

Hemsterhuis and Antiquity -
How Greek was he, this Frisian Socrates?*

(Some preliminary remarks)

Summary

It is customary to consider the philosophy of Frans Hemsterhuis mainly retrospectively, i.e. by taking as a starting point his undeniable impact on German philosophy and the history of ideas in Germany during the last part of the 18th century and after. It is, however, worth while to study his philosophical ideas in their own right. This means, among other things, taking seriously his own claim that he accepts only two philosophers as his great examples, Newton and Socrates. This paper concentrates on the latter, i.e. it is an investigation to show in some detail what his Greek heritage really means. After some general, more or less critical remarks on the methodological difficulties of tracing 'influences' (which may very well be just parallels or analogies), the author of this paper considers some examples of Hemsterhuis' familiarity with ancient literature, using them as a steppingstone to some remarks on his ideas on art; it will be suggested that, great as the differences are, Hemsterhuis' conceptions on 'mimesis' have something in common with Plato's. Next his relationship with Plato is considered more in general. Finally - but perhaps most important - his 'Socratism' is briefly discussed.

The working hypothesis of the paper will be sufficiently corroborated as to permit the conclusion that further investigations are necessary.

Introduction

In the year 1990 Dutch philosophy will have some reason to look backwards: it will be the bicentennial of Hemsterhuis' death and Coornhert died two hundred years earlier. Frans Hemsterhuis (1721-1790) and Dirck V. Coornhert (1522-1590) have much in common, though there are interesting differences as well. First, both should be regarded as important Dutch philosophers. Coornhert possibly is the greater man (but he wrote Dutch), Hemsterhuis the more influential in the history of ideas (he wrote French). Coornhert was a self-made man in learning, with late Latin and no Greek; Hemsterhuis was the son of a famous professor of Greek (and other matters, philosophy and mathematics too in his early career) and the son

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disposed of a firm knowledge of both ancient languages and of several others; only his German was limited. Both these philosophers are connected with Socratism, although Coornhert only by modern scholarship, whereas Hemsterhuis was already regarded as the 'Batavian Socrates' by his contemporaries, including himself. For both the perfectibility of man was a serious issue (perfectism).

Coornhert and Hemsterhuis have both often been regarded as outstanding representatives of a humanistic attitude - rightly so, I believe. They had in common also an active interest in the unhappy conditions of prisoners in goal; here, however, there is also a marked contrast: Coornhert became a prisoner himself during the horrid period of the religious wars; Hemsterhuis was an official in charge of poor uneducated criminals. (See Meyboom III 130ff.). In his effort to improve their situation, we can see a link with the principle of perfectibility, as I hope to show on a later occasion. Whether this could be said of Coornhert too, is also beyond the scope of this paper.

One further remark. It is a curious fact that both Coornhert and Hemsterhuis were gifted artistically. To the former we owe quite a few engravings, to the latter some drawings, sometimes only surviving in engravings by others.¹

The concept of perfectibility implies a noticeable deviation from what counted - rightly or wrongly - as a Christian dogma: as a consequence of the original sin, man is deemed to be utterly unable to perfect himself by his own means and efforts. In this matter Coornhert, who remained a Christian, most probably even a Roman Catholic, is certainly very near to Pelagianism, the doctrine of Saint Augustin's British contemporary Pelagius, who rejected the doom of mankind as a consequence of an original sin and was in due course, through the influence of the African Saint, condemned for his doctrine by the church.² Coornhert lived in a period in which atheism was still hardly possible; two hundred years later there were quite a few *philosophes*, who professed a materialistic atheism. Hemsterhuis attacked this and held many positions that were in tune with Christianity, such as the immortality of the soul and the existence of a divine Creator, but he was not a Christian: he thought of himself as a born Greek, he was a Platonist. It is one of the aims of this paper to go somewhat deeper into the questions, whether this claim is correct, and if so in what sense he may be regarded a Platonist; and, more in general, how his relationship to Antiquity and ancient philosophy is to be seen.

All kinds of Platonism were a constant feature of Western culture through the ages and they were most probably of considerable importance for the formation of Hemsterhuis' major ideas. On the other hand, when Moenkemeyer refers repeatedly to Neoplatonic features in the work of Hemsterhuis, without giving any support for the existence of these features in the form of a concrete reference to a Neoplatonic

¹ In an exhibition of the Koninklijk Penningenkabinet (Royal Numismatic Collection) in Leiden (1988) one could see a rather elegant medal, coined after a design by Hemsterhuis in commemoration of the Battle at Dogger Bank (1781); it shows a nearly manierist Victory. (Hemsterhuis was not indicated at the exhibition.)

² For Coornhert's Pelagianism see e.g. Fresco (1981) and (1986).

text, he is likely to be wrong (or at least rash).³ Such Hemsterhusian conceptions can probably nearly always be 'explained' by his familiarity with Plato himself. But *vide infra*; of course only a detailed study, or rather the laborious study of details, can give us sufficiently precise knowledge of any direct relationship. This is one of the reasons why this modest paper is presented as 'preliminary remarks', being the result of a work still in progress. Another reason is the consideration that the discoveries (to be) made in this field certainly do not offer a complete answer to the question of what Hemsterhuis' transformations of Platonic philosophy really mean, and that is the more important question. A third reason is that in this attempt I limit myself to such evidence as is available without consulting unpublished material.

A Prospective Approach

As Hammacher points out, Hemsterhuis' philosophy has mainly been interpreted retrospectively,⁴ i.e. by taking as a starting point its influence on his many German admirers; this influence on his contemporaries and on those who came immediately after him in the first period of German Romanticism was considerable and, from the point of view of the history of ideas, it is certainly interesting enough. But, on the other hand, this retrospective approach, concentrating on the way his philosophical thought has been 'recepted', is likely to lead to a onesided or even incorrect interpretation of this thought. Philosophically speaking, his ideas should be interpreted and appreciated in their own right. We should look not to their 'significance' but rather to their 'meaning' (both in the sense of Hirsch Jr.).⁵

Does this imply that we should just be 'close readers' of his own words, his own writings? Partly so, but not quite. The highdays of New Criticism in the theory of literature are over and Hirsch already did not accept its dogmas. In principle, it is a good conception, but it does not work.

³ See Moenkemeyer *paene passim*, e.g. p. 51. With sweeping rhetoric Flam defends the thesis that Hemsterhuis was depending on the Neoplatonist Proclus, though but for one point he has no or demonstrably invalid arguments. Vieillard-Baron (p. 596), on the other hand, holds that Hemsterhuis is a Platonist, not a Neoplatonist. - But of course it depends on what one wishes to mean by 'Neoplatonism', whether one limits the term to (later) Antiquity or not. Here I prefer the limited use.

⁴ See Hammacher (1971), p. 9. In Hammacher (1983) the approach is different, as the title indicates, but he remains true to his first position (p. 110).

⁵ E.D. Hirsch Jr., *Validity in Interpretation*, New Haven and London, 1967. For the same reason I leave out of my account Diderot's critical remarks, interesting as they are, but mainly interesting for those who want to study the philosophy of Diderot rather than the philosophy of Hemsterhuis. I think Brini Savarelli saw this clearly.

A 'prospective' approach seems to be a necessary complement. I mean this: If we want to understand what Hemsterhuis (or any other writer, philosopher or not) means, we should have knowledge, as precise as possible, of the cultural situation in which he is writing. This implies that we must also look for influences he experienced. Only thus can we hope to understand what he really means. This is all the more true in the case of Hemsterhuis, the man who tells us explicitly that he is firmly attached to Ancient Greek roots.

There are, however, several difficulties to surmount. First of all, we must realise that 'influences' never tell the whole story. If a philosopher's work is worth studying, he must have *transformed* the material handed over to him. (Cf. our remark on Platonic influence on Hemsterhuis above.) Otherwise his work would be just epigonistic. This implies that such a 'prospective' approach can only be auxiliary to a correct understanding, no more than that, and ... no less than that.

In the second place, it is a difficult task, in this sense that one may find striking analogies, striking resemblances, without proving anything. Thus, for instance, an interesting comparison has been made between conceptions of Locke's and of Hemsterhuis', but the natural conclusion that the latter was influenced by the former has been successfully challenged. It seemed to be wiser to draw the more prudent conclusion of a mainly or even entirely *indirect* influence through the intermediation of French sensualism, as represented by Helvétius and Condillac; but even this option has been doubted. Personally I am convinced that Hemsterhuis is no sensualist at all, probably never was. It is just his vocabulary which is misleading, but he stresses himself that it has to be taken metaphorically.⁶

Hemsterhuis has much in common with Shaftesbury; the latter's writings were in Hemsterhuis' library, but since there seems to be no evidence that he read them, Brummel for one did not use this presence as a proof of (direct) influence.⁷ Even when we know that Hemsterhuis read and re-read the works of some of his predecessors, and even when he is himself claiming to have been inspired by them, we should not be rash in drawing conclusions. Plato is, of course, a conspicuous example. Even here intermediate sources may be important, more important than Hemsterhuis realizes himself. His appeal to a Socratic heritage may be a somewhat different and more promising matter. In a way, it may seem even more difficult; but I believe that, in fact, this is not the case. During Hemsterhuis' lifetime the famous Socratic problem had not yet been invented or discovered. (The first book that seems to have asked systematically: What can we know about the historical Socrates?, probably was the one by Stapfer,⁸ but this cannot have had any importance for Hemsterhuis, because it was published only in 1786, a few years

⁶ In 1779 he writes to Diotima: "I confess that the word *organe* is somewhat too much in the figurative style." (Brummel 241)

⁷ See Brummel, p. 84 and p. 230.

⁸ According to Boehm, p. 305ff. I never saw the book myself and I doubt very much whether others who mention it, with the exception of Boehm and A. Patzer, did. - For the problem of the historical Socrates see Fresco (1983).

before his death and after he had finished nearly all his writings and, more important still, many years after he had definitely formed his philosophical ideas. Besides, it is most unlikely that he knew about this booklet by a very young Swiss author.)

After centuries of eclipse Socrates had again become an important and often inspiring figure in (the history of) philosophy.⁹ We can see this in Brucker, who wrote the major work on the history of philosophy in the eighteenth century. There was a great, surprisingly diverse response, mostly positive and creative as in Diderot,¹⁰ in Hamann and in Eberhard amongst others, but sometimes negative. *De Socrate iuste damnato*¹¹ dates not only from Antiquity, but also from the century of Hemsterhuis: Irving Stone's ideas are less new than he and probably most of his readers believe. (Diderot, Hamann and Eberhard were amongst those whom Hemsterhuis met personally. It is interesting to note that Nozeman and Hofstede were also among Hemsterhuis' personal acquaintances.)¹² On a later occasion I hope to show in greater detail that Hemsterhuis' 'Socratism' was entirely his own, viz. different from that of his contemporaries and friends.

One remark should find its place here: Hemsterhuis most of the time clearly distinguishes between Socrates and Plato, a distinction which was rarely made in his time - and, I am afraid, I have to add - even in our time.

A Greek Inheritance

The intimate affinity Hemsterhuis felt with Antiquity, especially with Socrates and Plato, is always taken for granted. Modern scholars mention it as a matter of course, but do not pay much attention to it. The general opinion is that, notwithstanding his Hellenism, he is first of all a child of his own century and heir to more recent traditions. This may be true, *is* true, but the problem of how true it is deserves closer scrutiny.

In the first place, being a child of his own age included a new and somewhat different admiration for Antiquity. At that time Greece and Greek culture were being rediscovered: no longer were Rome and Latin literature the main interest. Tiberius, Frans Hemsterhuis' father, had a leading part in awakening this renewed interest for Greece, its civilization and its literature. When Frans Hemsterhuis is praising the Greek language for its unique capacity of rendering every shade of

⁹ Cf. Boehm and Trousson.

¹⁰ Especially in his *Salon* of 1767, but see Trousson for more information.

¹¹ See Montuori.

¹² For Nozeman, Hofstede and Eberhard see Fresco (1988).

meaning (*Lettre sur les désirs*, I 63)¹³ he is echoing a thesis repeatedly maintained by his father. That Hemsterhuis' love for Greece was his own, somewhat sentimental, interpretation - as already remarked by Hölderlin's fatherly friend Wilhelm Heinse -, is also true, but so was Heinse's.

When Hemsterhuis took over problems and terminology from his predecessors, he often gave different answers to the first and changed the meanings of the second. Otherwise we could not understand his impact on German philosophy and literature during the last quarter of the eighteenth century and after.

This is also why it is unwise to 'label' him; e.g. I don't think he was by implication a dualist when fighting materialistic monism (thus Savarelli p. 13). He has been called a rationalist and an irrationalist - he was neither: he took reason seriously, but direct intuition had the last and first word with him. He even defines 'reason' as 'intuitive faculty': "The being that has the faculty to sense (feel, *sentir*) and therefore the (faculty) to acquire ideas or, which comes to the same thing, the contemplative or intuitive faculty (...). This intuitive faculty one calls reason ..." (*Lettre sur l'homme*, I 84). Later in the *Alexis I* (II 187) he says: "The intellect has the intuition of these ideas...", which might be translated into Greek as "*Ho nous theôrei*." 'Ideas' are not to be understood in a Platonic sense, but isn't this very much like Plato and, maybe, Socrates? To take him for a Spinozist, concealing his deepest convictions, as Lessing did, is mistaken; Jacobi was right in seeing things differently, but there is much in his conceptions to think him congenial in spirit and attitude to Spinozism, but no more than that. It would also be wrong to label him an eclectic. Of course, *il prend son bien où il le trouve*, but one should recognize that he refounded all his ingredients to a new coherent and - to use his own favourite term - homogeneous whole. And a working hypothesis, proposed here, is that the Greek heritage was helpful to him in so doing. But our present scope is more limited; first of all, we shall try to show that there really is such an heritage, not just a superficial semblance of it.

Let us enumerate some well established facts. He could not have had a more favourable climate for his Hellenism than growing up in a home and at universities at Franeker and from 1740 onward in Leiden where his father revived Greek philology. The most important of his father's pupils were among his intimate friends, Ruhnkenius and Valckenaer in the first place. Though at university he probably mainly studied 'experimental philosophy', i.e. (natural) sciences, and though he never took an academic degree, his intimate and profound knowledge of Greek literature and culture has never been doubted (nor verified in detail either!).

Second, his relationship with the Princess of Gallitzin, his 'Diotime', was not only a conspicuous example of Platonic Eros, but was directly based on the teachings of Diotima in Plato's *Symposion*.

Many times he stresses his Socratic attitude, e.g. in a well known passage in the beginning of his first dialogue *Sophyle*, where he says that there are only two serious philosophies in this world: "c'est la Socratique et la Neutonienne." The second one he apparently drops immediately (I 172). And, indeed, important as

¹³ See p. 75. for Hemsterhuis' works and p. 86 for references to the Meyboom Edition.

modern science was to him, Socratism was more important. On December the 23rd, 1788, many years later, he writes to his Diotima, after admitting (with candid modesty, but not without irony as well) his comparative ignorance of all modern 'isms' in philosophy: "Concerning isms, there are two Heroes whom I declare myself to be a follower of and a staunch defender, Socrates for real philosophy and Newton for all that concerns physics ..." (Loos 1970, p. 118-119).

He admired ancient art and was a connoisseur of it. He had a well known collection of gems and precious stones, later lent to Goethe, but since long back in Holland (The Hague and recently Leiden). The fact that it has been discovered in our time that hardly any of his gems date from antiquity seems unimportant to me.

Use and Transformation

As is well known, Hemsterhuis wrote little and published less, and did so only rather late, mostly in limited, almost private editions. Still one distinguishes two periods, mainly on formal grounds. In the first period, about 1770, he wrote essays in the form of more or less private letters, *Lettre sur la sculpture* (published 1769), *Lettre sur les désirs* (1770) and the longish *Lettre sur l'homme et ses rapports* (1772). After the beginning of his intimate friendship with the Princess of Gallitzin (1775) he turned to writing dialogues in a Greek setting, such as *Sophyle ou de la philosophie* (actually lacking a specific Greek background), *Aristée ou de la divinité*, *Simon ou des facultés de l'ame* (not published in the original French during his lifetime, but already circulating also in German translation among his friends), *Alexis ou de l'age d'or* (published simultaneously in French and German) and *Alexis (II) ou du militaire* (fragment, only published in 1924). Other short pieces are of minor importance for our subject, some of them still unpublished.

His major ideas underwent little change in these two periods. His well known theory of the 'organe moral' was already clearly fixed in the *Lettre sur l'homme*, although the term is probably even more metaphorical in the later dialogues than it already was in the Letter.

That he was widely read in the classics is not only well known from other sources, but is also to be seen in his writings. In his dialogues he sometimes used his familiarity with Antiquity to add to the 'couleur locale'. First a few random examples of this familiarity.

As an example of the harmony, order etc. of separate parts, forming a whole (as a prerequisite for artistic composition), Protogenes' famous picture of the Rhodian mythical hero Ialysus is mentioned in the *Aristée* (II 19). So far so good, but it is said that it was a mosaic picture, which very much suits the argument, but is extremely unlikely. Hemsterhuis' irony is that he himself adds a note, pointing out how unlikely this is.

In the *Alexis* (II 157) two lines from Callimachus are cited and the author adds a note, giving the original Greek wordings and goes on to say: "Ces vers se trouvent dans Callimaque, poète qui a fleuri principalement sous Ptolémée Philadelphie, et qui par conséquent paroîtroit de quelques années postérieur à Dioclès et Alexis. (These are the two speakers in this dialogue.) Voilà de ces

épines dont la Critique a souvent de la peine à se débarrasser. etc." I can't help reading this as pleasant irony. Part of the fun is that Callimachus is old enough to be cited at the pretended time of the conversation between Dioclès and Alexis, though he had probably not yet written these two verses from his Hymn to Zeus; but this Hemsterhuis does not say and, maybe, did not even know. Another part of the fun seems to me that Sim(m)ias of Rhodes is mentioned as visiting Athens and he was probably born at about the same time as Callimachus and here our author does not make any pseudo-critical remarks, though Simmias is introduced as "l'ancien ami de votre père", so he should not be very young. - In the very incomplete list of his classical readings which Meyboom gives (III 120-121) we find several editions of Callimachus.

If I am right, in this example Hemsterhuis knew perfectly well what he was doing. The following one is somewhat different: In the *Lettre sur l'homme* (I 134) we find a note, saying: "*Ho de nomos turannos ôn tôn anthrôpôn, polla para phusin biazetai*, dit Protagoras chez Platon." - Well, this quotation we do find in Plato's *Protagoras*, but Plato (337D) makes Prodicus say it. I think this shows that Hemsterhuis is citing from memory and, though it is a curious mistake, it also seems to show that he knew this dialogue quite well; otherwise he would not have given an entirely correct Greek text and probably would not have trusted his memory. Note that Hemsterhuis quotes this dictum to underline his rather Rousseauian ideas. It is characteristic of him (and of course also, but less so, of his contemporaries) to quote an author from antiquity rather than a modern one to support his own views.

Another interesting example is the following: In his *Lettre sur l'homme* (I 125) he says: "Menedemus of Eretria pretends with reason that justice, prudence and courage are names for parts or different modifications of virtue. Just like the elegant and the gracious are modifications of beauty; and the pathetic (le pathétique), the terrible etc. are names for different modifications of harmony." If we compare this with his source, Plutarchus (de virt. mor. 2, p. 440 E = R&P 304), we find Hemsterhuis' text to be a curious 'modification', for what Plutarchus really says is: "Menedemus from Eretria denied the multitude (plêthos) and differences of virtues, because he held that it (virtue) was one, but using many names; for the same was called prudence, courage and justice, just like 'mortal' (brotos) and 'man' (anthrôpos)." The most likely explanation is again that Hemsterhuis quoted from memory, but the more interesting explanation is that he quoted Menedemus just to suit his own argument and thus somewhat modified Menedemus' ideas which were naturally too rigid for the more refined Hemsterhuis. Both explanations are compatible. Anyway, we see that Hemsterhuis knew about this somewhat forgotten, but not unimportant philosopher.

He gives quotations from many ancient writers, both familiar and less familiar to us. This his motti also testify. He has only one or two motti from 'modern' authors, e.g. Kepler (*Lettre sur l'homme*, I 79, but preceded by one from Lucretius, the famous and proud "Avia Pieridum...", I 926 ff. and IV 1 ff.).

Three of his motti are especially interesting. The first is also from Lucretius and will be treated below. The second is the motto for his most Platonic dialogue, the *Simon* (II 77); it contains the famous Pythagorean oath, which shows us how

strong and narrow the relationship between Plato and the Pythagoreans in the view of Hemsterhuis was. It is not given in its most frequently quoted formula; but it is a direct citation from the Pythagorean *Carmen aureum*, a poem from the 3rd century A.D., mainly consisting, however, of much older material. So this dialogue which finds its climax in a long speech by a divinely inspired Diotima, revealing ultimate truths about the "facultés de l'ame", is introduced by this most solemn oath: "This will put you on the path of divine virtue, yeah by him who gave to our soul the tetraktys, the source of ever-flowing Nature." It is not clear whether Pythagoras himself is the source or whether it is the tetraktys, but this problem need not detain us here, although I believe that, at least in the *Carmen aureum*, the second interpretation is the more likely one.¹⁴ ('Tetraktys' is the Pythagorean holy number 10 as the sum of 1+2+3+4.)

The third motto I want to draw attention to is very curious indeed. It is the one Hemsterhuis puts at the beginning of his *Aristée* (II 1). Hemsterhuis does not indicate the source of the motto; he also omits it elsewhere, e.g. in the case of the above-mentioned one from the 'Golden Verse'. But if my hypothesis is correct, he had a very good reason for not mentioning the author here. The quotation ("*An gnôs ti esti Theos, hêdiôn esèi*") looks like a verse, a iambic trimeter, but it is not one. Still I decided to look for a iambic trimeter, frequent in tragedy and comedy. Hemsterhuis quotes at least twice¹⁵ "le sage Philemon" (I 112), the once famous poet of the so-called 'New Comedy', only surpassed by Menander. And I found something surprisingly similar and ... essentially different: Fragment 107 has as its first line "*An gnôis ti est' anthrôpos, eudaimôn esei*", which is followed by a rather trivial 'wisdom'. "If you know what man is, you'll be happy."¹⁶ Just an exhortation to accept the frailty of the human condition. Not so with Hemsterhuis.

¹⁴ For more detailed information see Van der Horst, p. 26-27.

¹⁵ Both quotations are interesting, but they cannot be treated here for lack of space (I 91, cf. *Simon*, and I 112).

¹⁶ Edmonds, notorious for his rather fanciful translations, renders the text as:

You'll be happy once you get into your head
 What human beings are.
 So-and-so is dead,
 Don't think that strange or terrible; some girl is,
 Some girl is not, with child; or somebody's
 Ruined, say, or mourning, or has a nasty cough;
 Nature brings all these troubles. Smile them off.

The first line is also attributed to Diphilos, both in Stobaeus *Florilegium*, which is interesting in so far as in the second case we have the Greek text as it stands, whereas for Philemon editors adopt an emendation by Grotius, only partly followed by Hemsterhuis, it seems. But we know that Tiberius Hemsterhuis was interested in editing Philemon's Fragments; see Meineke, *Historia Critica Comiorum Graecorum*, 1839, p.v note, where the name of Frans' friend Valckenaer is mentioned in the same context.

If my hypothesis of his motto's being a conscious variation of Philemon is correct -and it seems a likely one, for how to explain otherwise that his text is an incorrect trimeter? -, well, if so, then he substituted "God" for "man", a most suitable change for a dialogue concerning "la divinité". Only at the end of the dialogue does the knowledge of God become a serious possibility (esp. II 69ff.); the 'method' Hemsterhuis proposes reminds us irresistably of Plato's *Phaedo*. The universe is a united kosmos, governed by the Divinity, but we cannot recognize its order. Our "grande étude doit être de connoître Dieu." But it can be done only by a slow and patient procedure through self-knowledge. This brings happiness. We have, however, to "faire disparaître l'écorce de l'humanité." (II 69). Coming back to this he even says: "... il faut la mort." (II 75).¹⁷

Examples concerning Art and Literature

I shall give some more examples from the comparatively early *Lettre sur la sculpture*. Here the first author cited must be regarded as a familiar one to the eighteenth century; it is Lucanus. When speaking of the sublime, Hemsterhuis adds a note giving examples from ancient literature. (This is not unusual as such; in Lessing's *Laokoon* one of the rare examples not taken from ancient literature, is a negative one, whereas quotations abound.) Hemsterhuis wants to illustrate his theory that the beautiful and sublime consist in giving as many 'ideas' as possible in the shortest possible time. He then quotes the well known "Victrix causa deis placuit, sed victa Catoni." (Lucanus I 128), indeed a striking example of rhetoric brevity, illustrating his theory, as his second example which I omit here does even better. The interesting thing is that he is giving a typically Stoic quotation, whereas he often reminds us that he cannot stand Stoics (except Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius); his dislike is very humorously expressed in the picture of a philosophers' quarrel in the *Alexis I* (II 159-160).¹⁸

But many years later he still held Lucanus in high esteem, as is shown by a casual remark in a letter to the Princess of Gallitzin of August, 15th 1787 (Trunz-Loos 133, p. 55); she had compared Herder's Spinozism to a grave covered with flowers. He writes: "The simile you use to draw a picture of his system seems to me admirable and as true as it is beautiful and horrible. I see in it an astonishing

¹⁷ Therefore I do not believe that the second change Hemsterhuis permits himself in the motto - which disturbed me at first - should weaken my supposition; he writes "*hèdiôn*" for "*eudaimôn*". My impression is that he just wanted a comparative (also of three syllables) to stress the difficulty of reaching the goal, the knowledge of divinity, so that "*hèdiôn*" just means 'more happy' and not 'sweeter'.

¹⁸ There is no indication that the fighting philosophers, Chrysothemis, the epicurean, and Callicles, the Stoic, are historical figures, so the whole scene is probably Hemsterhuis' invention, but he may have found an inspiration in a literary source, whether ancient or of later date.

mixture of the sublime black of Lucanus and the freshness of Homer's lilies and roses." (Cf. also Meyboom III 123-124).

The way he is expanding his views on the merits of brevity in the *Lettre sur la sculpture* is interesting and, to my mind, rather modern. For there is some analogy (not more) with R. Ingarden's "Leerstellen" and U. Eco's "opera aperta". The unfinished, the sketchiness, which obliges the person who looks at a picture or reads a poem to fill in, to finish for himself, is largely praised; in literature this includes the *aposiopesis*. It is illustrated e.g. by an interesting criticism of a passage in Euripides' *Hecuba* (the same he is citing again in *Aristée*, II 60-61): to paint the former queen's misery it would suffice just to say: "O Zeus, what should I say?", but the Greek herald continues for several lines (Euripides, *Hecuba* 488ff). An eloquent silence would have been more expressive than beautiful verse (*Lettre sur la sculpture* I 28).

This brings us to the problem of 'imitation' (*mimesis*) in art. At face value one will think that Hemsterhuis follows the usual theory of art as imitation (and if necessary improvement) of nature, but I don't believe this to be correct. So far I have not yet found any evidence of detailed knowledge in Hemsterhuis of Plato's condemning 'imitation', and his ideas on art are certainly quite different; but still I have a feeling that both have the same fundamental basis from which they are developing their views on art. There is a remarkable analogy between the way Hemsterhuis describes conceiving a really godly Apollo (*Lettre sur la sculpture* I 41) and what Plotinus says about the Zeus of Phidias (*Ennead* V 8,1).

Connected with the idea of stimulating the activity of the imagination of the 'public' is, in my view, Hemsterhuis' opinion on what may be called the hierarchy of the arts. Contrary to what most scholars hold, I am convinced that for Hemsterhuis poetry comes first. I cannot go into detail here, but this primacy seems to pervade his whole oeuvre, being clear also in the *Simon* and in the *Alexis I*, where it turns out that philosophy cannot do without the assistance of poetry. This last point is already an argument, but we find it in this (comparatively) late dialogue. It is likely that Hemsterhuis' conviction was already firmly established earlier. A real argument is rather to be found in the (comparatively) early *Lettre sur la sculpture* (I 26-27): Sketches give more pleasure, because they are more like the arts of oratory and poetry. These "use only signs and words, not pencils and brushes, thus activating only the reproductive faculties of the soul, and therefore have much more considerable effects than painting and sculpture could have." What he means is that a 'finished' work of art does less to activate the 'faculties of the soul'. In this context Hemsterhuis speaks also of "divine liveliness" (divine vivacité), which reminds us of the later interpretation of Platonic *mania* as *divinus furor* (Marsilio Ficino and others). Traces of the same interpretation are perhaps present in the *Alexis I* and there they might possibly be connected with Plato's *Phaedrus*, the only dialogue in which Plato explicitly holds a positive view of (poetic) *mania* (245), although a line in the *Symposium* comes also very near to it (218 B).

This brings us to Plato and to the Pythagoreans. Of course, everybody knows that Hemsterhuis was styled not only the Batavian Socrates, but also the Batavian Plato, even before he wrote his dialogues. His *Lettre sur les désirs* was hailed as an admirable Platonic document by Herder and others. In a letter of January, the 2nd, 1773 to Hamann Herder writes "...ihm sei, als habe er 'in Platons Vorwelt' zusammen mit Hemsterhuis 'auf einer Hörbank gegessen'." (Trunz 1970, p. 90). Most likely this feeling is only due to the *Lettre sur les désirs*. When Hemsterhuis communicated his dialogues to his friends, they were immediately regarded as Platonic and appreciated (and sometimes criticized) as such. But as a philosophical genre the dialogue was not exceptional. Berkeley, Hume and many others sometimes used it and they were not a priori regarded as emulating Plato. Hemsterhuis was. (The fact that Tiberius devoted much energy to Lucianus' Dialogues and that they were part of Frans' favourite readings is never, as far as I know, mentioned in this context; still it is not precluded beforehand that the son was influenced by them, if only from a technical point of view. According to Brummel, p. 69, Frans preferred Lucianus as a writer of dialogues even to Plato!) On the other hand, it is rather unclear what it really means to write dialogues in a Platonic manner, because there is such a great variety in Plato's own. In one case there could be no doubt, that of the *Simon*. In fact there is nowhere any reason for doubt. But the *Simon* is an explicit *aemulatio* of the Platonic *Symposion*. I don't have to go into any detail here. It is interesting, however, to see what Hemsterhuis himself says in his 'Avertissement de l'éditeur'(II 81): "Pour ce qui regarde son style, il (the dialogue) a plus encore le ton qui règne dans Platon, que celui de la naïveté noble de Xénophon, ou de la simplicité populaire d'Éschine." This admiration for the popular simplicity of Aeschines is echoing ancient judgement rather than being based on the dialogues that, in Hemsterhuis' time, went under his name, i.e. some Pseudoplatonic works as the *Axiochus* or the *Eryxias*. But we may draw the conclusion that Hemsterhuis had read them.¹⁹

His whole relationship to his Diotima, the Princess of Gallitzin, whose Socrates he was, is entirely based on the *Symposion*. He even translated it for her and, according to Loos (1961, p.122 note 11) the last part of this translation, about a quarter of the whole, has been preserved. And he dedicated his *Simon* even more explicitly to her than any of his other later works. The *Simon* is the only Hemsterhuisian dialogue in which Socrates is among the dramatis personae together with several other Platonic characters as Agathon and Aristophanes. The whole vivid introduction is very much like Plato, including several details, one of which may even point to familiarity with the beginning of the *Theaitêtos*. And, as in Plato, Diotima is the writer's mouthpiece.

Incidentally, we can see here that he is using later material, such as Diogenes Laertius to whom he often returns. This can be illustrated by an example of the curious device he sometimes uses to refer to his earlier work. Since he is

¹⁹ It turns out that he translated the beginning of the *Axiochus*. So he will have appreciated 'Aeschines'. (Addition 1990).

pretending that his dialogues are ancient Greek texts, he cannot quote directly. So, when referring to the *Lettre sur l'homme*, he refers to 'our friend'. In a similar way he refers to his own *Simon* as a work of Phaedo of Elis in his *Alexis* (II 153); as a matter of fact, Diogenes tells us that Phaedo wrote a dialogue *Simon*. Certainly one should always bear in mind that as such this reference is no 'proof'. It is always possible that Hemsterhuis got this information from some history of philosophy of his own time. Only, since we know from external and internal sources that he was widely read, it is a pretty safe assumption. This remark should always be borne in mind, especially with regard to the following considerations about Hemsterhuis' direct knowledge of Platonic dialogues.

If we can be certain about his intimate knowledge of the *Symposion*, we also know that he read the *Protagoras* - see above -. His familiarity with the *Crito* is also certain; see *Aristée* (II 59-60 with note). And the same place gives sufficient circumstantial evidence for the *Apology*, it seems. Generally speaking, it is almost impossible that he should not have read the *Phaedo*; the brief indications I gave concerning the parallelism between the Platonic dialogue and the *Aristée* furnish already a serious argument and a detailed comparison would certainly be entirely convincing. For a Platonic philosopher as he was, holding with conviction the thesis of the immortality of the soul and may be even that of transmigration, such circumstantial evidence is overwhelming. But there is not much specific evidence; even the presence of Cebes in the *Simon* is not sufficient; almost the only particular passage that seems to point in this direction is the note about Archytas (II 166), where he quotes from a (spurious) letter by Plato to Archytas. This letter is given by Diogenes Laertius (VIII 79ff), but it does not say that Archytas should "garder son poste", a phrase we find in the *Phaedo* (62B).²⁰ Once Hemsterhuis writes to his Diotima: "...Votre Platon a raison de dire que les contraires naissent de leurs contraires;..." (Trunz-Loos 1971, 143, p.58, from a letter of November, the 27th, 1787). This is possibly an allusion to *Phaedo* 60B.

Aristée (II 73) makes it very probable that he knew the *Laches*²¹; the same dialogue (II 88) has a phrase about Nestor which makes knowledge of the *Ion* very likely (cf. *Ion* 537). In the *Simon* (II 88) there is a vague reminiscence of the *Euthydemus* and knowledge of this dialogue becomes a near certainty in the light of *Alexis II*, p. 120.

A curious case is constituted by the *Euthyphron*; this dialogue stands at the beginning of the first Tetralogy, just before the *Apology*, the *Crito* and the *Phaedo*, but how could Hemsterhuis call his alter ego in the *Sophyle* 'Euthyphron'? In the Platonic dialogue of this name the priest Euthyphron is not a man Hemsterhuis was likely to be in sympathy with. Probably the meaning of the name (having the right mind) prevailed, but it remains strange. In any case, he did not stick to it, but he changed it to 'Dioclès', a good masculine alternative for 'Diotima', the glory and honour of Zeus respectively. If, however, as it is possible, he used already the

²⁰ See Fresco (1981), p. 8 and note 17, also for the consideration that this is no 'proof'.

²¹ Now I believe that II 73 points to *Symposion* 221. (Addition 1990)

name 'Dioclès' in an earlier draft of the *Sophyle*, the whole question becomes extremely puzzling.

Several small details in the *Alexis I* (e.g. II 180) make knowledge of the *Phaedrus* probable; I mentioned already that his positive interpretation of divine inspiration is also in favour of this hypothesis (cf. note 24).

One interesting problem remains. Did Hemsterhuis also possess Plato's later dialogues? (In his time the seemingly 'youthful' *Phaedrus* was certainly not considered as a late dialogue.) He cites a famous phrase from the *Theaitetos*, but this does not prove much (see below). The introduction of the *Simon*, already mentioned, might be an indication, since Plato uses in this dialogue the device of pretending that someone had written down the discussion, so that it could be recited. But it would be premature to conclude that Hemsterhuis, in using nearly the same design, shows more than superficial knowledge of this dialogue. The *Timaeus* is certainly likely, but I am not too sure. More in general, the *Alexis I*, although explicitly taking Hesiod as a starting point suggests throughout knowledge of similar myths, e.g. in the *Politikos* (269ff); so far, however, I found nothing that really supports this hypothesis. (Familiarity with Ovidius' *Metamorphoses* and Vergil's *Fourth Ecloga* is likely: *Astraea*.)

It all comes to this: As far as detailed 'proof' goes, we find as yet very little of real importance outside the *Symposion*. Personally I am convinced that many of Hemsterhuis' most important philosophical ideas, including those about the immortality of the soul and transmigration, are inspired by Plato himself. It has been maintained that his ideas about immortality and transmigration can largely be 'explained' by the influence of Leibniz and some of his followers, viz. "The Genevan naturalist Charles Bonnet" (Moenkemeyer, p. 112-113). For the moment I cannot refute this and the views may be not entirely incompatible. It is true, I cannot detect any trace of the theory of Platonic 'forms' (ideas). So the core of his Platonism comes to his view on Love, Eros. This is, however, connected with the more general Platonic conceptions, just mentioned. On the other hand, it is so central to Hemsterhuis' whole philosophy that I cannot do it justice otherwise than in a book.

Therefore just one or two remarks on Hemsterhusian *Eros*. For him there seems to have been a genuine link with Platonic *paideia*; this is certainly prominent in the *Simon* and it may even have been present - consciously or unconsciously - in his relations with friends like Fagel. In his *Lettre sur les désirs* (I 59) he explicitly rejects "pédérastie", but in the *Aristée* homosexual love is introduced, be it in a somewhat hidden way so that it may escape most readers. *Aristée*'s beloved Antiphile (II 38) turns out (II 62) to be the dead general Antiphilos, a historical personality, not a girl of the name Antiphilè. Whether this is just 'couleur locale'? I don't know. Commentators (Moenkemeyer and others) say that Hemsterhuis had to give this outburst of passionate love to *Aristée*, not to his own 'alter ego' Dioclès, in order to spare the Princess's feelings. But they do not seem to realize that the real passion is for a man, whereas the affair with the hetaire Philarete is just a more or less regrettable incident.

Of course Platonic Eros is present in most dialogues. Something of it we just saw for the *Aristée*. The *Simon* is presented by Hemsterhuis as a translation of a

manuscript found near an altar of Eros at the entrance of (Plato's) Academy and the *Alexis* I ends with a promise of a sacrifice to Eros. But whether all this and the prominent role for Diotima etc. leads to the conclusion that Hemsterhusian Eros has a real philosophical significance in the true Platonic sense, can only be brought to light by a detailed investigation.

Turning back to the *Lettre sur les désirs* we see that it is regarded as very Platonic. Vide supra for a remark of Herder. Herder also translated the letter and when publishing his translation in 1781 in the *Teutsche(r) Merkur* he writes: "Vielleicht hat seit Platon über die Natur des Verlangens in der menschlichen Seele niemand so reich und fein gedacht als unser Autor." (Trunz-Loos 29, p. 16). Although Herder also had other writings by Hemsterhuis in mind, he refers in the first place to the Letter he translates.

I am not the first to remark that Herder changes the plural "désirs" into the singular "Verlangen"; this is a far-reaching difference, making it more Platonic than it was, I believe. This is curious because the same Herder draws attention to an important point which, to my knowledge, has been almost neglected since.²² In his simultaneously published *Liebe und Selbstheit*, close to the beginning, he rightly points out that Hemsterhuis and Empedocles have much in common. Hemsterhuis draws a close parallel, near to identity, between (cosmic) love and Newtonian attraction, but vice versa also between physical repulsion and 'strife', to use immediately Empedocles' terminology. Although we find these ideas in his later work as well, the way he is then treating harmony, homogeneity etc., to my mind, shows a rather marked difference in comparison with his earlier work. In the *Aristée* (II 49) he mentions "two principles, the only universal ones we know of in Nature, activity and inertia, (...) but neither of these two principles offers us a productive, creative power." That is something quite different. My impression is that in the dialogues Love is the only real force and it has a metaphysical dimension. I admit that we should be cautious, since Hemsterhuis is referring to the same simile as in the *Lettre sur les désirs*, the metaphor of the spring ("ressort") (II 47 and I 68), to indicate inertia, but the way he handles it is, I believe, much nearer to the Empedoclean concept in the Letter than it is later. We come much closer to the speech of Eryximachus in Plato's *Symposium* (185 E, 187 A etc.), the speech in which Plato introduces - as a paradox according to some scholars, Seltman for instance - the famous Aphrodite Ourania, Heavenly Love, a concept adopted since by many, also by Hemsterhuis through Diotima in the *Simon* and in his correspondence.

I may permit myself one further remark. It is well known that Lucretius was inspired by Empedocles' 'Philia', 'Aphrodite' and 'Gèthosunè', in his prooemium "Aeneadam genetrix, hominum divomque voluptas, alma Venus...". But that is where Hemsterhuis took his motto from for his *Sophyle ou de la philosophie*: "Te dea te fugiunt venti etc."; in short, philosophy under the irresistible sway of Love!

Another important point in this context is whether Hemsterhuis' firm conviction concerning the immortality of the soul and its being immaterial might be Neoplatonic rather than Platonic. It can only very indirectly stem from the

²² There is a very cautious remark in Brummel, p. 236.

Christian world he lived in. Therefore it is not uncommon to attribute it to Neoplatonic influences. But is this necessary? Here a passage from the *Lettre sur l'homme* is illuminating (I 147-148). After speaking about religion and rejecting Christianity for several reasons we cannot go into here, he states that the atheist does not exist (I 146) and continues that as long as a geocentric cosmology prevailed man considered himself important: Men and gods both children of the Mother Earth (with a quotation from Pindarus). But then came that great revolution, the insight of philosophers, i.d. Pythagoras and "sa secte sacrée", that our earth is just a planet. And because of the "néant de notre globe vis-à-vis de l'infinité de l'univers physique" they had entirely different ideas about God. They tried to change society on the basis of "l'organe moral": "Si l'on fait attention à leur *homoiôsis tõi theôi kata to dunaton*, à leurs *aretai theôrètikai kai kathartikai*, à leur *metriopatheia*, à leur *luisis apo tou sômatos*, à leur *zoè tès psychès kath' heautèn*, one will be convinced that their system was almost entirely based on the truths I tried to prove you in this letter. (Etc.)". Well, here we find in the Greek words several expressions that can be traced back to Neoplatonism. This holds especially for the *aretai theôrètikai kai kathartikai* which may be as late as the 5th century A.D., but all the rest is also genuinely Platonic. (Besides, *kathartikos* is already to be found in the *Carmen aureum*, vide supra.) 'Becoming like (a) God as far as possible', the first Greek words, goes back to a famous passage in Plato's *Thetaitetos* (176), but it was naturally popular with Neoplatonists. The mere fact of this great praise for the old Samian and his sect points in both directions, just as much to Neoplatonism as to Plato himself. Isn't then the more simple conclusion that Hemsterhuis was not ignorant of certain Neoplatonic writings, but that he - always familiar with the Platonic dialogues themselves - did not need them to form these ideas? If he did need any influence to generate his own deeply rooted convictions...

Some minor points remain. First Frans Hemsterhuis' admiration for the Pythagoreans, their love for mathematics, for astronomy (including the rejection of the geocentric cosmology), their ideas about harmony and order which form a basis for his own theories about beauty etc. For Hemsterhuis Pythagorean views were certainly, but not exclusively (cf. I 147-148) linked with Platonic philosophy. This too is something that should be treated at length. For the moment I leave it, but just point out that nearly all his modernism, the importance he attached to mathematics, to modern physics, Newtonian, Cartesian conceptions etc. etc., all this is in accordance with his admiration for the Pythagorean tradition. "*Mèdeis ageômetrètos eisitô*" was for him self-evident, not new at all. But of course he was aware of the great progress in modern science.

So we come to the last point, his great admiration for Socrates. This too is certainly a debt to Plato. And this is also a matter that should not be treated lightly. Therefore just some remarks here. As I said before, we should not look for the same amount of naughty irony as we find in many of the Platonic dialogues. The curious thing is that probably the most Socratic of all his writings - in our view - is the *Alexis II*, rightly called by its first editor, Boulan, a maieutic dialogue. Here we do find a Dioclès who succeeds in showing Alexis, in a way not unworthy of Socrates himself, that his ideas about warfare and glory were unfounded.

But when it is said that e.g. the *Sophyle* is not in the true Socratic spirit we should remind ourselves that it is not out of tune with the Socrates we find in Xenophon. Hemsterhuis refers once to the Xenophontic *Symposion* (I 62), praising the picture Socrates gives there of love.

I am ready to admit that the way the famous *daimonion* is treated notably in the same *Sophyle*, but sometimes elsewhere, is much nearer to later Platonists like Apuleius or Plutarchus. The latter he certainly knew. On the other hand, the only time Hemsterhuis makes Socrates himself refer to his usual divine sign (Simon II 89) is not unlike the negative way it is always represented by Plato. In the *Sophyle* an oath by the "génie de Socrate" not to stop before the two interlocutors had found what they were looking for (the truth) is throughout stimulating the discussion; this is not really un-Socratic.

That is one of the reasons why I feel that Moenkemeyer (p. 106) is right only in a very superficial sense in saying: "Obviously, the actual content of *Sophyle* with its indebtedness to Cartesian dualism and Newtonian physics, is thoroughly un-Socratic." First I am not so sure about a Cartesian dualism in Hemsterhuis. Second - a more important point -, Socratism has little to do with 'content', everything with attitude, with the eternal restlessness of the philosopher who asks and searches rather than finds.²³ But one has to admit that in this dialogue Euthyphron does not show much of Socratic ignorance or irony. In Hemsterhuis' later dialogues we find more of it. Passages which are, to me, Socratic enough can be found e.g. II 27, 53, 72, all from the *Aristée*. But there is much more, also in his letters. I dare maintain that Hemsterhuis was aware of this philosophical attitude which we, moderns, regard as specifically Socratic. In other words, that he comes near to the inquisitive, disturbing ironical man we want him to be.

When Hemsterhuis compares Socrates in fetters and the dying Socrates to others suffering injustice or even regarded as unhappy by the common man (e.g. II 59 and 73), then we find of course a picture of the sage whose true happiness cannot be affected by the external circumstances, as we see it also in contemporary paintings. But it is truly felt, it is not just traditional.

Summing up, Hemsterhuis' Socratism has two components: first and most of all, Socrates represents the theory of Platonic Eros, but he also shows us this important philosophical attitude. Therefore there is no contradiction in Hemsterhuis' view that Socrates and Newton can be combined and it becomes natural that, philosophically speaking, Socrates comes first.

I hope to have shown that even this preliminary study of Hemsterhuis' connections with Antiquity is rewarding. The thesis that his familiarity with Antiquity was far from superficial and that, therefore, it should be taken into account when studying his ideas seems to be well established in this paper. But much I just indicated, much I left out and I am convinced that much more is to be found. It is an investigation to be continued. Also his numerous unpublished letters should be consulted. It will - just to give one example - probably be very

²³ See Fresco (1983) *passim*.

interesting to go into detail for the relationship between Hemsterhuis and Aristotle whom he quotes more or less frequently.²⁴

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²⁴ I just begin to study the unpublished manuscripts. Some of the hypotheses and conclusions in this paper are confirmed; so far none is contradicted. It is certain that he admired Plato's *Phaedrus* and that he knew his *Ion*. - During the discussions in Rotterdam Prof. Hammacher drew my attention to the fact that Herder uses the same Greek line, as adapted from Philemon, as a motto for his *Gott, Einige Gespräche* (1787). He must have borrowed it from Hemsterhuis without having any idea of the real origin of his quotation. (Addition 1990)

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