inherent limitations. Accordingly, Van Til emphasizes the insufficiency of natural theology when it comes to eternal salvation.⁴⁵

To sum up our findings so far: Van Til follows the Cartesian impulse of separating theology and philosophy while insisting that theology owns the role of the final arbiter in cases of conflict. In both of these points he follows closely

40 Van Til, *Vervolg* (see above, n. 19), pp. 9–10.

41 See *ibid.*, p. 9 and cf. *ibid.*, pp. 21–22.

42 See *ibid.*, p. 8.

43 In the Dedication to the *TuC* (see above, n. 23) Van Til remarks that “inter disceptantes philosophos oraculum Dei ad causae definitionem intercedere putandum est.”

44 See *ibid.* and cf. *TuC* (see above, n. 23), *CTR*, pp. 21–23.

45 See *TuC* (see above, n. 23), *CTR*, pp. 3–5.

his teacher Heidanus.⁴⁶ Yet there are differences. Heidanus in his dogmatic handbook still struggles to find a proper way to deal with the so-called “mixed doctrines” (i.e. those doctrines, that are both known by reason and believed by faith such as the attributes of God).⁴⁷ But Van Til in his *TuC* carries through the principle of separation by dividing it into two treatises, on natural and revealed theology, respectively, underscoring the apologetic gain of his approach.

Next, we need to address the question as to the extent and the way in which revealed theology presupposes the results of natural theology according to Van Til. This issue has received some attention in the scholarly literature of the past. There one finds the assertion⁴⁸ that Van Til’s view on the relationship between natural and revealed theology was a precursor to the Wolffian approach which posited that “natural theology could be viewed as the basic theology upon which a system could be built and to which certain revealed but rationally explicable data could be added.”⁴⁹ As we shall presently see, this claim is basically correct, though it needs some qualification lest Van Til’s emphasis on the separation of natural and revealed theology fails to receive its proper due.

At the beginning of the first part of the *CTR* that deals with the scriptural doctrine of God, Van Til lists four notions that are presupposed by revealed theology and consist of nothing less than a nutshell summary of his natural theology. Scripture, according to Van Til, addresses itself to those who have already learned from reason, 1. that God on whom everything depends, really exists; 2. that body and soul are distinct; 3. that they are subject to the law of God with its threats and promises; 4. that they are guilty and therefore need to seek reconciliation with God.⁵⁰

Given this clear affirmation that revealed theology presupposes the main tenets of natural theology, it would be easy to characterize Van Til’s approach as perfectly in line with the definition of the Wolffian system given above. Yet it needs to be noted that Van Til refuses to adopt a thoroughly rationalistic outlook. This is evident from the fact that he does—in accordance with his principle of separating theology and philosophy—not leave it to unaided

46 See Aza Goudriaan, ‘Die Rezeption des cartesianischen Gottesgedankens bei Abraham Heidanus,’ *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 38 (1996), 166–168.

47 See Abraham Heidanus, *Corpus Theologiae Christianae* (Leiden, 1686), p. 266.

48 See J.I. Doedes, *Inleiding tot de leer van God* (Utrecht, 1870), pp. 211–212; Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 14 vols. (London-New York, 1936–1977), 1/2: 288–289; Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics* (see above, n. 28), 1: 306.

49 Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics* (see above, n. 28), 1: 306.

50 See *TuC* (see above, n. 23), *CTR*, p. 24.

reason to establish the authority of Scripture. He points instead to the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit.⁵¹ What is more, he does not draw on natural theology in order to establish, support, or defend doctrines that properly belong to revealed theology, though at times he compares the testimony of Scripture with the light of nature.⁵²

Hence we conclude this section by remarking that Van Til's view on the relationship of theology and philosophy is complex. What can be stated with confidence, however, is that the Cartesian principle of separating both disciplines had a significant impact on his outlook as it works itself out in the *TuC*.

4.2 *Clear & Distinct Perception and the Role of the Conscience*

In Van Til's natural theology reason is the sole principle of knowledge (to the exclusion of both Scripture and philosophical tradition).⁵³ Yet as the term 'reason' (*ratio*) is ambiguous, Van Til spends some time clarifying what he means by this expression. Reason, he holds, can be understood either subjectively or objectively. In the former sense (*ratio subjectiva*), it describes the human faculty of reasoning that is subject to error whenever it transgresses its proper bounds. Objectively understood, however, reason (*ratio objectiva*) denotes "that complex of notions, ideas and axioms, which is equally impressed on and implanted in the souls of all men."⁵⁴ Only in this latter sense is 'reason' the infallible norm of natural theology containing immutable and eternal truths.

Thus far we encounter in Van Til the typical rationalist notion of innate ideas that marks his indebtedness to Descartes and to the Cartesian movement in the area of epistemology. Unlike Voetius and his followers,⁵⁵ Van Til in his natural theology does not allow for notions that are acquired by the senses, in some way or another. For him, natural light and objective reason are thoroughly identical.

Having established the distinction of objective and subjective reason, Van Til goes on to characterize the relationship between the two as comparable to that between a normative law and a judge. Hence subjective reason is to seek clear perception of the ideas present in objective reason, compare them with one

51 See *ibid.*, p. 13 and cf. *ibid.*, *CTN*, p. 156. On the scholarly debate concerning this very issue at the end of the seventeenth century see Jacob van Sluis, *Herman Alexander Röell* (Leeuwarden, 1988), pp. 59–79.

52 See e.g. Van Til's discussions of the attributes of God in *TuC* (see above, n. 23), *CTR*, pp. 30–43.

53 See his definition of natural theology in *TuC* (see above, n. 23), *CTN*, p. 2 and cf. the polemical remark against the *philosophia traditiva* in the preface to the *CTN*.

54 *Ibid.*, p. 8.

55 See Goudriaan, *Reformed Orthodoxy* (see above, n. 3), pp. 74–83.

another, and draw proper conclusions from them. All this is done ultimately to be able to judge whether something is true or false, right or wrong.⁵⁶ What is striking in this analysis is the moral orientation in Van Til's rationalist epistemology. Objective reason not only contains basic metaphysical notions, but also involves infallible ethical principles. Obviously Van Til belonged to those Dutch Cartesians⁵⁷ who combined Descartes's quest for indubitable truth with their concern for upholding a universal moral standard (natural law). He therefore emphasized the role of the conscience (*conscientia*) as a God-given power (*facultas*) constitutive of every human soul. "By the conscience," Van Til argues, "the mind is intimately conscious of all its actions and affections and it also contains the norm of right and wrong in such a way, that it calms the mind that acts well while tormenting the one that transgresses the law."⁵⁸ In the latter function, the conscience serves as nothing less than the representative of God in the human mind, providing the mind not only with the principles of divine moral law but also with infallible moral judgments.⁵⁹

Consequently, conscience plays a prominent role in Van Til's explanation of how an individual can achieve certain knowledge. In this context he also introduces his adaptation of the Cartesian criterion of truth: "All foundation of certainty is founded in the fact that the mind only passes a judgment on things clearly and distinctly perceived and does not admit anything that is contrary to the light of reason. For we are created in such a way, that none of us can withhold assent from clear and distinct perceptions, when this is made known to the mind through the inner consciousness (*conscientia*)."⁶⁰ According to Van Til, everyone could attain to certain knowledge in the area of natural theology if only he used his reason rightly and suspended his judgment until he attained to clear and distinct perception of a thing in his inner consciousness resulting necessarily in his rightful assent and hence in a calmed conscience.

56 See *TuC* (see above, n. 23), *CTN*, p. 2.

57 Other examples are Herman Alexander Röell and Anthonius Driessen. See Van Sluis, *Herman Alexander Röell* (see above, n. 51), pp. 49–51 and Goudriaan, *Reformed Orthodoxy* (see above, n. 3), pp. 277–282, respectively.

58 *TuC* (see above, n. 23), *CTN*, p. 9.

59 *Ibid.*, *CTN*, p. 67. Van Til seems to have abandoned the scholastic distinction between *synderesis* (conscience as moral norm) and *conscientia* (the act of judging based on *synderesis*) that figured prominently not only in the Middle Ages, but also in the discussions of the first half of the seventeenth century (Perkins, Ames, Voetius). Yet he clearly draws on these earlier discussions, when developing his comparatively broad concept of the conscience in line with his Cartesian presuppositions. Cf. Goudriaan, *Reformed Orthodoxy* (see above, n. 3), pp. 270–282.

60 *TuC* (see above, n. 23), *CTN*, p. 9.

In light of this rather optimistic view of the capabilities of unaided human reason it comes as no surprise that Van Til had to face the opposition of those who charged the Cartesians with not taking seriously the biblical and confessional doctrine of the depravity of fallen humankind. In order to defend himself and his approach, Van Til pointed to the fact that no serious theologian has ever denied that man even in his fallen state retains basic rational capabilities. Thus the fall, according to him, did not affect man's ability to receive clear and distinct perceptions, to pass right judgments or to draw legitimate conclusions. Rather, the noetic effects of sin consist in a certain "dullness of the soul and its aversion from investigating the truth."⁶¹ This statement in itself might not have satisfied his critics, but read in light of what Van Til remarks in his *CTR* concerning the corruption of the human mind, it comes closer to the Voetian position than expected. There he writes in the context of his discussion of possible conflicts between reason and Scripture that the fallen human mind "cannot sufficiently be liberated from its preconceived opinions except by the sanctifying Spirit."⁶²

4.3 *The Proofs for the Existence of God*

According to Van Til, the question of the existence of God and the arguments leading to its affirmation do not belong to natural theology as such. Rather, they are "truths borrowed from first science (*prima scientia*)," namely the principles of metaphysics.⁶³ Yet because of their fundamental nature, they are briefly recapitulated in the preliminary considerations (*Praeliminaria*) of the *CTN*.

In the *CTN*, beginning with the undoubtable fact of his own existence combined with the notion of his own imperfection and dependence gained from conscience, Van Til ascends to the postulation of the existence of God. He does this by way of arguing that his dependent existence must have been caused by a supreme power, i.e. the highest greatest being (*ens optimum maximum*).⁶⁴ God—as he adds further on—stands at the top of the chain of dependence, not depending on any cause outside of himself, and hence exists necessarily. To this causal argument he adds in a second step a classical expression of the ontological proof, according to which "the idea of the supreme being implies necessary existence."⁶⁵ The third proof he mentions basically consists in a summary of

61 Ibid., *CTN*, p. 10.

62 Ibid., *CTR*, p. 22.

63 See the title of chapter 3 in *ibid.*, *CTN*, p. 10: "De veritatibus ex primâ scientia transumptis."

64 See *ibid.*, *CTN*, p. 5.

65 Ibid.: "in ideâ entis supremi contineri necessariam existentiam."

the argument Descartes had set forth in his third meditation.⁶⁶ He implies that the idea of God present in the mind of man cannot have been caused except by God himself.

The subjective approach is evident from the outset in this list. In his endeavor to prove the existence of God, Van Til adopts the Cartesian starting point of the individual who is conscious of his own existence. Moreover, he even follows the narrative mode of Descartes's *Meditations* by writing in the first person singular. All three arguments brought forth are clearly *a priori* in nature, not presupposing any form of sense experience. This fact illustrates Van Til's allegiance to the Cartesian suspicion of sense perception and consequently of the traditional cosmological argument. Indeed, every one of the arguments presented here has its equivalent in Descartes's *Meditations*.⁶⁷ However, the highly controversial 'method of doubt' that figured so prominently in Descartes's treatise is not explicitly dealt with by Van Til (although it is clearly noticeable in the background).

Besides these more fundamental points, Van Til provides a second list of arguments that in his view presuppose advanced knowledge in the field of metaphysics. This second list thus provides some insight into how Cartesians like Van Til tried to build on the foundations laid by Descartes.

The first of these advanced arguments appears to be a particular Cartesian modification of the physico-theological argument: "When contemplating the physical world, the mind finds within itself the ideas of things that differ from one another in innumerable ways and are changed by a variety of movements. In this artifice and fabric the inexhaustible wisdom and skill, as well as the eternal power and goodness of the artist is admired."⁶⁸ Here Van Til at first seems to abandon the Cartesian suspicion with respect to sense perceptions. Yet he immediately adds that his argument does not necessarily require that these ideas are caused by physical objects outside of the mind. They could just as well be caused immediately by God. In any case, Van Til argues, such ideas could not be produced by the human mind itself and hence they must point to God as their Creator. Every theory about Van Til's intention in adding this argument must, in the nature of the case, remain speculation. But it seems likely that he sought a way to accommodate the scriptural teaching concerning

66 For a helpful analysis see Georges Dicker, *Descartes: An Analytical and Historical Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 2013), pp. 110–114.

67 See *CSM* (see above, n. 32), pp. 33–34 for the first argument, *ibid.*, pp. 46–47 for the second, and *ibid.*, p. 31 for the third.

68 *TuC* (see above, n. 23), *CTN*, p. 6.

a knowledge of God gained from creation within the Cartesian framework of his natural theology.

The second added argument for the existence of God is particularly interesting because it contains a clear affirmation of the Cartesian mind-body dualism on Van Til's part. Only the constant intervention of God, says Van Til, can explain the interaction between mind and body in human beings in light of the fact that "thought (*cogitatio*) has nothing in common with extension (*extensio*) and its movement and vice versa."⁶⁹ Making a virtue out of necessity, Van Til turns the occasionalistic solution to the mind-body problem into an argument for the existence of an omni-causal deity.⁷⁰

Finally, given what was asserted earlier about the significance of the conscience in the natural theology of Dutch Cartesians in general and Van Til in particular, it does not come as a surprise that he invokes the presence of the conscience in man as an argument for the existence of God. After all, the conscience is to be viewed as acting in God's stead, representing him "not only as highest ruler, but also as holy legislator and just judge of the world."⁷¹

Establishing the existence of God evidently looms large in Van Til's natural theology, but it was not an end in itself. After all, Van Til did not advocate a 'mere theism' or a common natural religion based on enlightened reason. Dissipating his opponents' doubts about God's existence was nothing more than the first step in an argument that was ultimately to persuade them of the truth of the orthodox Christian faith in line with the Reformed tradition as presented in the *CTR*. In nothing less lies the ultimate end of the apologetic endeavor undertaken in the *TuC* as a whole.⁷²

4.4 *Cartesian Elements in Van Til's Doctrine of the Attributes of God*

In this final section, we will very briefly point out how Van Til's Cartesianism works itself out in some parts of his treatment of God's nature and his attributes. In doing so, we will focus on three issues that gained some attention in the theologico-philosophical debates of the late seventeenth century, namely the aseity of God positively understood (*causa sui*), God's omnipresence (debate on

69 Ibid.

70 Here Van Til might have been influenced by the occasionalist thinker Arnold Geulincx (1624–1669), who taught in Leiden when Van Til studied there (1664–1666). In his preface to the *TuC*, Van Til explicitly recommends Geulincx's handbook on ethics.

71 Ibid., p. 7.

72 A similar approach was taken by Van Til's contemporary Petrus Allinga (†1692). See Van der Wall, 'De coccejaanse theoloog Petrus Allinga' (see above, n. 4), 134.

imaginary space) and the definition of God as thinking substance (*substantia cogitans*).⁷³

The first attribute of God discussed in the *CTN* is the independence or aseity (lat. *aseitas*) of God's essence (*essentia*). According to Van Til this must be understood in two ways. *Negatively* aseity means that God does not depend on a cause outside of himself. To this Van Til adds a *positive* meaning: "Moreover, we also remark that the deity is in an utmost positive sense its own cause of existence and perseverance."⁷⁴ This twofold definition of aseity, not uncommon among Dutch Cartesians,⁷⁵ is most likely an adaptation of Descartes's notion of God as self-caused (*causa sui*). This Descartes had stated and defended as an integral part of his endeavor to prove the existence of God.⁷⁶ Remarkably, Van Til does not take the trouble to address the severe criticisms leveled at the concept of *causa sui* and its incorporation into the doctrine of divine aseity by some notable Voetian scholars.⁷⁷

A second debate in which Van Til aligned himself with Descartes and many other Cartesians concerns the controversial scholastic notion of imaginary space (*spatia imaginaria*), which is rejected outright in the context of his discussion of God's omnipresence. This concept, developed by Spanish Jesuits in the sixteenth century but soon also adopted by leading Protestant scholastics,⁷⁸ sought to safeguard divine immensity by postulating that God's essential presence exceeds the spatial bounds of creation. Hence God must have been somewhere before the creation of the world and his presence must reach beyond its present limits.⁷⁹ According to Van Til, however, imaginary space is a mere

73 Further research in this area will have to include an investigation into the intricate question, whether and if so how Van Til's treatment of the relationship between divine will and intellect is indebted to Descartes's radical voluntarism. Cf. Bac, *Perfect Will Theology* (see above, n. 3), pp. 211–257, who diagnoses voluntaristic tendencies in Burman's doctrine of the *possibilia*. Van Til's remarks on this issue in the *TuC* are less clear, but seem to have some resemblances with his teacher's elaboration.

74 *Ibid.*, *CTN*, p. 16.

75 See f.i. Franciscus Burmannus, *Synopsis Theologiae*, editio ultima, 2 vols. (Amsterdam, 1699), 1:96.

76 See Robert C. Miner, 'The Dependence of Descartes' Ontological Proof upon the Doctrine of Causa sui,' *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia* 58 (2002), 873–886.

77 See, for example, Van Mastricht, *Novitatum cartesianarum gangraena* (see above, n. 34), pp. 276–284.

78 See Cees Leijenhorst, 'Jesuit concepts of *spatium imaginarium* and Thomas Hobbes's Doctrine of Space,' *Early Science and Medicine* 1 (1996), 355–380, there 355–358; Goudriaan, *Philosophische Gotteserkenntnis* (see above, n. 3), pp. 93–108.

79 On Voetius's endorsement of imaginary space see Beck, *Gisbertus Voetius* (see above, n. 3),

invention (“nil nisi figmentum”) that does not in the least help to underpin the doctrine of divine omnipresence.⁸⁰ Underlying this judgment is the specific Cartesian notion of *omnipraesentia Dei*. According to this concept the existence of every extended thing—and hence everything that is spatial—is causally dependent on the active presence of God’s power. In fact, the Cartesian identification of matter and space,⁸¹ which is expressed in this notion, renders absurd any talk about space either before the creation of the physical universe or outside the latter. After all, Van Til maintains, “God does not need space in order to exist.”⁸² This statement is best understood against the background of the Cartesian emphasis on the independence of *res cogitans* from *res extensa* (metaphysical dualism of mind-body).

The last remark leads us to Van Til’s definition of God’s being as a most perfect thinking substance (*substantia cogitans*). This assertion is derived from the very same dualistic premise stemming ultimately from Descartes. According to Van Til it is evident, “that we do not have an *idea of a substance* that is neither a *thinking* thing and hence intellectual nor an *extended* thing and hence corporeal.”⁸³ Yet since the former is more excellent than the latter, God as the most excellent substance must be a *thinking substance*. For Van Til this is tantamount to saying that God is a spirit, i.e. a being endowed with intellect and will.⁸⁴ Moreover, contrary to finite thinking substances (i.e. the human soul), God cannot be passive or idle, which would imply imperfection. Rather, he must be considered as pure actuality (*actus purus*) in whom “living is acting and acting is thinking.”⁸⁵ Here we note the utter lack of any engagement with Voetian critics like Petrus van Mastricht, who not only rejected the Cartesian premises but also the whole endeavor of positively defining God’s essence as beyond the reach of finite man’s intellectual abilities.⁸⁶ Van Til’s lack of polemics in this instance and overall is probably best accounted for by his concern for the peace of the church that seems to have accompanied him ever since he wrote *Salem’s Peace* in 1678.

pp. 255–258.

80 *TuC* (see above, n. 23), *CTN*, p. 30.

81 On the Cartesian identification of matter and space see Alexandre Koyré, *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe* (Baltimore, 1968), pp. 101–109.

82 *TuC* (see above, n. 23), *CTN*, p. 30.

83 *Ibid.*, *CTN*, p. 33.

84 *Ibid.*

85 *Ibid.*

86 See Van Mastricht, *Novitatum cartesianarum gangraena* (see above, n. 34), pp. 225–246.

5 Summary and Conclusions

The appropriation of Descartes's thought among second generation Cartesian theologians like Van Til is a complex phenomenon that cannot easily be accounted for. It can be done adequately only by placing these thinkers within their historical context with a view to ascertaining how their appropriation of Cartesian tenets served their theological endeavor as a whole.

In this article we have demonstrated a profound influence by Cartesian philosophy on Van Til's natural theology, which expressed itself from the very beginning in the fundamental separation of natural and revealed theology. When discussing this unique feature of the *TuC*, we already noted the explicit apologetic goal behind his plain coordination of both kinds of theology. Here we add that, in the light of Van Til's remarks in the foreword to the *TuC* and given his previous engagement with emergent 'Spinozism,' it might not go too far to interpret his extensive adoption of Cartesianism in its entirety as an apologetic move. Hence Van Til appropriated Descartes's proofs for the existence of God as well as the latter's rationalist epistemology because he was of the opinion that the rising unbelief and skepticism of his day could be fought back effectively with the weapons of the "new philosophy." For Van Til, this approach arguably left behind the scholastic baggage (such as the discussions surrounding the subtle concept of 'imaginary space') and drew exclusively on arguments based on objective reason that is common to all men. In making these observations, however, one should not forget that establishing a philosophically persuasive account of natural theology for Van Til was not an end in itself; rather it was a means to facilitate the reception of the corpus of doctrines presented in revealed theology, i.e. the full-orbed Christian faith as confessed by the Reformed church of his day.

Accordingly, beyond his far-reaching agreement in certain parts of the *CTN* with Descartes's *Meditationes*, we noticed Van Til's various attempts to modify and build on Cartesian tenets. These attempts included the important role given to the conscience, which provided Van Til's epistemology with an ethical dimension that leads beyond Descartes's *cogito*. Moreover, Van Til at times seemed to notice possible tensions between Cartesian notions and the biblical teaching expressed in his revealed theology. This tension caused him at times to put special emphasis on certain aspects (fallenness of human nature as "dullness of the soul"). On other occasions it led him to subjoin additional thoughts (physico-theological argument for the existence of God), or even to discard certain aspects altogether.

Unlike the publications of some of his more radical Cartesian contemporaries (f.i. Balthasar Bekker) Van Til's *Compendium* did not cause any notable

upheavals despite its manifest indebtedness to the “new philosophy.” Accordingly, it is hardly surprising that Van Til receives only marginal attention in the modern scholarship on the history of early Enlightenment thought that has focused mainly on the more controversial figures. Yet, as Wijnand Mijnhardt and Jonathan Israel recently pointed out, it was “the tolerant, and originally Cartesian, Cocceian ‘consensus theology,’ developed in the late seventeenth century by such theologians as Salomon van Til” that had a lasting impact on the theologico-philosophical developments of the eighteenth century. This is true not because it continued to dominate the academic discourse (Cartesianism soon had to make way for Newtonian natural philosophy), but because it inspired a new irenic climate in which the Cocceians could join forces with moderate Voetians in order to drive back the influence of radical thinkers (i.e. Spinoza and his followers) and facilitate societal reforms.⁸⁷ The present article has sought to put some flesh on the bones of this assertion. We have ventured to do so by sketching the ‘moderate Cartesianism’ in Van Til’s natural theology, while emphasizing the apologetic impulse (i.e. defending orthodox Christianity against skepticism, Spinozism etc.) behind this appropriation. The latter should not be neglected when considering the reasons for the considerable impact of certain Cartesian tenets in the Dutch Republic.

87 Jonathan Israel, *Enlightenment Contested. Philosophy, Modernity, and the Emancipation of Man 1670–1752* (Oxford, 2006), p. 384. Cf. Wijnand Mijnhardt, ‘The Construction of Silence: Religious and Political Radicalism in Dutch History,’ in *The Early Enlightenment in the Dutch Republic, 1650–1750*, ed. Wiep van Bunge (Leiden, 2003), pp. 231–262.