

Lemma gepubliceerd in: *Dictionary of Seventeenth and Eighteenth-Century Dutch Philosophers*, 2 delen. Geredigeerd door Wiep van Bunge, Henri Krop, Bart Leeuwenburgh, Han van Ruler, Paul Schuurman en Michiel Wielema, Bristol: Thoemmes Press 2003.

Elie LUZAC (1721-1796)

Rietje van Vliet

Elie Luzac junior was born on 19 October 1721 in the small coastal village Noordwijk, about ten miles away from Leiden, the city where he lived almost his whole life. He was the son of Elie Luzac senior and Anne-Marie Cabrolle. He married three times: first on 3 November 1750 with Ernestine Auguste Treu (from Altona) from whom he got in 1751 one daughter, Anne Marie Dorothee. Unfortunately his wife died in childbirth. After a short affair with Anne Danjée, daughter of one of his employees, from whom he got the bastard-son Elie Danjée, Elie junior married on 26 June 1763 Marie Massuet, daughter of the famous Amsterdam physician and publicist Pierre Massuet. In 1766 she gave birth to one child: Anne Luzac. Shortly afterwards Marie Massuet died. After being a widower for fourteen years Elie Luzac married on 2 April 1780 Geertruy in 't Hout, widow of the Leiden music teacher Johan Anthonie Carbrijn. She had already one daughter: Maria Geertruy in 't Hout. Elie Luzac died on 11 May 1796 and was buried in the former Vrouwenkerk in Leiden. Elie Luzac was a member of Leiden's Walloon Church.

The Huguenot refugee family Luzac brought forth several famous descendants. The uncle of Elie, Etienne Luzac (1706-1787), had since 1738 the direction of the *Gazette de Leyde*. This French-language international newspaper was printed by Elie's other uncle, publisher Jean Luzac (1702-1783). From 1772 the newspaper was edited by Elie's half-cousins Etienne Luzac (1754-1827) and the radical Jean Luzac (1747-1807). The latter was an important figure in Leiden city politics since the crises of 1785, when radical and moderate factions struggled for power. In the same year he became a professor of law at the Leiden University.

In 1739 Elie Luzac had been enrolled as a 'litterarum studiosus' at the Leiden university, where he would continue his studies for most of the 1740s. Later he described himself as primarily a 'student of philosophy'. He fully absorbed the Newtonian science as taught in Leiden by Johan Lulofs, successor of the famous professor Willem Jacob 's Gravensande. Luzac developed a close personal relationship with Lulofs and it was Lulofs by whom Luzac became acquainted with the work of the German philosopher Christian Wolff. On 6 September 1759 Luzac took up the trade of lawyer as a lawyer. He was involved in several cases, for instance on behalf of the private planters in Berbice (1774-1775), defending freedom of trade on the part of the Zeeland firm Charnock against the Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (1788-1792) and later on the part of the Amsterdam banking house Hope and Comp. (1793-1794).

Luzac was also a printer, publisher and bookseller. After an apprenticeship at his uncle Jean Luzac Elie Luzac started his own printing business in 1742. He got an international reputation among colleague-booksellers, publicists and scholars. One of his first editions was *l'Homme machine*, written by Julien Offray de la Mettrie (1747). Its contents appeared to be explosive, because of its supposed heterodox and spinozistic thoughts. Immediately afterwards the consistory of the Walloon Church ordered Luzac to deliver all copies of the book and to mention the name of the author. Luzac obeyed, but did not tell a thing about the author. Also the highest authorities of the Province of Holland, the Province Council tried to forbid the materialist tract and sent a missive with these contents to all the towns of the province. In the meantime Elie Luzac succeeded in helping La Mettrie to leave the country towards Berlin. He also wrote a short refutation of the work of La Mettrie: *l'Homme plus que*

machine (1748) but there are several reasons to doubt his opinions about the materialistic ideas of La Mettrie. After all Elie was involved in an at first criminal case, later civil suit against him. In the same time he wrote *Essai sur la liberté de produire ses sentimens* (1749).

Because of his reputation as a eminent bookseller Elie Luzac was invited by the Hannover government to open a printshop and publishing house in the young university city in Lower Saxony, Göttingen (1753). There he published among other titles the treatises of the Göttingen Academy of Sciences. However, within three years he became involved with an almost never ending legal controversy with his superiors, after which he left Göttingen for ever. In the meantime he published the scientific magazine *Bibliothèque impartiale* (1750-1758), with the Berlin publicist and perpetual secretary of the Berlin Academy of Sciences Jean Henri Samuel Formey as editor in chief, followed by the *Nederlandsche letter-courant* (1759-1763).

Luzac was a member of the international community of enlightened Huguenots. He was an enormously prolific author. Until his death he addressed almost every conceivable eighteenth century topic. As a conservative he was an Orangist political theorist of the final decades of the Dutch ancien régime as well as an antagonist of the power of aristocracy regents. In reaction of Jan Wagenaar's *Vaderlandsche historie* he wrote the pamphlets *Het gedrag der stadhoudersgezinden, verdedigt door Mr. A.v.K. rechtsgeleerden* (1754), *Het oordeel over den Heere Raadpensionaris Johan de Witt* (1757) en *De zugt van den Heere Raadpensionaris Johan de Witt* (1757). During the time the patriot movement emerged in the 1780s Luzac attempted to halt the – in his eyes – assault on civilisation by several polemical writings, such as the magazines *Reinier Vryaarts openhartige brieven* (1781-1784), *De vaderlandsche staatsbeschouwers* (1784-1788), and *Vaderlandsche brieven* (1784-1788). His ideas about the established order and his rejection of participation by the people in politics can be found in his *De voor- en nadeelen van den invloed des volks op de regeering* (1788-1789), and *Lettres sur les dangers de changer la constitution primitive d'un gouvernement public* (1792). Luzac wrote also comments on Montesquieu's *De l'esprit des loix* (1759).

One of the first reactions on the *Discours sur l'origine et les fondemens de l'inégalité parmi les hommes* (1755) and *Contrat social* (1762) by Jean Jacques Rousseau, was written by Elie Luzac. He thought Rousseau's ideas were no more than pure speculations. Luzac rejected his lack of ability to reason coherently and systematically. Also Rousseau's depiction of a largely instinctive human happiness in the pre-social state of nature and his defense of popular sovereignty were abhorrent to Luzac. In his *Lettre d'un anonime à monsieur J.J. Rousseau* (1766) and *Seconde lettre d'un anonime à Monsieur J.J. Rousseau* (1767) Luzac showed his totally disapproval of Rousseau's works.

Luzac's ideas about morality were inspired by the works of Grotius and his adaptors. With his annotated edition of Christian Wolff's *Institutions du droit de la nature et des gens* (1772) Luzac placed himself in the centre of the discussion about the merits of natural law. Critics immediately hailed this edition as a masterpiece. Luzac's continued effort was to result in the massive *Du droit naturel, civil, et politique* (1796).

His commitment with the Dutch state and society resulted that Luzac was interested in the Dutch wealth and economy. In his eyes Wagenaar in his history of the Dutch Republic had wrongly neglected elements as commerce and navigation. That is why Luzac wrote about the rise and decline of the Dutch commerce, *Hollandsch rijkdom* (1780-1783). His conclusion was that the economic problems in the Republic were dued to the bad relationship between polity and economy. He was convinced that the restoration of the Stadholderate was the only solution to renew the flourishing Dutch commerce.

The central concepts of Elie Luzac's ideas were reason, tolerance, moderation and harmony. He inhabited the world of moderate enlightenment, believed in intellectual freedom and was opposed to clerical intolerance and governmental repression. His systematic and strongly rationalist approach to knowledge came under fire in France. He interpreted the attacks on the

values of his moderate enlightenment as a revolutionary political offensive. The Dutch patriot movement at the end of the eighteenth century confirmed his suspicions. In his eyes the destruction of knowledge had been followed by a wholesale assault on civilisation. 🍏

BIBLIOGRAPHY

A nearly complete list of the works by Elie Luzac, can be found in Velema, W.R.E., *Enlightment and conservatism in the Dutch Republic. The political thought of Elie Luzac (1721-1796)* (Assen/Maastricht 1993).

Further reading

Bots, H. and J. Schillings (eds.), *Lettres d'Elie Luzac à Jean Henri Samuel Formey (1748-1770). Regard sur les coulisses de la librairie hollandaise du XVIIIe siècle.* (Paris 2001).

Kossmann, E.H., *Verlicht conservatisme: over Elie Luzac* (Groningen 1966).

Velema, W.R.E., 'The Rise and Fall of Morality. Elie Luzac on the History of the Science des Moeurs', in: *Theoretische geschiedenis* 14 (1987), pp. 143-156.

Velema, W.R.E., 'Homo Mercator in Holland. Elie Luzac en het achttiende-eeuwse debat over de koophandel', in: *Bijdragen en mededelingen betreffende de geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 100 (1985), pp. 427-444.

Velema, W.R.E., 'Elie Luzac. Een anti-patriots publicist', in: H.M. Beliën e.a. (eds.), *Nederlanders van het eerste uur. Het ontstaan van het moderne Nederland 1780-1830* (Amsterdam 1996), pp. 33-40.

Van Vliet, R., 'De *Bibliothèque impartiale*, 1750-1758: geleerdentijdschrift en boekhandelstijdschrift', in: *De achttiende eeuw* 31 (1999) 1, pp. 35-63

Van Vliet, R., 'Uitgever en schrijvers als kemphanen tegenover elkaar. Elie Luzac, uitgever van de academie van wetenschappen te Göttingen (1754-1756)', in *Mededelingen van de Stichting Jacob Campo Weyerman* 23 (2000) 2, pp. 79-93

Van Vliet, R., '*Annales Beligues* (1772-1776): conservatief-verlichte ideeën over macht en gezag', in: *TS, Tijdschrift voor tijdschriftstudies* MMI 9 [2001], p. 25-33.