



PROJECT MUSE®

Newton and the Netherlands

Jorink, Eric, Maas, Ad

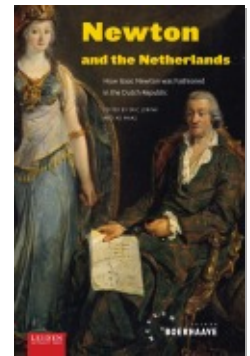
Published by Leiden University Press

Jorink, Eric & Maas, Ad.

Newton and the Netherlands: How Isaac Newton was Fashioned in the Dutch Republic.

Leiden University Press, 0.

Project MUSE., <https://muse.jhu.edu/>.



➔ For additional information about this book

<https://muse.jhu.edu/book/46347>

Anti-Newtonianism and Radical Enlightenment

JORDY GEERLINGS

In July 1745, a self-declared natural philosopher using the pseudonym 'Chevalier Veridicus Nassaviensis' was arrested in The Hague for publishing a blasphemous treatise called *La découverte de la vérité, et le monde détrompé à l'égard de la philosophie et de la religion*. It was arguably the most ferocious attack on Newtonian philosophy and organized religion to be published in the Dutch Republic during the eighteenth century. The author, who had also presented himself as Johann Konrad Franz von Hatzfeld (1685–after 1751), had taken the risk of personally presenting prominent men in the city with copies of this work and was therefore soon caught. All copies of the book that could be found were seized, although the archives are silent about the consignment that was to be taken across the German border.¹ Hatzfeld was taken to the Voorpoorte prison in The Hague, where he was subjected to questioning. Despite Hatzfeld's protests, the book was then found to be blasphemous by an assembly of theologians, and the *procureur general* (magistrate) thereupon sought to have Hatzfeld 'confined for life'. This was an unusually harsh punishment in the Dutch Republic, even for heterodox writers, and it was only when the already aged Hatzfeld started to display very believable signs of delusion that the authorities took pity on him and downgraded his sentence to a permanent banishment from the provinces of Holland, Zeeland and West Friesland.² On 24 January 1746, Hatzfeld was forced to witness the public burning of his books, and let go afterwards.³

The prosecution of Hatzfeld was more than simply the end point of a fascinating footnote in the history of anti-Newtonian thought.

On the contrary, his book caused a scandal within the Republic and internationally, even implicating the Halle-based theologian Christian Wolff (1679–1754), whose approbation of the work was prominently but uninvitedly displayed on the title page. Thus, the case of Hatzfeld raises questions about the significance of international connections between radicals who in varying degrees were opposed to Newtonianism, which may have been stronger than is usually supposed. The development of Hatzfeld's ideas within the context of these connections is equally of interest because it sheds more light on what drove the acceptance of Radical Enlightenment thought for individual intellectuals.

In the following, I will investigate how Hatzfeld built a Radical Enlightenment worldview on the rejection of Newtonian thought, while taking into account the role played by social factors, such as dissatisfaction with a lowly social standing, the difficulties of making one's way in networks of patronage and contact with specific intellectual circles. All of these factors contributed to what I would like to call 'radicalization', the intellectual growth process towards radical thought which as such has rarely been described with such social factors in mind. Also, I will examine how some of these same factors limited the influence of Hatzfeld's treatise on the discussion of Newtonian ideas in the Dutch Republic. Finally, instead of repeating the criticisms directed at Jonathan Israel for his excessive emphasis on the doctrinal unity of the Radical Enlightenment and his tendency to divorce intellectual history from its social context, I will attempt to take a methodological middle ground that takes seriously Israel's plea for an integrated history⁴ based on the understanding that Enlightenment thought evolved in a more or less dialectical fashion with social and political factors.

The London period, 1723–1725

Little is known about Hatzfeld's early life, other than that he came from a Lutheran background and that he trained as a court servant.⁵ Some time during the early 1720s, Hatzfeld moved to London, having served as a *valet de chambre* in various noble households. During his time in England he was not yet the radical critic of religion and political power he would later become. Instead, his ambition was to become a respected, indeed revered, 'natural philosopher'. Although we can't be sure if he continued to be a court servant during this time, it is

clear that he had sufficient leisure to instruct himself in the sciences. An important element of his learning process consisted of the experiments conducted by Elias Bessler (1680–1745), who claimed to have succeeded in building a machine capable of perpetual motion without external assistance, but had remained controversial in spite of the support of the Lord of Hesse Cassel. Hatzfeld believed he could outdo Bessler by building his own version of the machine, which was to be his first major scientific project, and in his opinion a ticket to an international reputation as a scientist.

By 1724, Hatzfeld had worked out plans for his wheel of perpetual motion and felt sufficiently confident to show them to the public. Desiring the presence of authoritative witnesses, he directed his attention to the Royal Society, where he intended to demonstrate the results he had achieved with his machine. To this end, he sent at least three letters to the society's secretary, along with technical drawings and explanations of how his wheel could sustain its independent movement.⁶ Yet in spite of his repeated efforts, Hatzfeld was never allowed to present his plans at the society. His letters show the bitterness he felt after having been rejected. He complained furiously about the society's unwillingness to recognize the evident merits of his plans for the machine. Adding to his bitterness was the fact that he had also been rejected by Newton, who had refused to receive him when he turned up at his doorstep. Hatzfeld fired off an angry letter to Newton, whose intellectual merits he doubted profoundly, in which he boasted to have already seen 'more light in these matters' than Newton had ever done.⁷ He later claimed that he had defeated Newton several times by confronting him in person with his errors concerning the nature of light and matter.⁸ This claim remains unsubstantiated; Newton was perhaps predictably unwilling to engage Hatzfeld in conversation.

As far as the rejection by the Royal Society is concerned, it is not possible to draw a conclusive explanation from existing evidence, but the fact that the prevailing opinion within the society rejected even the theoretical possibility of a *perpetuum mobile* certainly worked against Hatzfeld. An article in the *Philosophical Transactions* by Royal Society member John Theophilus Desaguliers (1683–1744) on the subject denied perpetual motion was possible and explained how the idea of it was based on false principles, while casting doubt on the veracity of Elias Bessler's claims about his wheel,⁹ and he was by no means the only one to state such views. Newton moreover presided over the session

of the Royal Society which considered and rejected one of Hatzfeld's letters,¹⁰ raising the possibility that Newton personally played a part in blocking Hatzfeld's attempts at intellectual recognition by the society. The ageing Newton was becoming weary of Hatzfeld and other quarrelsome continental philosophers. He confided in his correspondence that he wished to see the end of these speculations.¹¹ Thus, by the time Hatzfeld took up the project of Bessler, many key London scientists considered it outdated, even fantastical, making any recognition for the perpetual motion machine virtually impossible.

The Case of the Learned (1724)

The construction of a perpetual motion machine was not the only scientific pursuit in which Hatzfeld engaged during his time in London. He was also developing his own theory of the physical world, complete with metaphysical and religious underpinnings. In 1724, Hatzfeld went on the attack by publishing a treatise, in which he defended his *perpetuum mobile* project and offered his own worldview. Essentially, his treatise was a comprehensive rejection of Newtonian science and its implications in the fields of theology and metaphysics. Although most of his criticism was directed at Newton himself, Hatzfeld also attacked key Newtonians William Whiston (1667–1752) and Samuel Clarke (1675–1725), as well as writers who, he believed, had published similarly objectionable theories, such as the well-known doctor George Cheyne (1671–1743).

The foremost objection Hatzfeld formulated against Newtonian philosophy was that it constituted a metaphysical degradation to God and man alike, by making the natural world dependent on constant divine intervention in order to keep it working. Although Newton had been characteristically reserved about expressing himself about the role of God in his natural philosophy, and usually left it to others to spell out the metaphysical consequences of his theories, he had claimed that the preservation of motion in the universe and the maintenance of natural law and order depended constantly on the divine will.¹² In doing so, Hatzfeld believed, Newton and his supporters had reduced God to a lowly engineer, condemned to perpetually patch up an imperfectly constructed machine.¹³ Also, since Newton's God would only have created a natural world dependent on his constant control because this gave him pleasure, he would have been even more pleased to create and control the spiritual world, which would be an

even greater demonstration of divine power. Thus, Hatzfeld believed, the Newtonian God must logically extend his control of the natural world to the control of souls. Hatzfeld decried this thinking as 'predestination' because it deprived mankind of its ability to act freely, making it impossible for humans to wilfully act for good or evil.¹⁴

The core of Hatzfeld's criticisms is clearly reminiscent of Gottfried Leibniz (1646–1716), and specifically of Leibniz's correspondence with Samuel Clarke, which had been in circulation since 1715, and had been available in a French-English edition since 1717.¹⁵ For Hatzfeld, reading this debate was a formative experience, from which he derived categories of thought that would continue to guide him for the rest of his life. It informed him about the central problems concerning the metaphysical implications of natural science, and provided principles with which he could support his own worldview. Inspired by his reading, Hatzfeld included a chapter in his treatise which defended Leibniz against Clarke's charge that his idea of a metaphysically independent natural universe removed providence from the world, because it eliminated all divine influence on it. Hatzfeld, repeating Leibniz's own defence against the charge, attempted to explain that providence should be interpreted as God's ability to foresee what would be required for the maintenance of order in the world, and prearrange it accordingly. God had endowed matter and nature with all the necessary properties and laws for his creation to function without his intervention, according to his 'concept of pre-established order'.¹⁶

Hatzfeld's alternative view of nature was designed to counter the difficulties of Newtonianism by offering a comprehensively different account for everything Newton had attempted to explain. First of all, Hatzfeld believed that attraction and repulsion were inherent to matter, which necessarily existed in a plenum. He abhorred the supposition that a vacuum was possible in nature because it implied action at a distance between particles, which seemed to support the idea of direct divine intervention in the world. In this sense, Newtonian theory should be considered contrary to the Bible, which clearly said that God had created the world in six days, while Newton's belief in constant divine intervention seemed to imply that God had not completely finished his creation.¹⁷ Newton's aether, too, was a concept to be rejected. There was no evidence to prove its existence, and any substance of this kind would create resistance to the movement of the planets. However subtle it might be, aether would eventually cause

enough resistance to stop the movement of the planets. Yet, as the length of the years on Earth was showing no signs of decreasing, the planets had to be moving at the same speed they had always done, thus disproving the existence of the aetherial medium, or requiring the unacceptable supposition of another act of divine intervention.¹⁸

Regarding the motion of planets, Newton had erred in other ways as well. A solar system working according to the Newtonian notion of gravity, Hatzfeld thought, would necessarily collapse: if the sun's attractive force were greater than the resisting force of the planets, it would draw them into its centre and consume them. Newton and his followers, as well as George Cheyne with his *Philosophical Principles of Religion* (1715), had tried to counter this difficulty by positing that this was precisely one of the points at which divine intervention manifested itself.¹⁹ This, of course, was unacceptable to Hatzfeld, who believed that any configuration of gravitational force would produce a planetary disaster dishonourable to God.²⁰

Hatzfeld's alternative explanation for the motion of planets depended on the principle of fermentation, which by 'violently agitating' matter in the sun caused the sun to heat up, producing light but also agitating the 'particles' of the nearby planets in such a way as to provoke the contraction and extension of matter in the planets.²¹ This would cause them to exhale vapours which acted on the air, producing motion. For Hatzfeld, the fact that the planets closest to the sun moved faster than the others confirmed this thesis.²² The solar system clearly subsisted because of a constant exchange of matter driven by fermentation. How the planets could stay in orbit through fermentation remained unclear, however.

Fermentation as an account of movement in matter was nevertheless the centre point of Hatzfeld's physical worldview. Contrary to Newtonian physics, it allowed for an independent natural world that worked in perfect harmony, revealing the foresight of its creator. Newton, on the contrary, was a disaster for science as well as religion. His many mistaken presuppositions regarding the 'machine of the world' had hampered his experiments, leading to contradictory explanations of what these experiments proved, and dangerous ideas about how divine power influenced the workings of nature. Hatzfeld believed he had provided a powerful counterargument, and fully expected that it would bring down the Newtonian scientific edifice, along with its metaphysical implications.

Newton and his followers, however, appear to have ignored Hatzfeld's treatise entirely. In fact, *The Case of the Learned* seems to have gone largely unnoticed in contemporary scientific discussions, even though various London book auction catalogues carried the title from the 1720s until as late as 1791,²³ indicating that the book had found its way into a fair number of English libraries. My research has thus far discovered only one published response to it. This one response came not from the well-known circle of Newtonians, but from James Sedgwick, an apothecary operating from Stratford-le-Bow to the east of London, who knew of Hatzfeld's work and even engaged with it in his own writing. In 1725, Sedgwick referred to Hatzfeld in his *A New Treatise on Liquors*,²⁴ which was intended mainly to describe the effects of alcoholic and other liquids on the human body, as well as to advise on the treatment of the resulting problems. Hatzfeld and Sedgwick shared a tendency to combine the chemical language of fermentation, spirits and vapours with the traditional humoral analysis of the human body. For both of them, fermentation was the main principle on which the operation of living bodies, including human beings, depended. By fermenting victuals in the stomach, and through the fermentability of the blood, living beings were able to maintain their existence.²⁵

On Liquors in fact appropriated many of the ideas found in *The Case of the Learned*, sometimes without acknowledging its debt to Hatzfeld. This connection with Sedgwick and his use of humours as a tool to analyze the functioning of the human body indicate that the description of Hatzfeld as a *'Freidenker englischer Prägung, in der der Deismus entwickelt wurde'*²⁶ needs to be augmented by emphasizing Hatzfeld's connections to humoral theory, chemistry and, to some extent, materialism as described in Ann Thompson's work on the development of eighteenth-century materialism outside of the gentlemanly Royal Society.²⁷ Many of the natural philosophers Thompson describes, such as Thomas Willis (1621–1675), employed evolving types of humoral analysis, fermentation theory and chemical accounts of matter to explain the physical world as well as the nature of the soul and its connection to the human body. Hatzfeld's vague ideas about this connection, which described the soul as different from and above the body, but still susceptible to the influence of humours and fermentation,²⁸ were not unprecedented in contemporary English thought, especially insofar as it mixed the increasingly outdated humoralism with mechanist and materialist accounts of the human body.²⁹

Hatzfeld, then, may have been a vague, incoherent thinker, but he had read widely to stake out a modestly deist worldview which rejected direct divine intervention in the pre-established harmony of the physical world and the soul, but simultaneously upheld the veracity of revealed religion. He did not engage in the critiques of religion such as those offered by John Toland (1670–1722) or Anthony Collins (1676–1729), and as far as his views on the physical world were concerned, he bore a much closer resemblance to the moderate English materialists and Leibnizianism than to any form of early-eighteenth-century radical thought in England. Yet, in spite of his relatively moderate stance in religious matters, it is clear that Hatzfeld's intellectual agenda was singularly incompatible with that of the Royal Society or any other part of respectable mainstream academia in early-eighteenth-century London. His support of Leibniz after the conclusion of the calculus conflict, his espousal of the controversial perpetual motion project and his comprehensive rejection of Newtonianism along with its metaphysical underpinnings drove him to the fringes of contemporary scientific discourse in London. His ideas were similarly at odds with influential Latitudinarian positions, which relied on a synthesis of natural religion buttressed by a Newtonian universe, built on the constant agency of God as a guarantor of order and as a moral standard for a stable society.³⁰ In addition to his problematic intellectual identity, Hatzfeld's bid for fame was frustrated by his impatience with the 'gentlemanly' conventions according to which London's learned society functioned, as his repeated outbursts of anger showed.³¹ There would be no breakthrough for him in London, but Hatzfeld was nevertheless solidly convinced of his own merits as a scholar, and the experience of rejection, which bitterly resounded in his letters and his treatise, set him on the path towards ever more extreme convictions.

Radicalization and the anti-Newtonian miscalculation, 1741–1746

If little is known about his London period, the next stage of Hatzfeld's life is a mystery. At some point, he left London for the Continent, but it is not clear exactly when he did so, or why. Jonathan Israel claims that Hatzfeld left in 1725, after having been accused of espionage, and court papers in The Hague confirm that Hatzfeld took mass at the Walloon Church in The Hague in 1726.³² It was not until 1741 that Hatzfeld turned up again. He was now in Berlin to seek an audience with King Frederick of Prussia, but was apparently denied access to the royal court. We

can only speculate as to the circumstances of this refusal, but the stay in Berlin was not a complete disaster. Hatzfeld was able to obtain letters of recommendation to the well-known theologian Christian Wolff (1679–1754), who was to play a crucial part in the development of Hatzfeld's second, more radical work. Wolff himself had only recently returned to his post at Halle after an accusation of 'atheism' in 1721. His return to Halle in 1740 had largely been due to Frederick the Great's arrival to power,³³ which permitted a greater amount of latitude to reform-minded philosophers. However, in spite of royal backing and his accession to the rectorate at his university, Wolff was still engaged in a long-standing conflict with powerful Pietist factions, and even the charges of heterodoxy and atheism had not abated.

In fact, in cities like Halle, Leipzig, Gotha and Berlin, the term 'Wolffianism' had come to include a variety of heterodox views on religion and society. Students were thought to be especially susceptible to these views, and many prospective academics were asked to first explain their views on Wolffianism. The fears of Wolffian heterodoxy were not entirely baseless, as research by Günter Mühlpfordt and, more recently, Martin Mulsow has shown. According to Mühlpfordt, the 1740s saw the development of a '*radikaler Wolffianismus*', or 'left Wolffianism', which tended towards deism, the critique of religious traditions and even social reform.³⁴ Mulsow, in his research of learned networks in eighteenth-century Germany, has drawn on Mühlpfordt's work and located radical Wolffianism primarily among student groups, especially in Leipzig, Halle and Gotha, where Theodor Ludwig Lau, Johann Hein, Carl August Gebhardi and Christlob Mylius were among the most prominent and active radicals.

Some of these radicals gravitated around the Aletophilenkreis, founded by Wolffians Ernst Christoph Graf von Mantteuffel (1676–1749) and Johann Gustav Reinbeck (1683–1741) in Berlin during 1736. This circle, the hub of which seems to have been Johann Christoph Gottsched (1700–1766), tended towards a liberal Wolffian worldview, claiming to love truth (*aletophilia*) as a polemical stance against orthodox theology, but without presenting a clear-cut alternative worldview. Thus, the Aletophilenkreis included many conservative thinkers, while also becoming a meeting place for radical Wolffians, many of whom were university students. With Wolffian rationalist philosophy as their starting point, these radicals criticized superstition, supernaturalism, revealed religion and the veracity of the Bible, usually adopting deist

positions in the process.³⁵ Needless to say, they opposed Pietism as well as Lutheran orthodoxy, often publishing scandalous deist works such as *Der Vernünftige Freygeist* and *Betrachtungen über die Majestät Gottes* (both from 1743). It may therefore be said that Leipzig, where Gottsched was based, was a significant centre of Enlightenment critique of religion at the middle of the eighteenth century.³⁶ Hatzfeld was heading straight for this city and the surrounding region, and I submit that his subsequent encounter with important figures in the Aletophilenkreis was a key stage in the radicalization of his thought.

Although Hatzfeld seems to have had some success in finding support for his new book in Leipzig, he initially struggled in Halle, where he was repulsed by the Pietist and anti-Wolffian theologian Joachim Lange (1670–1744), who wished to have nothing to do with his work.³⁷ Hatzfeld also claimed to have been rejected in Berlin, for example by, amongst others, Leonhard Euler (1707–1783), who had insisted that Newton's ideas were '*pas touché*' by his plan for the new text.³⁸

It was not until 1742 that Hatzfeld truly achieved his breakthrough in Halle. In that year, Hatzfeld finally met Christian Wolff in that city, after having travelled there from Berlin carrying a letter of recommendation from as yet unknown sources. With surprising ease, Hatzfeld obtained Wolff's 'excellente Protection'³⁹ for the new book as well as some measure of access to Wolff's learned network. In fact, a recent dissertation by Johannes Bronisch has found fascinating evidence which proves that between 1742 and 1744, Hatzfeld stayed at the Leipzig residence of Von Manteuffel,⁴⁰ whose salon had become a meeting place for the city's intellectuals.

While no recommendation from Wolff has been found, Bronisch suspects that it is because of Wolff's connection to Manteuffel that Hatzfeld was able to gain this protection. Bronisch has interpreted Wolff's actions in favour of Hatzfeld as an attempt to create a 'flanking movement' in support of his own work against the metaphysical implications of Cartesianism and Newtonianism,⁴¹ which, owing to the language barrier, had not yet gained a foothold in the French-speaking world. Accepting Hatzfeld's proposal for a new book would have been a strategic choice by Wolff, engaging a highly ambitious supporter to say what he himself could not and gaining an ally in the continuing *Monadenstreit* against prominent supporters of Newtonian philosophy at the royal academy in Berlin, like Leonhard Euler. For Hatzfeld, Wolff brought the advantages of intellectual protection and even

material support. Through Wolff, he could finally rise to fame and recognition, as well as defeat the philosophy of his enemy Newton.

These hopes were soon dashed, however, when it became clear that Hatzfeld was not the ideal ally against Newtonian philosophy. Manteuffel had to ask Hatzfeld repeatedly to rework his harsh criticisms of Newton in a more ordered, systematic manner, but was proving unsuccessful in his attempts to moderate Hatzfeld's characteristic zeal.⁴² In 1744, Manteuffel even complained to Wolff that Hatzfeld was 'incurable'.⁴³ By this time, Manteuffel's support for Hatzfeld was faltering, and he was relieved to see Hatzfeld leave on foot for The Hague with the intention of proceeding to London, after having spent a brief period at court in Gotha.⁴⁴ It is not clear what personally motivated Hatzfeld to return to London, but it is possible that the tensions with Manteuffel brought about his departure. Hatzfeld does not seem to have severed his ties to Wolff, nor had he abandoned the project of reworking and expanding his treatise of natural philosophy. He had resolved to once again publish his ideas on these issues, this time together with his newly acquired views on government and religion.

Placing the radical Hatzfeld

In 1745, having reached The Hague, and having ostensibly been prevented by illness and bad weather from moving on to London, Hatzfeld decided to publish his treatise in The Hague.⁴⁵ The documentary evidence in The Hague does not allow a careful reconstruction of how much time he spent in the city, or where exactly he lived, but the records do show that Hatzfeld had considerable difficulties in finding a printer and bookseller willing to publish the treatise. In the end, Pierre d'Hondt, a bookseller who later claimed to not to read French, agreed to Hatzfeld's request. However, he did so only after he had been assured that the text did not violate any civil or religious laws, and that Hatzfeld would take full responsibility for his text. The treatise, moreover, was to be published at Hatzfeld's own expense, presumably paid out of his earnings from Leipzig.

Interestingly, the proofs were read by professor of mathematics and fortifications Pierre Antoine de Saint-Hilaire (dates unknown) in The Hague, who was connected with local Freemasons, and later became prominent in the Loge de Juste.⁴⁶ This would suggest that Hatzfeld himself had connections with Masonic circles in The Hague, some of which have been identified as centres of radical thought,⁴⁷ and could

thus have given their support to the publication process. Men like Jean Rousset de Missy (1686–1762) and others involved in the posthumous publication of Spinoza's works immediately spring to mind as likely contacts in The Hague. The idea that Hatzfeld made such connections is made more likely by the fact that Hatzfeld mentioned Lambert Ignace Douxfils, a Commissioner of the Post in Brussels and important colporteur of books for the pre-Masonic group called the Knights of Jubilation, on his list of subscribers for *La découverte*.⁴⁸ However, the evidence is too scarce to establish anything more than the likelihood that Hatzfeld did meet with freemasons and radicals in The Hague, possibly even as early as 1726 upon his return from London.

La découverte, conversely, is a more solid basis on which to identify Hatzfeld as a radical, because the persecution of the book was due to its highly unorthodox views on religion, the Church and the princely governments of Europe. Hatzfeld now challenged the historical veracity of the Bible, denounced the oppressive superstition imposed by the priests, denied the holiness of Christ and the existence of devils, and rejected the possibility of miracles. Clearly, Hatzfeld's ideas, which must have originated in Leipzig, had begun to resemble those of the radical Spinozists in the Dutch Republic who continued to worry religious authorities. However, in spite of this ideological convergence, Hatzfeld never abandoned his staunchly deist belief in a God metaphysically distinct from and above Creation and continued to abhor any worldview that confused the immaterial divine with nature.⁴⁹

The text also included a meritocratic political agenda with a strongly republican thrust. Even though this did not prevent him from seeking princely support whenever he could, Hatzfeld found that the princes of Europe and their selfish lackeys were responsible for misgovernment and that they had prevented the rise to influence of more meritorious men, as Hatzfeld believed himself to be. Moreover, governments must not only be more meritocratic, but must also act in the interest of the people from which any government derives its mandate. England and the Dutch Republic were examples of states that embraced political liberty, but they too were in danger if they did not contain the threat of priestly deception and the abuse of secular authority.⁵⁰

La découverte, therefore, contained many radical views against which the authorities in The Hague would necessarily take offense. However, the treatise also conveyed other messages. The pseudonym Hatzfeld employed, for example, offers some interesting clues as to his

ideological motivations, the self-styling strategies he employed and even his social background. In calling himself the 'Chevalier Veridicus Nassaviensis', he referred to his Nassau origins, but it seems unlikely that he was simultaneously displaying further political loyalties to such parties as the House of Orange, about which he would very likely have been quite vocal. Similarly, the use of the word 'chevalier' would suggest that Hatzfeld was of noble descent, but the hearings conducted at the Voorpoorte prison revealed that Hatzfeld was in fact of common descent, and that his real name was 'Harsveld'.

Clearly, Hatzfeld had changed his surname and added his middle names,⁵¹ quite possibly to associate himself with the famous and powerful aristocratic family of Hatzfeld, in an effort to give himself a more noble appearance. His native Dillenburg was home to a branch of this family, and there was a tendency there to change the surnames of family branches that no longer had noble status by giving them a slightly different spelling.⁵² 'Hatzfeld' could thus easily become 'Harsfeld', making it likely that Hatzfeld attempted to cover up his real name in order to claim this status, even though there may well have been no family connection based on which he could legitimately do so. Nevertheless, the use of the name Hatzfeld seems to have worked a number of times throughout his life, and some of the later commentators of *La découverte* still believed Hatzfeld to be a 'noble Saxon'.⁵³

In using this pseudonym, Hatzfeld was clearly also claiming association with the Aletophilen, who described themselves with great emphasis as 'lovers of truth'. The title of his treatise, his pseudonym 'Veridicus' and his insistence on his 'love of truth' to the authorities in The Hague⁵⁴ all suggest that he counted himself among the *Aletophilen*, and that this group must have exercised a considerable measure of influence on Hatzfeld's intellectual development towards radicalism. This would explain how Hatzfeld acquired the ideas that permitted him to form his radical critique of the European clergy, the veracity of the Bible and the existence of the devil, none of which naturally derived from the moderate deist natural philosophy of the London period which still underpinned *La découverte*. However, the journalists and theologians who commented on Hatzfeld's book generally ignored the deeper implications of its title, limiting their coverage of it to its 'blasphemous' content and the claimed connection with Christian Wolff, whose approbation of *La découverte* appeared on its title page, no doubt to the surprise of many.

In Halle, Wolff was shocked to find his name associated with such a scandalous treatise. He quickly denied any support for Hatzfeld's ideas, explaining that Hatzfeld had come to him seeking subscriptions for a book on Cartesian and Newtonian philosophy.⁵⁵ Wolff claimed to have supported these plans only out of his desire to suppress controversy, implying that Hatzfeld had lied about his intentions.⁵⁶ Several other publications by Wolff in the *Bibliothèque germanique*, the *Acta eruditorum*, and the *Bibliothèque raisonnée* repeated these claims. Wolff was very much concerned about his own reputation, quoting extensively from his own published work to prove his philosophical orthodoxy and dissociate his views from Hatzfeld's.

Johannes Bronisch describes how Wolff activated his network of correspondents to receive information on Hatzfeld's book, which he had not seen himself, and to disseminate his rejection of it.⁵⁷ Von Mantuffel seems to have been most prominent in the effort to control the damage of what Bronisch has aptly called the 'anti-Newtonian miscalculation',⁵⁸ but others aided in these efforts as well. Samuel Koenig (1712–1757), a prominent mathematician at the academy in Berlin, who had experienced a personal confrontation with Hatzfeld there, helped Wolff publish a French text against Hatzfeld in the *Bibliothèque raisonnée*,⁵⁹ which had already published a damning review of the book, albeit without judging Wolff's involvement.⁶⁰ Also, Pierre Moreau de Maupertuis included Wolff's self-defence from the *Acta eruditorum* in his *Bibliothèque germanique*.⁶¹ In the next few years, the indignation at Hatzfeld's book extended as far from The Hague as Florence.⁶² It also became known in Poland, whereas Jan Poszakowski (1684–1757), a Jesuit abbot from Nieswicz closely allied to the influential Zaluski noble family, announced a full refutation of Hatzfeld's text, which also claimed '*le livre de M Hatzfeld est aussi écrit en allemand*'.⁶³ However, no translation has been found, and Poszakowski's announced refutation has appeared only in a nineteenth-century bibliography of Jesuit writings and has not been seen since.⁶⁴

From the many theological responses to his book it is clear that Hatzfeld quickly acquired international infamy as a 'deist', '*freygeist*' (freethinker) and even a '*cerveau brûlé*' (hothead). Contemporary commentators were especially indignant about the Hatzfeld's blasphemous ideas on religion, which in their perception completely overshadowed his metaphysical and physical arguments. Although the *Bibliothèque raisonnée* believed he had been '*quelquefois assez*

sage avec Wolff and Leibniz,⁶⁵ all other comments on the book were scathing. In the eyes of Johann Georg Meusel (1743–1820), Hatzfeld had joined the ranks of Simon Tissot de Patot, Pierre Bayle, Georg Schade and Carl August Gebhardi, who had been branded as ‘deists’,⁶⁶ and the German theologian Johann von Mosheim (1693–1755) mentioned him in the same breath with Voltaire and Lieutenant La Serre,⁶⁷ the free-thinker who was hanged for espionage during the siege of Maastricht in 1748. Especially for German-speaking intellectuals, Hatzfeld had become one of the most outrageous examples of irreligiosity in recent times.

The scandalous nature of his treatise also put Hatzfeld well beyond the intellectual agenda of moderate Dutch thinkers critical of Newtonianism and its theological implications. The attempt to enlist the support of Willem Jacob ’s Gravesande (1688–1742),⁶⁸ who became increasingly critical of Newtonian physico-theology towards the end of his life, had been unsuccessful. Even the conflicts with the Royal Society about the *vis viva* and the Leibniz-Newton controversy – in which, according to Jonathan Israel, Dutch intellectuals like ’s Gravesande and Petrus van Musschenbroek (1692–1761) crucially diverged from Newtonianism on such issues as the externality of motion to



Fig. 1: Book burning, probably of Hatzfeld's book.

matter⁶⁹ – did not create sufficient conditions for an ideological convergence between Hatzfeld and Dutch anti-Newtonians. Moreover, as Michiel Wielema has demonstrated, the influence of Leibnizian-Wolffian philosophy on Dutch thought did not begin to take effect until the later decades of the eighteenth century, as a result of Dutch translations of Leibniz and Wolff's works.⁷⁰ Ideologically speaking, therefore, Hatzfeld seems to have been very much distinct and separate from any segment of the Dutch intellectual landscape, in spite of his likely connections with radical thinkers in The Hague. No overt support was forthcoming, and Hatzfeld disappeared into obscurity.

Conclusion: The origins of radicalism

As it evolved, Hatzfeld's worldview intersected with a number of contemporary intellectual developments, including the Leibnizian-Wolffian struggle against Newtonianism and the complex varieties of Wolffian deism it generated,⁷¹ as well as replacement of humoral accounts of the human body with theories drawn from chemistry and materialist philosophy. Out of contemporary ideas, Hatzfeld created a highly peculiar amalgam of Leibnizian metaphysics, mechanist materialism, fermentation theory and deism, which although already heterodox, did not reveal any necessary tendency towards radicalism on the level of political and religious convictions. Rather than his relatively modest natural philosophy, it was his frustrated ambition, his status anxiety and his contacts with German freethinking circles and perhaps even his impatience with contemporary academic mores that were the driving forces behind his movement towards the radical critique of Christianity and absolutist government in Europe.

The case of Hatzfeld thus shows how strongly social factors could impact on the persuasive force of Radical Enlightenment ideas on individual readers. The communication of Radical Enlightenment ideas was successful not merely because of the transmission of radical texts or the semantic strength of radical positions in Enlightenment debates: concerns about status, ambitions, frustrations and contact with freethinking groups must have contributed in a highly significant way to the acceptance of these ideas. Radicals criticized the institutions of the *ancien régime* for personal as well as intellectual reasons, and analyzed its imperfections according to their perception of their own dreams and interests. Examining radicalization as it occurred at the individual level may therefore be a useful contribution to our

understanding of how the radical strain of the Enlightenment spread, and how those drawn to these ideas shaped their intellectual identities within a complex of social pressures, fears and hopes. Intellectual history should also be a history of intellectuals.

Notes

- 1 Algemeen Rijksarchief, Hof van Holland, MS 5863 'Sententie 24 januari 1746'.
- 2 Algemeen Rijksarchief, Hof van Holland, MS 5454, 'Eysch van den Avocaat Ficaal en Procureur', 24 januari 1746.
- 3 Ibidem.
- 4 Jonathan Israel, *Enlightenment contested: philosophy, modernity and the emancipation of man, 1670–1752* (Oxford 2006), p. 23.
- 5 Algemeen Rijksarchief, Hof van Holland, MS 5454.
- 6 Royal Society Archives, ELH H3 124–126.
- 7 H.W. Turnbull, A. R. Hall and L. Tilling (eds), *The correspondence of Isaac Newton*, 7 vols. (Cambridge 1959–1977), vol 7, nr. 1418.
- 8 J.C.F. von Hatzfeld, *The case of the learned, represented according to the merit of the ill progress hitherto made in the arts and sciences, chiefly in philosophy, of which the author gives an entirely new system* (London 1724), pp. 82–83.
- 9 *Philosophical transactions, giving some account of the present undertaking, studies and labours of the ingenious in many considerable parts of the world* (1720–1721), vol. 31, pp. 234–239, esp. p. 234.
- 10 R. Westfall, *Never at rest: a biography of sir Isaac Newton* (Cambridge 1980), p. 811.
- 11 Ibidem, p. 811.
- 12 B.J. Teeter Dobbs and M.C. Jacob, *Newton and the culture of Newtonianism* (New York 1995), p. 14.
- 13 Hatzfeld, *Case of the learned* (note 8), p. 25.
- 14 Ibidem, p. 20.
- 15 *A collection of papers which passed between the late learned Mr Leibnitz and Dr Clarke in the years 1715 and 1716 relating to the principles of philosophy and religion* (London 1717), pp. 1–46.
- 16 Hatzfeld, *Case of the learned* (note 8), p. 31.
- 17 Ibidem, p. 39.
- 18 Ibidem, p. 111.
- 19 G. Cheyne, *Philosophical principles of religion* (London 1715), p. 187.
- 20 Hatzfeld, *Case of the learned* (note 8) p. 107.
- 21 Ibidem, p. 125.
- 22 Ibidem, p. 127.

- 23 *A catalogue of books, comprehending many libraries, particularly that of Robert Butler Esq, and a general officer, lately deceased, also the valuable articles at the Pinelli Sale, intended for abroad* (London 1791), p. 264. An ECCO search yields thirteen catalogues mentioning *The case of the learned*.
- 24 James Sedgwick, *A new treatise on liquors: wherein the use and abuse of wine, malt-drinks and water, &c. are particularly consider'd, in many diseases, constitutions and ages* (London 1725).
- 25 *Ibidem*, p. 160.
- 26 E. Tortarolo, 'Ein Opfer der Zensur in Den Haag: Johann Conrad von Hatzfeld,' in: U.J. Schneider (ed.), *Kultur der Kommunikation* (Wiesbaden 2005), pp. 229–240, on 239.
- 27 A. Thompson, *Bodies of thought: science, religion, and the soul in the early Enlightenment* (Oxford 2008).
- 28 Hatzfeld, *Case of the learned* (note 6), p. 134.
- 29 N. Arikha, *Bodies and tempers: a history of the humours* (London 2007), pp. 173–199.
- 30 M.C. Jacob, *The Newtonians and the English Revolution, 1689–1720* (Ithaca, London 1976).
- 31 S. Shapin, *A social history of truth: civility and science in seventeenth-century England* (Chicago 1994).
- 32 Algemeen Rijksarchief, Hof van Holland, MS 5454, 'Eysch van den Avocaat Ficaal en Procureur', 24 januari 1746.
- 33 J. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: philosophy and the making of modernity* (Oxford 2001), p. 557.
- 34 G. Mühlpfordt, 'Radikaler Wolffianismus: Zur Differenzierung und Wirkung der Wolffschen Schule ab 1735', in: W. Schneiders (ed.), *Christian Wolff 1679–1754: Interpretationen zu seiner Philosophie und deren Wirkung* (Hamburg 1979), pp. 237–253, on 242.
- 35 M. Mulsow, *Freigeister im Gottsched-Kreis: Wolffianismus, studentische Aktivitäten und Religionskritik in Leipzig 1740–1745* (Berlin 2007), p. 38.
- 36 *Ibidem*, p. 11.
- 37 J. Bronisch, *Der Mäzen der Aufklärung: Ernst Christoph von Manteuffel und das Netzwerk des Wolffianismus* (Berlin 2010), pp. 325–326.
- 38 J.C.F. Hatzfeld, *La découverte de la vérité et le monde détrompé à l'égard de la philosophie et de la religion*, (The Hague 1745), p. 15.
- 39 *Ibidem*, p. 50.
- 40 Bronisch, *Der Mäzen der Aufklärung* (note 37), p. 327.
- 41 *Ibidem*, p. 326.
- 42 *Ibidem*, p. 328.
- 43 *Ibidem*, p. 330.
- 44 *Ibidem*, p. 333.
- 45 Hatzfeld, *La découverte* (note 38), p. lxvi.

- 46 M. Davies, 'The Grand Lodge of Adoption, La Loge de Juste 1751, a short-lived experiment in mixed Freemasonry or a victim of elegant exploitation?', in: A. Heidle and J. Snoek, (eds), *Women's agency and rituals in mixed and female masonic orders* (Leiden 2008), pp. 51–76, on 54.
- 47 See M.C. Jacob, *The radical Enlightenment: pantheists, freemasons and republicans* (London 1981).
- 48 Ibidem, p. 172; Hatzfeld, *La découverte* (note 38), p. cxi.
- 49 Hatzfeld, *La découverte* (note 38), pp. 91 and 167–168.
- 50 For more on Hatzfeld's political views, see Israel, *Enlightenment contested* (note 4), pp. 338–340.
- 51 *Nederlandsch gedenkboek of Europische Mercurius* 57 (1746), pp. 114–116. This periodical was aware of the proceedings of Hatzfeld's trial and the manner in which Hatzfeld had answered the questions put to him by his interrogators. See also Algemeen Rijksarchief, Hof van Holland MS 5454/13/1.
- 52 L. Hatzfeld, 'G. Hatzfeld von Dillenburg: Genesis einer nassauischen Beamtenfamilie', *Nassauische Annalen* 101 (1990), pp. 59–89, on 81.
- 53 H. de Gregoire, *Histoire des sectes religieuses* (Paris 1845), p. 266.
- 54 Algemeen Rijksarchief, Hof van Holland MS 5454.1; Israel, *Enlightenment contested* (note 4), p. 338.
- 55 *Nova acta eruditorum, mensis novembris* (Leipzig 1746), pp. 669–672, on 670.
- 56 *Acta Historico-Ecclesiastica, oder gesammlete Nachrichten von den neuesten Kirchengeschichten* 73 (Weimar 1749), pp. 447–448.
- 57 Bronisch, *Der Mäzen der Aufklärung* (note 37), p. 319.
- 58 Ibidem, p. 325.
- 59 *Bibliothèque raisonnée, des ouvrages des savans de l'Europe* 38–1 (1747), pp. 235–239.
- 60 Ibidem, 36 (1746), pp. 368–397.
- 61 *Nouvelle bibliothèque germanique ou histoire littéraire* (July–September 1746), pp. 189–201.
- 62 *Novelle letterarie pubblicate in Firenze* 7 (1747), pp. 731–733.
- 63 *Bibliothèque anuelle et universelle* 3 (1753), pp. 177–178.
- 64 P. Augustin and L. de Backer, *Bibliothèque des écrivains de la Compagnie de Jesus*, 4 vols (Liège 1858), vol. 4, p. 596. The title of Poszakowski's refutation is *Censura libri ab Hatzfeldo perversae homine hoc titulo divulgati* La découverte de la vérité et le monde detrompé a l'égard de la philosophie et de la religion (place and date of publication unknown).
- 65 *Bibliothèque raisonnée des ouvrages des sçavans de l'Europe* 36 (1746), pp. 368–397, on 369.
- 66 J.G. Meusel, *Historische Literatur für das Jahr 1784* (Erlangen 1784), pp. 293 and 296.
- 67 J.L. von Mosheim and G. Winkler, *Vorlesungen über den Beweis der*

Wahrheit und Göttlichkeit der christlichen Religion: Vorlesungen über den zweiter Theil (Dresden 1784), pp. 334–336.

68 Israel, *Enlightenment contested* (note 4), p. 214.

69 *Ibidem*, p. 220.

70 M. Wielema, *Ketters en verlichters: de invloed van het Spinozisme en Wolffianisme op de Verlichting in gereformeerd Nederland* (Amsterdam 1999), pp. 121–131.

71 Israel, *Radical Enlightenment* (note 33), pp. 552–558.