

Accommodation in the Seventeenth-Century Dutch Republic

The appropriateness of beginning a discussion of the eighteenth-century German accommodation debate with an examination of seventeenth-century Dutch biblical exegesis is at first questionable—on account of both chronology and geography. However, we have good reason to begin with the Dutch Republic rather than proceeding straight to the debate. Though the accommodation debate occurred in Germany roughly during the period from the last third of the eighteenth century to the first third of the nineteenth century, the country's seventeenth-century neighbors foreshadowed the debate.

The doctrine of accommodation has a long history, extending back to the patristic age, particularly through the work of Augustine. Calvin popularized Augustinian accommodation, but Luther also used it, and post-Reformation scholars of both Lutheran and Calvinist confessions developed it further. Through Socinus, a heterodox understanding gained a hearing in the sixteenth century. Yet while introduced in the sixteenth century, it was not until seventeenth-century Dutch Reformed scholars combined Socinian accommodation with Cartesian philosophy that this heterodox understanding became widely accepted. The popularity of this newly formed Socinian doctrine sparked contention among orthodox Calvinists, resulting in a major dispute.

Socinian accommodation did not become a fully defined concept for German scholars until the eighteenth century. Rather than emerging from a Lutheran origin, Socinian accommodation came to the Germans via seventeenth-century Dutch Reformed Cartesio-Cocceians. To admit

an acceptance of Socinianism, as with Spinozism, was tantamount to admitting atheism. Hence, it was advantageous for these Germans to be able to show a theological lineage from the Cartesio-Cocceians rather than from Socinus. In addition to appropriating Socinian accommodation from the Cartesio-Cocceians, eighteenth-century adherers of this heterodoxy inherited Cartesio-Cocceians' practices, applying the doctrine to similar issues and biblical passages as they did. The early stages of the accommodation debate in Germany thus continued the cosmological discussion central to the earlier Dutch dispute and further developed the beginnings of doctrinal accommodation found in late seventeenth-century Dutch accommodation.

On the other hand, in defense of Augustinian accommodation, eighteenth-century orthodox Lutherans and Pietists turned to their seventeenth-century Lutheran heritage. We will discuss their argument further in Chap. 4, but it is important to note here that while the orthodox Lutherans and Pietists were acquainted with Voetian accommodation, they did not need to make the geographical and confessional jump that Germans embracing the Socinian definition did because they could trace a progression directly from Luther to post-Reformation Lutheran theology. Also, as Augustinian accommodationists combated eighteenth-century heterodox accommodation, they distanced their opponents from the Cartesio-Cocceians and associated heterodox accommodation directly with Socinus. Hence, while the accommodation dispute in seventeenth-century Reformed circles differed from the accommodation debate, a clear historical and theological development links the two. It would be a disservice to study the latter without discussing the former.

THE VOETIANS AND THE CARTESIO-COCCEIANS

Acquainted with the Dutch Republic through his military service to the country, a family tradition, René Descartes (1596–1650) established himself in the United Provinces of the Netherlands after his military service and several years of travel. Despite being born near Tours in France, Descartes preferred life in the Dutch Republic, especially given the greater level of privacy there. Thus, before its dissemination throughout Europe, Cartesian philosophy found its home in the Dutch Republic. The controversial work *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641) created an immediate response of both admiration and dismay in Dutch academia.

Among Descartes's critics was a professor of theology named Gijsbert Voetius (1589–1676). After completing his education in Leiden and briefly serving as a minister, Voetius was appointed professor of theology at Utrecht in 1634. Throughout the 1630s, Voetius served as the leader for orthodox Calvinists in the Dutch Republic, but it was not until the 1640s that this network of Dutch Calvinists gained the title “Voetians.” Associated with this title was a reputation for combatting heterodoxy and upholding Reformed theology in the orthodox tradition.¹

As part of their endeavor to uphold orthodoxy, Voetians refuted Cartesian philosophy.² In their estimation, the mechanistic worldview of Descartes rid the world of God, or at the very least distorted God's role in the universe. Also, Cartesian doubt undermined the foundation of Christianity, to the extent of questioning the very existence of God.³ Lastly, the Cartesian system replaced revelation with reason, elevating philosophy to the stature of the Bible. The Voetians argued that scriptural truth was limited by Cartesian dualism to matters of morality, while philosophy became the sole interpreter of natural science.⁴ As a result, they reduced the Bible to a collection of moral principles, void

¹For further information concerning their Aristotelian nature, see Paul Dibon, “Die Republik der Vereinigten Niederlande,” in *Die Philosophie des 17. Jahrhunderts*, vol. 2, *Frankreich und Niederlande*, ed. Jean-Pierre Schobinger, Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie (Basel: Schwabe, 1993), 42–86; Richard A. Muller, “Reformation, Orthodoxy, ‘Christian Aristotelianism,’ and the Eclecticism of Early Modern Philosophy,” in *Nederlands Archief voor Kereschiedenis*, n.s. 81, no. 3 (2001): 306–325.

²Paul Dibon, “Der Cartesianismus in den Niederlanden,” in Schobinger, *Die Philosophie des 17. Jahrhunderts*, vol. 2, *Frankreich und Niederlande*, 349–374; Dibon, “Scepticisme et orthodoxie réformée dans la Hollande du Siècle d’Or,” in *Scepticism from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment*, ed. Richard H. Popkin and Charles B. Schmitt, Wolfenbüttler Forschungen 35 (Wiesbaden: In Kommission bei O. Harrassowitz, 1987), 55–81.

³Jacobus Revius, *Methodi Cartesianae consideratio theologica* (Leiden: Hieronymum de Vogel, 1648), 60–71. Also see Revius, *Kartesiomanias pars altera, qua ad secundam partem rabiosae Assertionis Tobiae Andreae respondetur* (Leiden: Hieronymum de Vogel, 1655), 318–319, 385–386; Revius, *Analectorum theologicorum disputatio XXI* (Leiden: Johannis Nicolai van Dorp, 1647).

⁴Ernst Bizer, “Die reformierte Orthodoxie und der Cartesianismus,” *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 55, no. 3 (1958): 347. Also see Gijsbertus Voetius, *Thersites beauntimorumenos. Hoc est, Remonstrantium hyperaspistes: catechesis, et liturgiae Germanicae, Gallicae, et Belgicae denuo insultans* (Utrecht: Abrahami ab Herwii et Hermannii Ribbii, 1635), 266–267.

of universal truth or salvific force.⁵ On the other hand, they endowed philosophy with revelatory status as infallible and divine truth.⁶

Despite the concerted efforts of the Voetians, by the late 1640s Cartesian thought permeated much of Dutch academia. By the 1650s, the Voetian camp was countered by a group of scholars led by the Leiden theology professor Johannes Cocceius (1603–1669). Born in Bremen, Cocceius studied in Germany and the Netherlands. After returning to Bremen as a professor in 1630 and back to Franeker in 1636, Cocceius eventually earned the theology chair at Leiden, which he maintained until his death.

Open to Cartesian thought, Cocceius appropriated some of the new developments in biblical exegesis associated with Cartesian scholars. Jonathan Israel describes Cocceius's hermeneutical principle as follows: "parts of Scripture were intended only to be figurative and allegorical, tailored to the ignorance and superstition of the ancient Israelites," while "the real meaning and relevance can only be distilled by means of sophisticated exegetical methods."⁷ With the realization of the accommodated nature of the text, proper interpretation of the Bible required new exegetical methods. For instance, passages that recounted supernatural occurrences could be interpreted figuratively or allegorically, rather than literally, which often meant using accommodation to harmonize scientific accuracy with the biblical authors' inaccurate perception.

Israel rightly argues that this understanding of the Bible solidified the connection between the Cartesians and the Cocceians.⁸ However, the Cocceians used Cartesian philosophy to varying degrees. Cocceius himself refrained from appropriating Cartesian doubt, a principle employed by Cocceians such as Abraham Heidanus (1597–1678), Francis Burmann (1628–1679), Johannes Braunius (1628–1708), Christophorus Wittichius (1625–1687), and Balthasar Bekker (1634–1698).⁹ Willem van Asselt argues that while Cocceius showed limited

⁵Bizer, "Die reformierte Orthodoxie," 283.

⁶Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650–1750* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 25–26.

⁷Jonathan Israel, *The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall, 1477–1806* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), 666.

⁸Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 892.

⁹Willem J. van Asselt, "Scholasticism in the Time of High Orthodoxy (ca. 1620–1700)," in *Introduction to Reformed Scholasticism*, ed. Willem J. van Asselt, trans. Albert Gootjies,

interest in Cartesian philosophy, the Leiden professor never envisioned developing this line of thinking within his own theology. Despite Cocceius's original intentions, many Cocceians established their whole theology on the basis of a partnership with Cartesian philosophy.¹⁰ Hence, a certain amount of discontinuity existed between Cocceius and Cocceians who appropriated Cartesian philosophy in their theology.

Wiep van Bunge attempts to identify the link between the Cartesians and Cocceians as Calvin's doctrine of accommodation.¹¹ Descartes, in his second *Replies*, alluded to the Bible's accommodation to "ordinary understanding."¹² Thus, van Bunge argues, accommodation served as a tool for the reconciliation of the Bible with this new science by bridging Reformed theology with Cartesianism. He claims that the Voetians, not the Cocceians, were the ones who departed from the Calvinistic tradition. They limited their theology by adhering to a literalistic reading of Scripture, thus "categorically refusing the hermeneutical principle of accommodation."¹³

Upon closer examination of van Bunge's argument, we can see three areas in which his assessment of Cartesio-Cocceian accommodation fails. First, while van Bunge rightly identifies the use of accommodation by Cartesio-Cocceians, he is wrong to dissociate Voetians from the doctrine. As we will see shortly, Voetians did not reject Calvin's understanding of accommodation; rather, they objected to the way in which the Cocceians apprehended the doctrine.

Second, van Bunge employs an antiquated and false understanding of Calvin's accommodation. Following Ford Lewis Battles, van Bunge argues that Calvin based his concept of accommodation on his rhetorical

Footnote 9 (continued)

Reformed Historical-Theological Studies (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage, 2011), 149.

¹⁰Willem J. van Asselt, *The Federal Theology of Johannes Cocceius (1603–1669)*, Studies in the History of Christian Thought 100 (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 81.

¹¹Wiep van Bunge, *From Stevin to Spinoza: An Essay on Philosophy in the Seventeenth-Century Dutch Republic*, Brill's Studies in Intellectual History 103 (Leiden, Brill, 2001), 50–51.

¹²René Descartes, *Philosophical Writings*, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984–1991), 2:102. Cf. in van Bunge, *From Stevin to Spinoza*, 50.

¹³Van Bunge, *From Stevin to Spinoza*, 51.

training.¹⁴ While perhaps not Battles's intention, this perception of Calvin separates the reformer's use of accommodation from his theological convictions. van Bunge's position allows him to connect Calvin to the Cartesio-Cocceians through the tradition of rhetoric while bypassing the need to prove theological cohesion.

Jon Balserak contends that a rhetorical matrix neglects the theological context in which Calvin was using the doctrine.¹⁵ For Calvin accommodation was not merely a rhetorical tool but a theological principle that upheld the authority of the Bible. Balserak states that Calvin's use of accommodation "rarely, if ever, suggests a conception of the Bible which understands its truth as being historically-relative, as seems to have been the case with these later proponents of accommodation such as Christoph Wittich," a prime example of Cartesio-Cocceian accommodation.¹⁶

Third, in contrast to Calvin, Cartesio-Cocceian accommodation rested on the foundation of a Cartesian dualism separating moral truth from natural philosophy. Cartesianism thus voided the Bible's claims of possessing natural truth. And so, unlike Calvin, Cartesio-Cocceians distinguished between the moral truth of Scripture and matters of nature. Viewing the world mechanistically, Cartesio-Cocceians implied that when biblical authors recounted supernatural occurrences in the Bible, they simply betrayed their own misunderstanding of how nature really functions. Whereas Calvin used accommodation to harmonize Scripture with science, Cartesio-Cocceians used accommodation to detach the Bible from science. Thus Bekker stated, "it is certain that philosophy contemplates all that is accessible to reason; it is theology that teaches what transcends the power of the human mind, as the Apostle testifies."¹⁷ Bekker went on to state that the "principle" of philosophy is

¹⁴Ford Lewis Battles, "God Was Accommodating Himself to Human Capacity," *Int* 31, no. 1 (1977): 20. E. David Willis presents a similar view in "Rhetoric and Responsibility in Calvin's Theology," in *The Context of Contemporary Theology: Essays in Honor of Paul Lehmann*, ed. Alexander J. McKelway and E. David Willis (Atlanta: John Knox, 1974), 43–64.

¹⁵Jon Balserak, *Divinity Compromised: A Study of Divine Accommodation in the Thought of John Calvin*, Studies in Early Modern Religious Reforms 5 (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006), 8–9.

¹⁶Balserak, *Divinity Compromised*, 166.

¹⁷Balthasar Bekker, *De Philosophia Cartesiana Admonitio Candida & Sincera* (Wesel: Hoogenhuysen, 1668), 10.

reason, while for theology it is revelation. These two concepts of truth consist of two different ontological principles. Though they can never contradict each other, for both are from God, they also never intersect with each other. In short, van Bunge fails to account for the dualism found in Cartesio-Cocceian accommodation, which would be anathema to Calvin.

CHRISTOPHER WITTICHIUS AND CARTESIO-COCCEIAN ACCOMMODATION

As a leading Cartesio-Cocceian, Christopher Wittichius's (1625–1687) 1652 disputation *Dissertationes Duae, Quarum prior De S. Scripturae in rebus Philosophicis abusu examinatur* is a prime example of Cartesio-Cocceian accommodation. Born in Brzeg, Wittichius studied theology under Tobias Andreae (1604–1676) at Groningen, in addition to his studies at Bremen and Leiden. After short teaching stints at Herborn and Duisburg, Wittichius spent a more extended period at Nijmegen and eventually settled down in Leiden. He worked to reconcile Cartesian philosophy and Reformed theology throughout his career, but his influence was felt most during his last two positions.

Wittichius characterized Scripture as “accommodat mediatè.” For Wittichius, accommodation meant that Scripture “often speaks in the opinion of the common people.”¹⁸ As a pedagogical tool, the erroneous thinking of the biblical audience was incorporated into the text. The common man did not benefit from the scientific knowledge of the learned. Thus, rather than relating certain matters such as natural science as it actually exists in reality, the Bible was written so that the common man would understand. For the greater purpose of communicating spiritual truth, the authors accommodated the erroneous perceptions of the biblical figures to their readers.

This definitional difference did not stop the Cartesio-Cocceians from turning to their Reformed history for the purposes of establishing credibility. Wittichius cited Calvin's comments on Genesis 1:16 to support his

¹⁸Christopher Wittichius, *Dissertationes Duae, Quarum prior De S. Scripturae in rebus Philosophicis abusu examinatur* (Amsterdam: Ludovicum Elzevirium, 1653), 3. I refer to the 1653 published edition, which contains minor changes from the original 1652 disputation.

use of accommodation.¹⁹ While the Bible described the moon as a lesser light, the modern man knew that the moon is merely a reflection of the sun and does not emit light itself. Rather than confusing ancient Israel with an irrelevant discussion of the moon, the biblical author chose to include this misconception in order to teach the greater truth that God is Creator of all. As a father adapts difficult subjects in a way that is appropriate to his child's capacity, so too the Bible "condescends to the understanding of the common people" by using their "erroneous opinions."²⁰

Accommodation, for Wittichius, was to be held in conjunction with the senses. The Bible relates natural matters by "accommodation to the appearance of the senses."²¹ For instance, the first chapter of Ecclesiastes addressed the rise of rivers, yet the passage was relating not scientific truth but rather the appearance of the river according to the senses.²² What distinguished Wittichius from Augustinian accommodation was his literalistic fashion of interpreting the text without taking account of phenomenological language. For Wittichius, when the Bible spoke of the ends of the earth, as in Isaiah 13:5 or Deuteronomy 30:4, the authors were mistaken about the nature of earth. Because of the "fallacy of sight," the biblical authors truly believed that the earth came to an end.²³

For many Cartesio-Cocceians, their definition of accommodation treated the senses of ancient Israel and scientific truth as mutually exclusive. Throughout his work, Wittichius's doctrine of accommodation juxtaposed the concepts "according to the appearances of the senses and the common people" and "not according to truth."²⁴ With regard to "things of nature," the Bible "does not speak accurately but according to the erroneous opinion of the common people."²⁵ Being forced to accommodate to the understanding of "the weak," passages that contain matters such as natural science are not to be trusted. Hence, the modern reader "cannot draw knowledge of natural philosophy" from Scripture.²⁶

¹⁹Wittichius, *Dissertationes Duae*, 6–7. Wittichius also connected Augustine's use of accommodation with Descartes. Wittichius, *Dissertationes Duae*, 249.

²⁰Wittichius, *Dissertationes Duae*, 91.

²¹Wittichius, *Dissertationes Duae*, 56.

²²Wittichius, *Dissertationes Duae*, 5.

²³Wittichius, *Dissertationes Duae*, 51.

²⁴Wittichius, *Dissertationes Duae*, 64. Also see, Wittichius, *Dissertationes Duae*, 30–31.

²⁵Wittichius, *Dissertationes Duae*, 92.

²⁶Wittichius, *Dissertationes Duae*, 3.

In the same year, Martin Schoock (1614–1669), who held the chair in philosophy at Groningen, published his incomplete *De Scepticismo* (1652). He had originally defended this disputation in the early 1640s as a student of Voetius, who encouraged him to develop it into a fuller treatment. Though the project never came to fruition, Schoock did manage to publish the first part ten years later. The delayed timing of the publication explains why Schoock made no mention of Wittichius's accommodation.

Rather than taking on Wittichius, Schoock targeted Philip van Lansbergen (1561–1632) and Paulo Foscarini (1600–1647). He rejected their idea that the Bible incorporated “erroneous common opinion.”²⁷ Such an understanding of accommodation implied that the Holy Spirit could not communicate truth without the inclusion of error.²⁸ He agreed with the Cocceians that the primary focus of Scripture was for the teaching of salvation. However, with Voetius, he argued that Scripture's objective did not negate other matters included in the Bible, such as natural science. Accommodation aided in the purpose of Scripture “but not so that it lies with the liars and errs with the erring.”²⁹ Schoock's doctrine recognized the Holy Spirit's need to condescend in the Bible but simultaneously affirmed the Spirit's ability to communicate spiritual matters alongside scientific truth. Contrary to Wittichius, Schoock presented an Augustinian accommodation, fully in agreement with Calvin, which upheld the Bible's authority and inerrancy.

STRENGTHENING SOCINIAN ACCOMMODATION WITHIN THE CARTESIO-COCCEIAN CAMP

In opposition to Schoock stood Cocceians such as Lambert van Velthuysen (1622–1685). Van Velthuysen earned his degree in philosophy at Utrecht in 1644. Although he never held an academic chair, van Velthuysen served as a leading member of the Cartesio-Cocceians and the “College der Scavanten,” a circle of academic, pastoral, and lay Cartesio-Cocceians in Utrecht. He began his career in Utrecht as a

²⁷ Martin Schoock, *De Scepticismo* (Groningen: Henrici Lussinck, 1652), 401.

²⁸ Schoock addressed this issue repeatedly in *De Scepticismo*, 399–426.

²⁹ Schoock, *De Scepticismo*, 406.

medical doctor and later became a trustee of the West Indian Company. In 1667, he changed careers once again, becoming Utrecht's magistrate. Some of his early scholarships included a work on the difference between mathematical infinity and God's infinite nature. He also published a study of Hobbesian ethics drawn from Cartesian arguments for the existence of God. His methodology was rooted in a dualistic approach to science and theology.

Between 1654 and 1656 van Velthuysen entered into a dispute with Jacobus du Bois (?–1661) over the interpretation of Joshua 10. The passage recounts Joshua's conquests and God's provision to have the sun stand still so that Joshua's forces could continue in victory. In the anonymously published *Bewys, Dat het gevoel en van die genen, die leeren der Sonne Stilstandt* (1655), van Velthuysen claimed that the Voetians disregarded the Copernican theory due to their opposition to Cartesianism. Since the Bible's account contradicted the scientifically verified heliocentric universe, Voetians continued to adhere to a geocentric universe because biblical passages described the sun as moving around the earth. By incorporating cosmology into their theological framework—rather than theology into a scientifically verified cosmological framework—the Voetians rejected a heliocentric world on the basis of what van Velthuysen saw was a false foundation.³⁰

As with Wittichius, van Velthuysen believed that the Bible did not contain consistent natural truth, or at least that natural truth was never the Bible's intention. Since the Bible's primary purpose was to teach about moral and spiritual truth, the modern reader could discard treatments of nature and science in Scripture. Contrary to the Voetians, van Velthuysen argued that not everything contained in the Bible was inspired by the Holy Spirit. Some matters could be understood as truth or dogma, while other matters were to be cast aside as remnants of the historical context of the Bible.³¹

Van Velthuysen attempted to maintain within his hermeneutics both Reformed and Cartesian principles. In accordance with the Reformed tradition, he sought the *verus sensus* of Scripture through an understanding of the circumstances surrounding the writing of the Bible. At the

³⁰Lambert van Velthuysen, *Bewys, Dat het gevoel en van die genen, die leeren der Sonne Stilstandt, En des Aertycks Beweging niet strydich is met Godts Woort* (Utrecht: Jaer onses Herren, 1655), 4.

³¹Van Bunge, *From Stevin to Spinoza*, 76.

same time, he propped up Cartesian reason as the sole judge when distinguishing between truly inspired passages and parts of Scripture that were a by-product of the writing process.³²

Though van Velthuysen's main targets were du Bois and the Voetians who rejected the heliocentric theory, he also criticized Wittichius's understanding of accommodation. Van Velthuysen admonished his fellow Cartesio-Cocceian's claim that the Bible spoke *ad captum vulgi*. Instead, he argued, we should understand certain texts that lacked the inspiration of the Holy Spirit as the result of the historical circumstances of the Bible. These passages were not accommodations of God but merely the views of the authors. For van Velthuysen, admitting that the Bible spoke *ad captum vulgi* would be claiming that the Bible "lies."³³

Though he rejected Wittichius's doctrine of accommodation, only a year later van Velthuysen reversed his position on accommodation. In response to du Bois's criticism of *Bewys, Dat het gevoelen van die genen, die leeren der Sonne Stilstandt*, van Velthuysen reiterated his earlier arguments in his similarly titled *Bewys, Dat noch de Leere van der Sonne Stilstant* (1656).³⁴ There is little difference between the two works except for van Velthuysen's endorsement of Wittichius's *De Stylo Scripturae* (1656) and his use of accommodation.³⁵ What van Velthuysen denounced in his first work, he advocated in his second.

Van Bunge suggests that van Velthuysen's about-face resulted from Wittichius's concerted effort to coax him toward his view.³⁶ Despite the lack of an academic chair, van Velthuysen held considerable sway

³²Wiep van Bunge, "Balthasar Bekker's Cartesian Hermeneutics and the Challenges of Spinozism," *BJHP* 1, no. 1 (1993): 67.

³³Van Velthuysen, *Bewys, Dat het gevoelen van die genen, die leeren der Sonne Stilstandt*, 9–14.

³⁴See Jacobus du Bois, *Naecktheyt van de Cartesiaensche Philosophie: Ontbloot in een antwoort Op een Cartesiaensch Libel Genaemt Bewys, dat het gevoelen van die gene die leeren der Sonne-Stilstandt* (Utrecht: Johannes van Waesberge, 1655), for his critique of van Velthuysen's earlier work. Also see du Bois's *Dialogus theologico-astronomicus* (Leiden: Petrus Leffen, 1653).

³⁵Lambert van Velthuysen, *Bewys, Dat noch de Leere der Sonne Stilstant, En des Aertryx Bewegingh, Noch de gronden vande Philosophie van Renatus Des Cartes strijdig zijn met Godts Woort. Gestelt tegen een Tractaet van J. du Bois* (Utrecht, Dirck van Ackersdijck and Gijbert van Zijll, 1656), 7.

³⁶Van Bunge, *From Stevin to Spinoza*, 84.

in the propagation of Cartesian thought. In an effort to solidify the Cartesio-Cocceian camp, Wittichius wrote to van Velthuysen, requesting that he reconsider opposition to his understanding accommodation. In addition, Wittichius petitioned Johannes de Raey (1622–1702) to personally present a copy of Wittichius’s newly published *De Stylo Scripturae* to van Velthuysen. Regardless of whether van Velthuysen’s reversal was as much a political move as a theological change, he nonetheless became a staunch defender of Cartesio-Cocceian accommodation.

The propagation of Socinian accommodation can be attributed not only to the numerous writings of Wittichius but also to van Velthuysen’s leadership within the Cartesio-Cocceian party. While Wittichius provided much of the theological advancement of Socinian accommodation, van Velthuysen’s shift on accommodation symbolized the unification of the Cartesio-Cocceians. Perhaps the most important element we can glean from this episode was that the doctrine possessed great enough significance for Wittichius to actively seek reconciliation with van Velthuysen. Socinian accommodation became one of the critical principles behind which the Cocceians rallied, who deemed it essential to their theology. Van Velthuysen’s seal of approval not only solidified the Cartesio-Cocceian position but also validated Socinian accommodation as a central component to Cocceian hermeneutics.

These now familiar themes were reiterated by Wittichius in his *Consensus veritatis in Scriptura divina et infallibili revelatae cum veritate philosophica a Renato Des Cartes detecta* (1659). In it, he maintained a Cartesian dualism that separated natural and spiritual matters, a bifurcation that characterized the Bible’s address of natural matters as “accommodating to the opinion of the common people.”³⁷ Whereas Augustinian accommodation upheld biblical authority in all matters, Wittichius’s understanding of the doctrine included error within God’s condescension. Once again he juxtaposed the two concepts: “Scripture often speaks according to the opinion of common people, not according to the accurate truth.”³⁸ For Wittichius, the two were mutually exclusive categories.

³⁷Christopher Wittichius, *Consensus veritatis in Scriptura divina et infallibili revelatae cum veritate philosophica a Renato Des Cartes detecta* (Leiden: Cornelii Boutesteyn & Cornelii Lever, 1682), 297. I am using the second edition.

³⁸Wittichius, *Consensus veritatis*, 6.

Turning to exegetical matters, Wittichius discussed passages such as Genesis 1 where the moon is said to be a lesser light. Since the Bible never intended to teach natural science, it used the accommodated language of common and ordinary phrases.³⁹ The use of accommodation extended to the apostles as well. They “condescended” to the capacity of their audience in their oral and written teaching.⁴⁰ When it came to supernatural accounts in the Bible, modern readers, Wittichius argued, must understand the accommodated nature of the Bible in order to appropriately interpret miracles. For example, when we read about Moses’s parting of the Red Sea, we must keep in mind that the dividing of water was only a description through the limited understanding of ancient Israelites and not according to truth.⁴¹ Hence, according to Wittichius, “it is not possible to know matters regarding natural philosophy claimed in Scripture.”⁴² Israel deems Wittichius’s “Cartesianism infused with liberal Calvinist theology” as the first “genuinely ‘critical,’ scientifically orientated, Protestant Biblical hermeneutics,” and he goes on to state, “it was not long before this stance [Wittichius’s accommodation] was pre-empted, and his very maxim captured and radicalized, by Spinoza and his followers.”⁴³

THE *PHILOSOPHIA S. SCRIPTURAE INTERPRES* CONTROVERSY

The publication of Lodewijk Meyer’s (1629–1681) *Philosophia S. Scripturae Interpres* (1666) added a new dimension to the ongoing dispute between the Voetians and Cocceians. Born in Amsterdam, Meyer returned as a physician after completing doctorates in both medicine and philosophy at Leiden. He worked closely with the theater, while also writing lexical works and serving as a Latinist. He and Spinoza became close friends, and they fostered a mutual respect and often sought each other’s opinions. Their philosophical commonality was evident in Meyer’s 1663 edition of and Preface to Spinoza’s *Renati des Cartes Principia philosophiae*.

³⁹Wittichius, *Consensus veritatis*, 238.

⁴⁰Wittichius, *Consensus veritatis*, 36.

⁴¹Wittichius, *Consensus veritatis*, 351.

⁴²Wittichius, *Consensus veritatis*, 28. Also see Wittichius, *Consensus veritatis*, 29.

⁴³Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 450.

Though Meyer exerted much time and energy in promoting Spinoza's philosophy, he was also an accomplished thinker in his own right. His *Philosophia S. Scripturae Interpres* was published anonymously, predating Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (1670) by four years, and quickly became a success in the clandestine book market. The following year Meyer published his Dutch translation of the work. The second Latin edition was released in 1674, often together with the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*. For the third edition published in 1776, Semler added a new introduction and critical notes. Not until Meyer's death in 1681 was the authorship revealed.

The controversial book was premised on the idea that philosophy was the sole interpreter of the Bible. Meyer contended that the "true and certain knowledge of things" was the only decipher of the Bible's difficult texts.⁴⁴ With new scientific knowledge, he could not accept a literal interpretation of Scripture, as the Voetians promoted. Meyer's solution was to extend the scope of Cartesian philosophy to areas of theology and biblical exegesis. What Wittichius and van Velthuysen merely implied in their works, Meyer stated explicitly in the *Philosophia S. Scripturae Interpres*. For our purposes, Meyer's work is significant due to the responses that followed its publication by both Cocceians and Voetians. Though Meyer only briefly mentioned accommodation in sections such as his prologue and epilogue, he forced his fellow Cartesians to defend their philosophical hermeneutic and use of Socinian accommodation.

In a frantic attempt to separate themselves from Meyer's Cartesian interpretation of Scripture, the leading Cartesio-Cocceians denounced the *Philosophia S. Scripturae Interpres*. They were unsettled by the extent to which Meyer had utilized Cartesian philosophy in biblical exegesis. While Meyer may have based his premise on Cartesian thought, he took the philosophical system beyond the boundaries established by the Cartesio-Cocceians. Van Velthuysen's response, *Dissertatio de usu rationis in rebus theologicis* (1668), led the Cartesio-Cocceian disconcertion with *Philosophia S. Scripturae Interpres*. However, van Velthuysen could not convincingly condemn Meyer's system due to the obvious similarity between the *Philosophia S. Scripturae Interpres* and his own work. Both elevated the role of reason and specifically Cartesian philosophy in biblical interpretation. Both contended that the Bible was filled with

⁴⁴Lodewijk Meyer, *Philosophy as the Interpreter of Holy Scripture*, trans. Samuel Shirley (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2005), 37, 52–53, 126.

obscurity that required a philosophical perspective in their interpretive methodology. And both expressed the same understanding of accommodation. Due to these similarities, van Velthuysen was often accused of writing Meyer's work himself. *Philosophia S. Scripturae Interpres* was perceived as the natural progression from van Velthuysen's earlier works.

It was Cartesio-Cocceian Lodewijk Wolzogen's (1633–1690) response in *De Scripturarum Interprete adversus Exercitationem Paradoxum* (1668) that created the most uproar. Wolzogen served as a pastor in Utrecht and would later become a professor of theology. He was part of the "College der Scavanten" and a close associate of van Velthuysen. As with van Velthuysen, whom Wolzogen defended against charges that he wrote the *Philosophia S. Scripturae Interpres*, Wolzogen denounced the work and attempted to distance Cartesio-Cocceian thought from what was perceived as the natural outcome of Cartesian philosophy. However, in attempting to separate himself from Meyer's system, Wolzogen assimilated his thought to a Socinian approach to Scripture.⁴⁵ As a result, Wolzogen was not only unsuccessful in distancing himself from Meyer but was now charged with Socinianism.

Agreeing with Meyer, Wolzogen contended that natural science could not contradict the Bible. However, he objected to Meyer's use of philosophy as the exclusive interpreter of Scripture. The accommodated nature of Scripture requires methods besides philosophy. Since the Bible was written "according to the use of common language," the language of the Bible is the best interpreter of Scripture.⁴⁶ Thus, the exegete must know the circumstances in which Scripture was penned, since it was written according to the common opinion of the ancient Near East. In fact, the biblical writers were ignorant of the actual cause of various phenomena, and they wrongly attributed natural events to supernatural forces, which inevitably led to the inclusion of errors.⁴⁷ This was done so that the Bible would be "understood by the ignorant" and not just by the educated.⁴⁸ Meyer and Wolzogen were in agreement on this last point, but they differed on how best to interpret these accommodations.

⁴⁵Lodewijk Wolzogen, *De Scripturarum Interprete adversus Exercitatore Paradoxum* (Utrecht: Linde, 1668), 221, 225–226. Also see Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 206.

⁴⁶Wolzogen, *De Scripturarum Interprete*, 72.

⁴⁷Wolzogen, *De Scripturarum Interprete*, 43.

⁴⁸Wolzogen, *De Scripturarum Interprete*, 70.

Not only did the *Philosophia S. Scripturae Interpres* affect the argumentation of the Cartesio-Cocceian camp, it also forced a response from a wide range of scholars. The Groningen professor Samuel Maresius (1599–1673) had previously held a middle ground between the Voetians and Cocceians. However, after the publication of the *Philosophia S. Scripturae Interpres*, Maresius, who was no friend of Voetius, sided with the Voetians because he perceived the work to be the natural outcome of Cartesian philosophy.

Maresius was the son of a former naval officer turned judge with a Reformed heritage that extended far back on both sides of the family. Upon completing his studies at Paris and Geneva, he entered into ministry at Laon and Crépy. After some time, Maresius took a hiatus in order to complete his doctorate at Leiden. The following years were filled with various ministry positions that moved him from Sedan to Maastricht and then to Hertogenbosch. In his final position, he succeeded Franciscus Gomarus (1563–1641) as a theology professor at Groningen. Maresius had planned to accept a position in Leiden but died before he was able to make the transition.

The year after the *Philosophia S. Scripturae Interpres* was published, Maresius held a series of lectures dedicated to the work and to what he perceived was an attack on orthodox theology. That same year Maresius expressed his discontent in *Disputationes Theologicae prior refutatoria libelli de philosophia Interprete Scripturae* (1667). According to Maresius, Meyer misunderstood the significance of the Bible as a historical text. Since the Bible spoke in the “human style” according to its day, Maresius argued, we must understand what exactly that meant in ancient Near Eastern times.⁴⁹ Philosophy could not provide the insight that a historical and philological study could.

Maresius condemned not only Meyer’s use of accommodation but also Wolzogen’s understanding of the doctrine. For Maresius, accommodation did not mean adapting to the erroneous understanding of the common man. To have the Bible written according to the “public and ordinary meaning” stipulated not erroneous thinking but merely plain speaking.⁵⁰ Whereas Cartesio-Cocceian accommodation construed

⁴⁹Samuel Maresius, *Disputationes Theologicae prior refutatoria libelli de philosophia Interprete Scripturae* (Groningen: Johannis Collenus, 1667), 3:9.

⁵⁰Maresius, *Disputationes Theologicae*, 3:11.

certain passages as full of errors or misunderstandings, Maresius's accommodation employed "common sense" and interpreted passages as phenomenological language.⁵¹ Maresius continued his criticism of Socinian accommodation in his systematic polemic against Cartesianism, *De Abusu Philosophiae Cartesianae* (1670). As a culmination of his thoughts on Cartesianism and also as a response to Wittichius's lecture annotations to his students, this work became a significant resource for refuting Cartesian philosophy.

BENEDICT DE SPINOZA AND THE *TRACTATUS* *THEOLOGICO-POLITICUS*

In the midst of the *Philosophia S. Scripturae Interpres* controversy, Spinoza published his *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (1670), introducing a new dimension to biblical hermeneutics and the use of accommodation. Not only did Spinoza incorporate Socinian accommodation within his argument for theological and political freedom, but he also implemented the doctrine at a level previously unseen. Central to the work was Spinoza's belief that the Bible "does not teach philosophical matters but only piety, and everything in Scripture is adapted to the understanding and preconceptions of the common people."⁵²

The prophets' superiority was contingent upon a high level of imagination, not knowledge. They were not privileged in matters of natural or spiritual truth.⁵³ What allowed the prophets to write the biblical books was nothing more than a vivid imagination, and it was to these "understandings and preconceptions" that revelation was adapted. However, accommodation was not only necessary but also necessarily errant. Spinoza wrote,

It is not in the least surprising, therefore, that God adapted Himself to the imaginations and preconceived opinions of the prophets and that the faithful have held conflicting views about God.... Nor is it at all surprising that the sacred books express themselves so inappropriately about God

⁵¹Maresius, *Disputationes Theologicae*, 3:16.

⁵²Benedict de Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, trans. Michael Silverthorne and Jonathan Israel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 186.

⁵³Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 27.

throughout.... They are here manifestly speaking according to the [utterly deficient] understanding of the common people, whom Scripture strives to render not learned but obedient.⁵⁴

The Bible was a result of accommodation to the historical context of the ancient Near East. It inevitably included the contradictory and erroneous preconceptions of that day in an effort to advance the piety of its readers.

Before examining the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, we must note a couple of points. First, as Jay M. Harris contends, Spinoza's understanding of accommodation took a turn just before the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*.⁵⁵ Prior to 1670, Spinoza extended the use of accommodation to the prophets of the Bible. In this view, the prophets knowingly adapted their writing to their audience to better communicate their message. However, in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, Spinoza no longer held this position. The prophets were not superior in knowledge; rather, they held the same views as the rest of the nation of Israel. Accommodation applied universally to both prophet and audience. Second, Spinoza secularized the doctrine of accommodation to further the objectives of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*. Gregory W. Dawes writes, "Spinoza's use of the traditional language of 'accommodation' seems to be little more than a transposition into traditional theological terms of Spinoza's conviction that prophetic knowledge was primarily a matter of the imagination."⁵⁶

In support of these two points, J. Samuel Preus traces in Spinoza's writings a form of accommodation similar to Maimonides up to 1665. However, in *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* Spinoza "puts an end to the traditional doctrine of accommodation."⁵⁷ Preus argues that Spinoza's accommodation radically departed from the "mainline Christian tradition" because he utilized the language of accommodation to "destroy supernaturalism" and to advance his hermeneutic of history.⁵⁸ Amos

⁵⁴Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 177.

⁵⁵Jay Michael Harris, *How Do We Know This?: Midrash and the Fragmentation of Modern Judaism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 125–126.

⁵⁶Gregory W. Dawes, *The Historical Jesus Question: The Challenge of History to Religious Authority* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 50.

⁵⁷J. Samuel Preus, *Spinoza and the Irrelevance of Biblical Authority* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 173.

⁵⁸J. Samuel Preus, "Prophecy, Knowledge and Study of Religion," *Religion* 28 (1998): 129.

Funkenstein states that while being influenced by Abraham Ibn Ezra's (1093–1167) understanding of accommodation, Spinoza “put [accommodation] on its head—or, if you wish, on its feet.”⁵⁹ To the detriment of Ibn Ezra and the Augustinian definition of accommodation, Spinoza's doctrine undermined the “authentication of the Bible as a superhuman document.”⁶⁰ By redefining accommodation, Spinoza used the principle to void the Bible of its theological content. Funkenstein describes Spinoza's primary purpose of accommodation as emptying “theological language” of its content before abandoning it altogether or having it “turned on its head.”⁶¹

Spinoza began *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* by integrating his understanding of accommodation into his discussion of prophecy and the role of the prophet. According to Spinoza, prophets were those who interpret God's revelation. However, the prophets “were not endowed with more perfect minds than others but only a more vivid power of imagination.”⁶² Also, despite the prophets' role as interpreters of revelation, they still had limitations. Prophets “cannot themselves achieve certain knowledge of them and can therefore only grasp by simple faith what has been revealed.”⁶³ Thus, the prophet was limited to his existing pre-conceptions of God, which were often mistaken and even contradicted other prophets. For example, due to Joshua's misconceptions concerning the stationary position of the sun, Scripture recorded that the sun stood still. However, Joshua's account was not a phenomenological depiction of the motion of the sun from an earthly perspective. Rather, Joshua was ignorant of the orbit of the earth around a fixed sun. On that particular

⁵⁹Amos Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination: from the Middle ages to the Seventeenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 220.

⁶⁰Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination*, 220.

⁶¹Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination*, 221. Spinoza's accommodation differed from someone like Galileo Galilei (1564–1642), who on the one hand maintained that God accommodated to the biblical authors without them accommodating their writings while on the other contended for an error-free Bible. See Hoon J. Lee, “Men of Galilee, Why Stand Gazing Up into Heaven?: Revisiting Galileo, Astronomy, and the Authority of the Bible,” *JETS* 53, no. 1 (2010): 103–116.

⁶²Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 27.

⁶³Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 13.

night, Joshua was unaware of the sun's reflection on atmospheric ice, which caused an unusually bright night.⁶⁴

The errors of the biblical authors were not limited to scientific matters but extended to their understanding of God. The Bible's anthropomorphic language was an outcome of the common notions of that time. When Scripture used the phrase "spirit of God," the prophet was describing God according to what he knew of man. Thus, "spirit of God" was the prophet's way of saying God was like a man and had a "mind, i.e., heart, passion, force and the breath of the mouth of God."⁶⁵ Not only did the prophets attribute human qualities to God, but they also limited God to human characteristics. For example, Adam was unaware of God's omnipresence and omniscience and thus presented God as lacking knowledge of Cain's deeds and location.⁶⁶ Moses too failed to understand these attributes of God. In questioning God's command to speak to the enslaved Israelites, Moses revealed his failure to grasp God's omniscience.⁶⁷

As God accommodated to individuals, so too did he accommodate to the entire nation of Israel. God's election of the nation was an accommodation to "childish" thinking. Spinoza explained,

When therefore Scripture states that God chose the Hebrews for himself above other nations (see Deuteronomy 10:15) so as to encourage them to obey the law, and is near to them and not to others (Deuteronomy 4:4–7), and has laid down good laws solely for them and not for others (Deuteronomy 4:2), and has made himself known to them alone, in preference to others (see Deuteronomy 4:32), and so on, Scripture is merely speaking according to their understanding.... Moses desired to teach the Hebrews in such a manner and inculcate into them such principles as would attach them more closely to the worship of God on the basis of their childish understanding.⁶⁸

⁶⁴Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 34.

⁶⁵Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 23.

⁶⁶Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 35.

⁶⁷Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 36.

⁶⁸Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 43, 44. This is how Spinoza interprets 1 Cor. 9:19–23. Paul was not establishing a special status for Israel; he was merely appeasing the need for such recognition. Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 53.

God did not intend to privilege Israel in any fashion. The special relationship between God and Israel was due to the Israelites' need for status. To promote piety, God allowed the Israelites to believe that they were unique.

In addition to a childish mindset, Spinoza perceived an inherent slavery mentality within the Israelites. Due to centuries of Egyptian rule, the Israelites were unable to make a mental exodus from the concept of *law*. In order to work within this slavery mentality, God created the Mosaic Law. The Law provided simplistic teaching geared toward a life of servitude and gratitude for God's rescue from slavery. Thus Spinoza argued that the Israelites understood God as a "legislator obliging them to live well by command of the law" or as a "ruler, legislator, king, merciful, just, etc., despite the fact that the latter are merely attributes of human nature and far removed from the divine nature."⁶⁹ The universal nature of God deemed such laws irrelevant; however, God established a system of laws for the temporary benefit of the Israelites. In truth, "God acts and governs all things from the necessity of his own nature and perfection alone, and his decrees and volitions are eternal truths and always involve necessity."⁷⁰

Spinoza distinguished between accommodation to the prophets and to Christ. He argued that God did not need to adapt his revelation because Christ had perfect knowledge. God revealed himself to Christ directly and not through "words or visions." Christ was not a mere prophet but a "mouth-piece" of God. Thus, "it would be equally irrational to think that God adapted his revelations to Christ's beliefs as that he had previously adapted his revelations to the beliefs of angels (i.e., to the beliefs of a created voice and of visions) in order to communicate his

⁶⁹Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 39, 63.

⁷⁰Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 65. As human law is directly tied to the nature of man and the limited understanding of the human mind, so too are the ceremonies described in the Old Testament. Spinoza contended that Isaiah "promises as the reward for liberating [the oppressed] and practicing charity, a healthy mind in a healthy body and the glory of God after death, but the reward for ceremonies is merely the security of the state, prosperity, and worldly success." Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 70. He wrote, "As for ceremonies, or those at least which are narrated in the Old Testament, these were instituted for the Hebrews alone and were so closely accommodated to their state that in the main they could be practiced not by individuals but only by the community as a whole." Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 68.

revelations to the prophets.”⁷¹ Christ understood God’s revelation as it truly was and not through the medium of accommodation.

In addition, Christ was sent not only on behalf of the Jews but for all humanity. When Christ spoke in laws, he was not speaking through his weakness of mind, as the prophets did, but as an adaptation of universal truth to the mindset of his hearers. The capacity of his audience determined how Christ spoke to them. To those who were weaker, Jesus taught through parables and obscurity, but to those with a greater capacity, he spoke eternal truth.⁷² Christ alone had the ability to receive unmediated revelation and freely adapt it to his audience as he deemed appropriate.⁷³

As stated previously, Spinoza’s accommodation implied that the Bible included contradictory and erroneous views. This notion impacted not only the authority of the Bible but also the way in which we interpret it. In Spinoza’s view, Scripture spoke in a “wholly inexact manner” for the purpose of spurring devotion and imagination.⁷⁴ Because prophecy did not add to wisdom but was merely accommodated to preconceived beliefs, one is under no obligation to follow its instruction in “philosophical” or “natural and spiritual matters.”⁷⁵ For instance, Jesus stated in Matthew 12:26 that demons who pledged loyalty to Satan cannot stand divided, but this statement did not attest to the existence of demons or Satan. Jesus was merely accommodating to the Pharisees’ erroneous belief in demons without commenting on their existence.⁷⁶

Spinoza also applied this line of reasoning to the interpretation of miracles. In his view, nothing was contrary to the laws of nature. Miracles were not events that occurred outside of natural law but rather were a way to accommodate an explanation through the imagination of the common person. Thus, the interpreter must often spiritualize the text to discover the true meaning of the passage. Rather than a literal

⁷¹Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 63–64.

⁷²Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 64.

⁷³Though Christ was unique in his ability to receive and adapt divine revelation, a small, select group of biblical authors occasionally accommodated their writings. Spinoza argued that Rom. 3:5 and 6:19 evinced Paul’s tendency to speak in “human terms” when ascribing characteristics such as “pity, grace, anger, etc.” to God.

⁷⁴Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 91.

⁷⁵Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 40.

⁷⁶Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 41.

interpretation, one must recognize the accommodated nature of the text. For instance, Spinoza denied the resurrection and spiritualized it as a message of piety. He wrote,

I therefore conclude that Christ's resurrection from the dead was in fact of a spiritual kind and was revealed only to the faithful according to their understanding, indicating that Christ was endowed with eternity and rose from the dead (I here understand "the dead" in the sense in which Christ said "Let the dead bury their dead"), and also by his life and death he provided an example of surpassing holiness, and that he raises his disciples from the dead in so far as they follow the example of his own life and death.⁷⁷

At times, the Bible was referring not to a spiritual message but to a natural occurrence that the biblical authors could *not* explain. Though a natural explanation could have been provided, the limited capacity of the audience prohibited them from articulating such a complicated process. Instead, the author gave the natural phenomenon a supernatural explanation in order to simplify the matter. Attributing the event to supernatural factors satisfied the common person and thus provided the sole "criterion" for defining a miracle.⁷⁸ Such would not do for Spinoza and other interpreters in the early modern era, who were more advanced in their understanding of science. Rather than limiting themselves to the way Scripture accommodated complicated explanations of natural phenomena, they were free to disregard miracles and discover the true explanation through science.

Due to the accommodated nature of Scripture, the modern reader also had to become acquainted with the culture and beliefs of that day. Since revelation was contextualized to the times of the Old and

⁷⁷Benedictus de Spinoza, Letter 75, in *The Letters*, trans. Samuel Shirley, with an introduction and notes by Steven Barbone, Lee Rice, and Jacob Adler (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1995), 338. Johannes Bredenburg (1643–1691) argues that a straightforward literal reading of 1 Cor. 15:13–15 makes the historical occurrence of the resurrection explicit. According to Bredenburg, Spinoza's claim is simply weak and cannot ignore the biblical claim for dogmatic truth. Wiep van Bunge, "Van Velthuysen, Batelier and Bredenburg on Spinoza's interpretation of the Scriptures," in *L'hérésie spinoziste: La discussion sur le Tractatus theologico-politicus, 1670–1677, et la réception immédiate du spinozisme*, ed. Paolo Cristofolini (Amsterdam: APA-Holland University Press, 1995), 63.

⁷⁸Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 84.

New Testaments, it was critical to understand these accommodations as cultural depictions of “apparitions and imaginary things” that were “adapted to the beliefs of those who passed them on to us as they appeared to them, namely as actual events.”⁷⁹ Spinoza proposed that exegetes should interpret Scripture in the same manner as scientists study nature. As with nature, a history of Scripture must be established, from which one can draw definitions and principles. He wrote,

Provided we admit no other criteria or data for interpreting Scripture and discussing its contents than what is drawn from Scripture itself and its history, we will always proceed without any danger of going astray, and we shall have the same assuredness in discussing things that surpass our understanding as in discussing things that we learn by the natural light of reason.⁸⁰

Thus, knowledge derived from the Bible had to be interpreted in light of the Bible’s historical context.

This principle was not only ideal but also necessary for interpreting Scripture properly. Due to the Bible’s instruction of piety, the “teachings of true piety are expressed in the most everyday language, since they are very common and extremely simple and easy to understand.”⁸¹ The Bible simply cannot be interpreted purely through reason or philosophy because it accommodated the common notions of humanity. Interpretation of such accommodations was based not on philosophical truths but rather on the history of the Bible. Spinoza differed from his friend Meyer on this point. Both took accommodation to erroneous beliefs as a given in the Bible. However, Meyer proposed that philosophy was the best interpretive tool for distinguishing between literal or figurative readings. In contrast, Spinoza held that Scripture’s history—not philosophy—was best poised to tell us when to interpret figuratively or literally.

The reverse was also true for Spinoza. Just as reason could not supersede the Bible, so too the Bible could not override reason. Spinoza feared that when the Bible was used to interpret philosophy, one would elevate the erroneous, accommodated beliefs over philosophical truth. In his view, the Bible only taught piety, so when the Bible was used in

⁷⁹Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 93.

⁸⁰Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 98.

⁸¹Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 111.

conjunction with natural and philosophical truths, it forced the prophets to say things they never intended.⁸² These statements, limited by their historical context, could not stand up against universal truth.

On a final note, Spinoza promoted the continued use of accommodation in contemporary theology. As the Bible was adapted to the common understanding of its day, so too must it be accommodated to the present day. Spinoza wrote,

Indeed everyone, as we have already said, must adapt these doctrines of faith to his own understanding and to interpret them for himself in whatever way seems to make them easier for him to accept unreservedly and with full mental assent. For, as we have pointed out, faith was once revealed and written according to the understanding and beliefs of the prophets and of the common people of their time, and in the same manner everyone in our day must adapt faith to their own views so that they may accept it without any mental reservation or hesitation.⁸³

The accommodated nature of Scripture necessitated that each generation adapt the teachings of the Bible to best suit the needs of present readers. For Spinoza, faith was a matter of piety and not philosophical truth, validated by one's obedience and not doctrine.⁸⁴ Thus, each reader was free to accommodate the Bible to his or her understanding and belief as long as it promoted piety and obedience.

With this understanding, one can see why Preus argues that Spinoza rid accommodation of the "Divine Intender" behind accommodated language.⁸⁵ The traditional understanding of accommodation held that a Divine Intender included deeper meaning and truth within the accommodated language of the Bible. The purpose of the Divine Intender was to use common notions and language to effectively communicate more complicated truth. Through Spinoza's removal of the Divine Intender and radicalized definition of accommodation, not only was there no deeper truth behind accommodated language, but also these accommodations carried no relevance for the modern reader. The accommodations were relevant for those during the time when the Bible was written

⁸²Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 186.

⁸³Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 183–184.

⁸⁴Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 181–182.

⁸⁵Preus, *Spinoza and the Irrelevance of Biblical Authority*, 188.

and for no one else. Instead, modern readers had to accommodate the Bible for themselves.

As in the case with Meyer's publication, Cartesio-Cocceians were quick to dissociate themselves from Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*. For example, in *Tractatus de Cultu Naturali, et Origine Moralitatis* (1680), van Velthuysen tried to distance himself from Spinoza. To his critics, the exegetical principles of Spinoza appeared similar to what van Velthuysen had been suggesting for years. The need for understanding the Bible's historical context and language were exegetical principles that both van Velthuysen and Spinoza shared. They both also held to a similar understanding of accommodation. Still, van Velthuysen attempted, inconsistently, to retain his and Wittichius's accommodation while rejecting Spinoza's.

It is true that van Velthuysen did not adhere to the fatalism that he had accused Spinoza of. He claimed that this fatalistic approach converted accommodation into lies.⁸⁶ However, van Velthuysen did not directly object to Spinoza's accommodation. Rather, he admonished Spinoza's determinism and what it meant for Spinoza's and van Velthuysen's accommodation. Without this determinism, Spinoza was left with a form of accommodation shared by Wittichius and van Velthuysen. However, Spinoza claimed that fatalism did not interfere with the accommodation of the Bible. As van Velthuysen would contend, Spinoza's doctrine of accommodation was based on the disparity between God and man. The exegetical use of the doctrine by Spinoza and van Velthuysen was contingent on their common separation of the moral elements from the natural matters in the Bible.

THE CULMINATION OF THE VOETIAN RESPONSE

Up to this point, we have been preoccupied with the heterodoxy of the Cartesio-Cocceians without examining the Voetian response. Certainly, the Voetians contributed their own share in polemical writings, quick to rebuff Cartesio-Cocceian innovations in hermeneutics and the redefinition of accommodation. Perhaps the most significant rejoinder to Cartesio-Cocceian hermeneutics came from Petrus van Mastricht (1630–1706), who sought to sustain Augustinian accommodation.

⁸⁶Lambert van Velthuysen, "Epistola XLII," in *Spinoza Opera* (Heidelberg: Carl Winters, 1925), 4:210.

Born in Cologne, Mastricht spent his early career teaching and ministering outside the Netherlands. Then in 1677, Mastricht was appointed to succeed Voetius as professor of theology at Utrecht, a position he held until his death. While best known for his *Theologia Theoretico-Practica* (1682–1687), Mastricht's *Novitatum Cartesianarum Gangraena* (1677) is more relevant for our purposes.⁸⁷ The work is divided into two sections. The first part addresses Cartesianism and the philosophical system's impact on biblical interpretation. The much larger second section is a systematic treatment of the whole spectrum of theology.

In this work, Mastricht combatted Cartesian theology along with Meyer's *Philosophia S. Scripturae Interpres* and Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*. Mastricht challenged the Cartesian foundation of Wittichius's and other Cocceians' hermeneutics. According to Mastricht, central to the Cartesio-Cocceian approach to Scripture was the role of philosophy in interpreting the Bible. By elevating Cartesianism, they made philosophy the principle judge of the Bible's meaning.⁸⁸ Cartesio-Cocceians thus divided philosophical truth from spiritual truth, resulting in a Bible that contained only spiritual truths and nothing else. This separation meant that the Bible related erroneous statements concerning natural science.⁸⁹

As Voetius's successor at Utrecht, Mastricht made use of Voetius's understanding of accommodation. For Mastricht, Cartesians such as Wittichius argued that the Bible's description of the sun's motion spoke "according to the erroneous opinion of the common people" and depicted "things to us he knows are not true."⁹⁰ Similar to his refutation of Wittichius in 1655, Mastricht contended that Cartesio-Cocceian accommodation essentially made God into a liar who intentionally deceived not only the Israelites but all generations of Christians.⁹¹

⁸⁷For Mastricht's discussion of accommodation in *Theologia Theoretico-Practica*, see 70–188.

⁸⁸Peter van Mastricht, *Novitatum Cartesianarum Gangraena* (Amsterdam: Janssonio Waesbergios, 1677), 34–49, especially 36, 38.

⁸⁹Mastricht, *Novitatum Cartesianarum Gangraena*, 9–10, 62–73, 96–105, 392–395.

⁹⁰Mastricht, *Novitatum Cartesianarum Gangraena*, 62.

⁹¹Mastricht, *Novitatum Cartesianarum Gangraena*, 71–73, 102–103. See also Petrus van Mastricht, *Vindiciae veritatis et auctoritatis Sacrae Scripturae in rebus philosophicis* (Utrecht: Johannis Waesberge, 1655), 13.

In contrast, Maastricht contended that all statements of God were “divine and infallible” according to the exact truth and not according to the erroneous perception of man.⁹² This included the proper use of accommodation, which utilized nonscientific language yet remained absolutely accurate.⁹³ Additionally, this divine deception that the Cartesio-Cocceians promoted was not limited to matters of nature but extended—even more so—to “practical, moral matters” and to faith and doctrine.⁹⁴ According to Maastricht, while Spinoza was the chief culprit of the abuse of accommodation, there was no fundamental difference between Spinoza’s position and that of Wittichius or Wolzogen.⁹⁵ Maastricht’s understanding of Cartesio-Cocceian accommodation would be equally true of the last accommodationist in our discussion of seventeenth-century exegesis.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END OF CARTESIO-COCCEIAN ACCOMMODATION

Balthasar Bekker’s (1634–1698) *De Betoverde Weereld* (1691) was the culmination of Cartesio-Cocceian accommodation. Even more than Spinoza’s *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, Bekker’s four-volume work epitomized Cartesian dualism and its effect on Socinian accommodation. However, while Bekker may be rightly perceived as the zenith of Cartesio-Cocceian accommodation, his work also signaled its demise. As we will see in subsequent chapters, Socinian accommodation continued into the eighteenth century, albeit stripped of the Cartesian dualism associated with Bekker and his fellow Cocceians. We have already seen how Spinoza progressed past Cartesian dualism. I will argue that most early eighteenth-century German scholars who utilized Socinian accommodation appropriated a Spinozist or Wolffian variant rather than a Cartesio-Cocceian approach. Also, though a Wolffian form of Socinian accommodation was prevalent during the first half of the eighteenth

⁹²Maastricht, *Novitatum Cartesianarum Gangraena*, 42.

⁹³Maastricht, *Novitatum Cartesianarum Gangraena*, 8–12, 28–29, 45–46.

⁹⁴Maastricht dedicates chapter 5 to accommodation in natural matters. Chapter 8 deals with “Practicis & Moralibus,” and Chapter 9 addresses accommodation in doctrine and faith.

⁹⁵Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 215.

century, Spinoza's radicalization of the doctrine existed throughout the century, especially in the second half of the eighteenth century.

Born the son of a Reformed minister in Friesland, Bekker followed his father's career path. After studying philosophy at Groningen and theology at Franeker, he served as a minister. However, Bekker soon faced criticism over the funeral oration he gave for his wife, a practice prohibited by the Reformed church. Not long after, Bekker gained the label of a Cartesian for the publication of *De philosophia cartesiana admonitio candida et sincera* (1668). His Cocceian leaning was also displayed in several of the theses in his doctoral disputations. Even more so, Bekker's catechism for adults further demonstrated his Cocceian theology.

In 1680, Bekker accepted a position in Amsterdam. In that same year and the two subsequent years, Amsterdam witnessed several comets. After the comets dissipated, Bekker addressed the superstition of comets as omens in *Ondersoek van de betekeninge der Kometen* (1683), presenting a Cartesio-Cocceian understanding of accommodation. The work added little original substance, simply rehashing arguments against the idea that comets were premonitions of future disaster. He argued that the superstition surrounding comets had more to do with erroneous common thinking than with scientific truth.

Despite facing little repercussion for his views in *Ondersoek van de betekeninge der Kometen*, Bekker's fate after the publication of *De Betooverde Weereld* was an entirely different matter.⁹⁶ Bekker completed the first two volumes in 1691, followed by the second two volumes in 1693. The first volume examined how various religions and cultures, particularly Catholicism, understood the spirit world. The second volume served as the core of his argument. This was where he worked out his dualism and Cartesio-Cocceian accommodation in the interpretation of the Bible's presentation of the spirit world. The less original third and fourth volumes analyzed demonic practices and the origin of supernatural accounts. Immediately after the publication of the first installment,

⁹⁶In addition to attacks from the Voetians, Bekker received little support from the Cartesio-Cocceians, in part because some Cartesio-Cocceians alienated him after he criticized Cocceius's interpretation of the book of Daniel in *Uitlegging van den propheet Daniel* (Amsterdam: Daniel van den Dalen, 1688). Bekker was backed by Eric Walten (1663–1697), who shared a similar understanding of accommodation. see Eric Walten, *Aardige Duyvelary* (Rotterdam: Pieter van Veen, 1691), 27, 47; Eric Walten, *Brief Aan zijn Excellentie, de Heer Graaf van Portland* (Hague: Meyndert Uytwerf, 1692), 19–20.

Bekker received negative criticism and was released from his ministerial position.⁹⁷

In Cartesio-Cocceian fashion, Bekker adhered to a Cartesian dualism that segregated natural science from spiritual truth within the Bible. According to Bekker, Scripture's intent was to instill faith and not scientific accuracy.⁹⁸ There was no better example of this misunderstanding than how we interpret passages that address the spirit world. When the Bible spoke of the spirit world, the modern reader had to realize that these accounts were adapted to the thinking of the ancient Near East.⁹⁹ Cartesian dualism stated that the immaterial nature of the spiritual world could not interact with the material world in the fashion depicted in the Bible. These accounts were ancient Israel's erroneous concepts of the spirit world.

This misconception arose in part from the incorrect translation of biblical terms. For instance, the Hebrew word *malach* could be translated "angel," but equally valid was the translation "messenger." To use the translation of "angel" misconstrued the nature of the spirit world.¹⁰⁰ In other words, the Bible was not teaching the existence of angels or their interaction with the material world but was instead recounting human activity with a divine mission.¹⁰¹

The second fault of modern interpreters was their lack of knowledge of the accommodated nature of Scripture. The Bible used adapted language to better communicate spiritual truths. Bekker stated, "The style

⁹⁷See Melchior Leydekker's review, *Dissertatio historico-theologica, de vulgato nuper cl. Bekkeri volumine, et Scripturarum autoritate ac veritate, pro Christiana religione apologetica* (Utrecht: Clerck, 1692); Jacobus Koelman, *Wederlegging van B. Bekkers Betoverde Weereldt* (Amsterdam: Johannes Boekholt, 1692); Petrus Hamer, *Voorlooper tot de volstreckte wederlegginge van het gene de heeren, Orchard, Daillom en Bekker* (Dordrecht: Cornelis Wilgaarts, 1692); Johannes Molinaeus, *De Betoverde Wereld van D. Balthazar Bekker... Onderzocht en Wederlegt* (Rotterdam: Barent Bos, 1692); Johannes van der Waeyen, *De betoverde wereld van D. Balthazar Bekker ondersogt en wederlegt* (Franeker: Strik and Horreus, 1693).

⁹⁸Balthazar Bekker, *De Betoverde Weereld* (Amsterdam: Daniel van den Dalen, 1691–1693), 2:54–55.

⁹⁹Bekker, *De Betoverde Weereld*, 2:143–179.

¹⁰⁰Bekker, *De Betoverde Weereld*, 2:43–52. The same can be said of the Hebrew word *satan*, which Bekker translated "opponent" or "enemy," not the proper name "Satan." Bekker, *De Betoverde Weereld*, 2:101–104.

¹⁰¹Bekker, *De Betoverde Weereld*, 1:85–90.

of great masters has been not only to leave people in errors for a time, but also to accommodate themselves to that language which in part arose out of such misunderstanding.”¹⁰² The Bible used the language of demon possession not based on facts but in conjunction with common notions, or more precisely, a lack of knowledge concerning mental illness. What modern medicine would accurately diagnose as mental illness, the biblical audience perceived as demon possession.¹⁰³ Rather than correcting ancient notions of the spirit world, the Holy Spirit bypassed these minor errors in order to better communicate the salvific message.

As disturbing as Bekker’s conclusions on the spirit world were to the orthodox, his hermeneutics were cause for greater concern. Andrew Fix argues that “Bekker’s Cartesian critique of the foundations of spirit belief was not nearly as dangerous to traditional religion as his exegetical methods were.”¹⁰⁴ Bekker’s use of accommodation in his exegesis was at the center of the debate within the Reformed church. Fix goes on to state, “It was to the outcome of this dispute, and not to the fate of Cartesianism in Holland, that Bekker’s arguments against spirits were ultimately tied.”¹⁰⁵ This assessment may be true to a degree, but it fails to understand the connection between Bekker’s Cartesianism and his understanding of accommodation. Fix associates Bekker’s accommodation with both Spinoza and Calvin, but he does not recognize the difference between their positions on the doctrine. I would argue that while Fix is correct to highlight Bekker’s exegesis, the hermeneutic that guided Bekker in his exegesis and use of accommodation was based on Cartesian dualism. Bekker did not share Calvin’s understanding of accommodation but continued the Cartesio-Cocceian accommodation of Wittichius, van Velthuysen, and Spinoza.

The influence of Bekker’s work would continue well into the eighteenth century. In particular, Semler would go on to release a new edition of Bekker’s *De Betoverde Weereld* and to affirm Bekker’s stance on the spirit world. The argument that demon possession was nothing more than the accommodated language of a misguided culture about

¹⁰² Bekker, *De Betoverde Weereld*, 2:287. Quoted in Andrew Fix, *Fallen Angels: Balthasar Bekker, Spirit Belief, and Confessionalism in the Seventeenth-Century Dutch Republic* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 1999), 63.

¹⁰³ Bekker, *De Betoverde Weereld*, 2:176.

¹⁰⁴ Fix, *Fallen Angels*, 10.

¹⁰⁵ Fix, *Fallen Angels*, 10.

mental illness became a common theme in eighteenth-century exegesis. However, for Semler and others, this was not due to a logical conclusion based on Cartesian dualism. Instead, we find a Spinozist accommodation or a call for a critical-historical method that had no need for such a philosophical basis. The Socinian core of Bekker's accommodation continued on into the eighteenth century, but the particularities of his Cartesianism dropped away.

CONCLUSION

Adhering to a Socinian doctrine in the seventeenth century was quite unattractive and detrimental to one's scholarship and vocational progress. Similarly, in the eighteenth century, association with Spinoza was considered tantamount to atheism or at the very least to pantheism. Though Socinianism, especially Socinian accommodation, continued beyond its namesake's lifetime into the seventeenth century, scholars were not free to admit their commonality with Socinus. As we have seen, Cartesio-Cocceians such as Wittichius, van Velthuysen, Wolzogen, Meyer, and Bekker advanced Socinian accommodation in principle but not in name. They shared with Socinus an understanding that the Holy Spirit accommodated not only to ancient Israel's limited capacity but also to their erroneous thinking.

In contrast with the Voetians and the Augustinian accommodation they shared with Calvin, the Cartesio-Cocceians combined a Socinian definition of accommodation with Cartesian philosophy. As Cartesians, they embraced a dualism that pitted spiritual truth against scientific truth. The Cartesio-Cocceian application of accommodation often dealt with matters of natural science, such as the Copernican theory, but also extended to doctrinal matters, such as the existence of angels and demons. The Cartesian variety of Socinian accommodation deemed errors within the biblical text an inevitable result of an ancient Near East writing. While rejecting the Cocceian reinterpretation, the Voetians maintained the importance of the doctrine by upholding Augustinian accommodation.

We have seen how Cartesio-Cocceian accommodation went through at least four major stages in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic. First, the Cartesio-Cocceian camp solidified their position on accommodation. Due to the significance of Socinian accommodation in Cocceian

hermeneutics, concerted effort was made to rally Cocceians around the Socinian doctrine. Though initially disagreeing with Wittichius, van Velthuysen was eventually persuaded of the doctrine, thus unifying the Cocceian camp against Augustinian accommodation.

Second, with the publication of Meyer's much-contested *Philosophia S. Scripturae Interpres*, Cartesio-Cocceians were put on the defense and forced to justify their hermeneutics. Allegations called into question the validity of exegesis based on philosophy. Rather than distancing themselves from these claims, however, Cartesio-Cocceians such as Wolzogen revealed their indebtedness to philosophical and Socinian hermeneutics while emphasizing the significance of Cartesian-Socinian accommodation. In addition, the controversy forced Maresius, previously a neutral, to side with the Voetians against Cartesio-Cocceian hermeneutics and especially Cartesio-Cocceian accommodation.

Third, Cartesio-Cocceian accommodation went through the wringer of Spinozist thought. As we have seen, both forms of Socinian accommodation resulted in similar interpretations, but Spinoza replaced the philosophical base of Cartesio-Cocceian accommodation with a historical method. Also, due to Spinoza's materialism, the boundaries of Socinian accommodation were stretched to new, expansive limits.

Finally, Cartesio-Cocceian accommodation culminated in Bekker's use of the doctrine. Advancing the most consistent expression of Cartesio-Cocceian accommodation, Bekker also symbolized the end of this particular variant of Socinian accommodation. The Cartesian dualism of the Cocceians would eventually be replaced by Spinoza's radicalization of the doctrine and, as we will see, by a Wolffian reinterpretation. We will witness all three forms of Socinian accommodation in the first half of the eighteenth century. While Cartesio-Cocceian accommodation had a very limited use, Spinozist accommodation increased in importance and underwent new developments throughout the accommodation debate.

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