LAMBERT TEN KATE AND THE ‘LOGOS’ 1
Religion and Linguistics in the Eighteenth Century
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If the mind of man is once impressed with the conviction that there must be order and law everywhere, it never rests again until all that seems irregular has been eliminated, until the full beauty and harmony of nature has been perceived, and the eye of man has, as it were, caught the eye of God beaming out from the midst of all His works.

Max Müller

1. Introduction

The date is 1 November 1729 A.D. The Amsterdam private scholar, connoisseur and linguist Lambert ten Kate (1674-1731) is composing a letter to a Dantzig acquaintance, Johann Philipp Breyne (1680-1764), a physician and botanist of Dutch descent. The letter, written in Dutch, will accompany four works by ten Kate, to be shipped as complimentary copies to Dantzig. One of these works is the two-volume Aenleiding tot het verhevene deel der Nederduitsche sprake (‘Introduction to the Sublime Part of the Dutch Language’, 1723), ten Kate’s celebrated work on historical grammar; the two other pieces (II and IV) deal with theological and religious matters.

In some respects the letter of the renowned Dutch linguist is rather startling. ‘Your Honour would wish to know on what subjects my attention has mainly been focused’, writes ten Kate. ‘My interest is of a rather wide scope’, he reports.

From my youth up I have been interested in all esteemed arts and sciences. I have never been attracted to matters grammatical as such and to what commonly is discussed in that field, but I was deeply interested in grammar that [64] belonged to the sublime part and could teach us how to think more carefully, and how to communicate our thoughts more clearly to others. This research has provided me with so many new data that two quarto volumes (...) have been filled (...) [sc. the Aenleiding, some 1500 pages].

As far as I can see, almost everything they include is original and has thus far not yet been discussed. As it appears to me, it is of the greatest importance with regard to the study of our own language and that of all our cognate languages such as High German, English, Swedish and Danish. Although this matter has caused me much labour through the increasing number of observations, it has nevertheless remained the least of my interests. Much more to my delight is the matter dealt with in the works of N° II. and N° III, because they guide me more directly to something of a higher order. However, I most I prefer the matter dealt with in N° IV, 2 as its

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1 This article is a revised and expanded part of a paper presented at the Tenth International Conference on the History of the Language Sciences (ICHoLS X), University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1-5 September 2005. It is a sequel and a complement to an earlier paper from 2003 on the underlying conceptions in the works of Lambert ten Kate. All quotations in Dutch have been translated into English.

2 This was a theological-ethical work entitled Drie gewigtige bedenkingen des gemoeds, benevens de weg tot heil (‘three grave contemplations of the heart, together with the way to salvation’) from 1728. It consists of three serious essays, written in
the years 1725-1727, in which ten Kate presents religiously inspired reflections on the humility, the contemplation of the talents, and the crucially important walk with God.

3 In all, four letters by ten Kate to Breyne, including this one, have been preserved in the Forschungsbibliothek Gotha (Chart. B 789, Bl. 429r-434v). Cf. Helmut Roob & Cornelia Hopf, Jacob und Johann Philipp Breyne. Zwei Danziger Botaniker im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert. Nachlassverzeichnis (Gotha: Forschungsbibliothek Gotha, 1988).

In his *Deutsche Grammatik* (II: 67) Grimm acknowledged: ‘Ten Kate hat die Ablaut zuerst in ihrer Wichtigkeit hervorgehoben [...]’.

Without any doubt, ‘L.’ stands for Lambert, whereas ‘N’ may refer to various interlocutors, including Adriaen Verwer. The presentation of the complex subject matter in the shape of dialogues was chosen for the readership’s convenience.

‘The Creator and His Government revealed in His Creatures; according to the light of reason and mathematics. On behalf of the constitution of respectful religion and the destruction of every basis of atheism’.

Between 1707 and 1710, Lambert ten Kate composed his concise *Gemeenschap tussen de Gottische spraeke en de Nederduyt sche at the behest of his friend, the grammarian and philosopher Adriaen Verwer (circa 1655-1717), an ardent Dutch follower of Isaac Newton. The discovery that the conjugation of Dutch and Gothic verbs follows the same pattern prompted ten Kate to divide the Gothic verbs into six ‘classes’. It is in the verbal conjugation system that ten Kate recognized the regularity of vowel alternation, which eventually led him to discover what Jacob Grimm (1785-1863) would later call ‘Ablaut’. In all respects the *Gemeenschap* has proven to be more valuable and more fruitful than the work of his immediate predecessor, the British scholar George Hickes (1642-1715).

The years 1710-1723 saw the full development of these and other interesting linguistic observations into the main body of his *Aenleiding tot de kennisse van het verhev ene deel der Nederduyt sche sprake* (2 vols.). The bulk of volume one consists of fourteen dialogues between L. and N., composed in the years 1711-1713. In this work he elaborated on the classification of the Gothic verbs and applied it to all the Germanic languages he was acquainted with. In order to prove his assertion that ‘regularity’ was ‘the crown of a language’ (1723, I: 543), ten Kate presented a host of examples to demonstrate that nearly all verbs in Dutch could adequately be divided into classes, and provided proof that the so-called ‘irregular’ verbs were subject to rules that obtained not only in Gothic, but were valid in all branches of Germanic. The second volume of the *Aenleiding* includes two long alphabetical listings of Germanic words derived from strong verb roots. As ten Kate deemed the verb to be the very first part of speech and consequently the uppermost in the hierarchy of the *partes orationis*, this specimen of a *lexicon etymologicum* could thus be considered as a lexicon of root words.

In short, ten Kate’s main concern was to find regularity in language, and he took great care to test the rules he had discovered against an extensive corpus of linguistic data. Abandoning the techniques of ancient etymology, the Amsterdam private scholar described and justified his own research methods very carefully. Thus, he actively contributed to the trend towards empiricism in the intellectual climate of the Dutch Republic at the beginning of the eighteenth century. His works are a fine illustration of the paradigm shift which took place in Dutch linguistics around 1700 under the influence of Newtonian thought (cf. Noordegraaf 2004).

It might be relevant to note here that in the autumn of 1715 ten Kate decided to suspend his work on the *Aenleiding*, giving priority to what he considered to be a more urgent task. Consequently, the year 1716 saw the publication of his adaptation of George Cheyne’s *Philosophical Principles of Natural Religion* (London 1705, 2nd ed. 1715), entitled *De Schepper en Zyn Bestier te kennen in Zyne Schepselen; Volgens het Licht der Reden en Wiskonst. Tot Opbouw van Eerbi edigen Godsdi enst en Vernie tiging van alle Grondsl ag van A thei stery*. George Cheyne (1671-1743) was among the Scottish Newtonians with whom ten Kate’s mentor Adriaen Verwer kept good contacts. Eulogizing in the preface both his compatriot Christiaan Huygens (1629-1695) and Isaac Newton 1643-1727), ten Kate attacked the Cartesian *Mechanismus*. As it appears, he deemed Newton’s system to be definitely superior to that of
Descartes’s. In his criticizing the ‘harmful Cartesian mechanism’, which he considered to be abhorrent and dangerous particularly for younger people, ten Kate revealed himself as the pious Mennonite he had always been.8

3. Ten Kate’s religious coordinates

The year 1699 saw the publication of a Harmonia Evangelica cui subjecta est historia Christi ex IV evangelis concinata, which had been composed by ten Kate’s learned fellow-townsman, the Swiss scholar Jean Le Clerc (Johannes Clericus, 1657-1736). Ten Kate’s Dutch gospel harmony appeared posthumously in 1732, clearly an emulation of Le Clerc’s work.

In Het leven van onzen Heiland Jesus Christus, one of his two truly voluminous works, ten Kate sought to avoid any textual overlapping when presenting all that was reported in the four gospels. As he states in an elaborate preface, at first he closely followed Le Clerc. However, he soon became aware of the fact that his predecessor had made a mess of it by relocating too many pieces of the texts.9 Ten Kate saw this as an embarrassment. He knew for certain that there was a stronger harmony to be found in the texts, for the words in the gospels had been spoken by the ‘Source of all Order’, namely Jesus Christ Himself (1732a: [viii]). So, independently from other scholars, he set out to find ‘the true order’ ([xii], seeking to present a new arrangement of texts on the basis of the ‘impartial reason’ ([x]). When he had finished he engaged again in an even more detailed investigation (xi).10

So, it is not without pride that, in the subtitle, ten Kate describes his own harmony as ‘put together on the basis of a newly investigated arrangement of the conformity of the four gospels, in which each gospel nearly keeps its own composition’, as the subtitle of the book has it.

Here we see ten Kate acting as a true philologist, wrestling with texts, passionately puzzling to get the precious pieces of the four gospels in the best possible order. He felt that he eventually succeeded in composing a superior gospel harmony because he had applied far fewer relocations than his predecessors did. As mentioned above, ten Kate was firmly convinced of the existence of a ‘true order’: it was Jesus Christ Himself who was its surety. Jesus Christ, whom ten Kate referred to as the ‘the Son, which is in the bosom of the Father’ and who ‘in the beginning was with God and who was God’ ([xiv]) – a clear allusion to the opening verses of the fourth gospel. We may therefore infer that ten Kate’s ‘metaphilology’ is characterized by strongly religious traits.11

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8 When reviewing the Dutch translation of Cheyne’s book, ten Kate’s acquaintance, the Amsterdam editor Jean Le Clerc remarked: ‘Son [viz. Cheyne’s] dessein est de voir la nécessité de reconnoître un Créateur, par ses Ouvrages [...]. Le Traducteur [viz. ten Kate], qui entend fort bien la Philosophie & les Mathematiques, y a ajouté une Préface très-judicieuse; ou il fait voir, en peu des mots, les défauts des principes de Descartes, a l’égard de la formation de toutes choses, & la manière dont Mr. le Chevalier Newton les a decouverts, par les principes opposez, qu’il a établis’ (Le Clerc 1715 [1716]: 447; 449).

9 ‘Was die Ordnung der Begebenheiten betrifft, wolte er darin Clerico folgen: allein er sahe bald, dass dies er im Matthäo allein so gewaltige Versetzungen machete, dass es nicht zu dulden war. Der Autor musste ihn also verlassen und fand, dass Matthäus und Johannes ungemein ordentlich in ihren Erzählungen waren. Marcus und Lucas sind es zwar nicht so, doch hat er nicht gar so viele Versetzungen darinn machen dürffen’ (Zedler’s Universal-Lexikon 42 (1744), 863-864, quoting from Leipziger Gelehrte Zeitungen Beitraege 3, 60).

10 When reading the preface one is immediately reminded of the way in which Ten Kate proceeded in his first linguistic work, the Gemeenschap tusschen de Gottische spraekte en de Nederduytsche (1710), reviewed by Jean Le Clerc in a piece entitled ‘Convenance des Languages Gothique & Flamande’. In his 1710 essay ten Kate he followed also an authority, namely George Hickes, but having found out that Hickes had been responsible for some serious flaws in the ordering of the Gothic verbs, ten Kate concluded that a new and independent research might yield superior results. So, he went his own way.

11 In the Aenleiding ten Kate makes no effort to conceal his religious presuppositions at all. The second ‘Redewisseling’ (“dialogue”), for example, written early in 1711, is not a ‘technical’ etymological treatise, but is devoted to the ‘Praise of Language, or the magnificence and dignity of speaking’ (1723, I: 6-12). In the tenth dialogue, written around March 1713, ten Kate emphasizes that all scientific research should serve ‘to understand the Divine Preaching of all Creation’. The Dignity and Grandeur of our language [...], just like all other things created, and all other gifts the Creator bestowed upon us, draw
Ten Kate inserted a large number of clarifying phrases in the text of his harmony and adds a host of footnotes. The first verse of the Gospel of John – ‘In the beginning was the Word’ – prompted him to compose one of his most elaborate comments (1732a: 67-69) in his book, when discussing the meaning of the Greek word 

\[ \text{logos} \]

in the text of his harmony and adds a host of footnotes. The first verse of the Gospel of John – ‘In the beginning was the Word’ – prompted him to compose one of his most elaborate comments (1732a: 67-69) in his book, when discussing the meaning of the Greek word logos, i.e. both *sermo* and *ratio*. In this note he also deals extensively with the views of Philo of Alexandria (Philo Judaeus, 20 (BC-50 AD), a Hellenized Jew who produced a synthesis of both traditions. Philo had a deep reverence for Plato, but for him, Greek philosophy was a natural development of the revelatory teachings of Moses, who was considered to be the teacher of Pythagoras. Now, for Philo as well as for John, the Logos was God’s tool for creating the world. As Vermes (2002: 56) points out, in Hermetic mysticism the Logos is called the ‘son of God’. This phrase, echoed by ‘the only Son in the bosom of the father’ in John, is the principle that brings form and order into the world.

As is well-known, the term *logos* figures prominently in Greek philosophy. It occurs particularly in the philosophy of the Stoa, where it represents the principle of order, harmony and regularity. One might even say that the word *logos* is perfect for expressing a basic idea in Greek philosophy, viz. that everything in this world is in proportion, ‘in order’, and hence can be understood by the human mind. When reading the preface one is immediately reminded of the way in which Ten Kate proceeded in his first linguistic work, the *Gemeenschap tussen de Godtische spraek en de Nederduytse* (1710), reviewed by Jean Le Clerc in a piece entitled ‘Convenance des Languages Gothique & Flamande’. In his 1710 essay ten Kate he followed also an authority, namely George Hickes, but having found out that Hickes had been responsible for some serious flaws in the ordering of the Gothic verbs, ten Kate concluded that a new and independent research might yield superior results. So, he went his own way. Philo, however, was also acquainted with the *logos* in Jewish thought: God’s logos, the word of God which created all things (cf. van Winden 1985: 9).

Remarkably, ten Kate devotes more than a full page to Philo’s ideas on the *Logos*. Why did he expatiate so much on the words *logos*, whom he sincerely believed to have been familiar with the Apostles? I assume that he was deeply intrigued by Philo’s doctrine of the Word, the Logos. The term ‘reasonable Soul’, for instance, used in ten Kate’s earlier writings (cf. Noordegraaf 2003), corresponds with Philo’s ὁ λόγος θεοῦ. Indeed, it is God who is the cause through which the world was created, but God’s reason - ὁ λόγος Θεοῦ - is the instrument by which it was put together. The *logos* is the surety that mankind will never prefer *akosmia* (disorder) to *kosmos*, order. The ‘reasonable soul’ has something divine in it: ‘Every man, in respect of his mind, is intimately related to the divine Logos, being an imprint [...] of that blessed nature’, Philo argues. I believe that Ten Kate was of the same opinion.

Gardt (1999: 100) points out that in the seventeenth century there was nothing unusual about a religiously motivated *ordo*-concept: ‘Die Welt ist ein von Gott geschaffenes Ganzes, dessen einzelne Teile in einem sinnvollen, harmonischen Bezug zueinander stehen’. It is safe to say that the idea of order ‘was predominant in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century European thinking about nature’ (de Baar 2007: 9). Note that this idea of the *harmonia mundi* now is not only operative in the field of theology and the study of nature, but can also be applied to the study of language.

In ten Kate’s major linguistic work, the *Aenleiding* of 1723, which addresses ‘the sublime part of the Dutch language’, the lone language inventor is a man who acts as a hybrid Adam by inventing language, on his own, starting with the verb. It is a creative act, a manifestation of Man’s place in Creation, of the *harmony* or analogy of the macrocosm and the microcosm; language as a creation of the mind of Man, which, in its turn, is intimately related to the divine Logos. My thesis is that Ten Kate was convinced that, as the reflection of a divine mind, language, by virtue of being part of the *kosmos*, had to be well-ordered as well. To him, ‘regularity’ was ‘the crown of a language’ (I: 543). Language was a ‘Divine gift’ (I: 9); ‘fostered by the Milk of Reason’, whose development and elaboration had been left to Man (I: 9-10). Since Reason was the ‘foster mother’ of language (I: 14), language had to be characterized by regularity and show logical coherence. Consequently, with the help of the researcher’s reason, it should be possible to uncover consistent rules.

In a Dutch treatise on art published in 1720 Ten Kate argues that the most interesting part of the ‘Beau Idéal’, ten Kate is ‘la Partie Sublime’, which he deems to be ‘une Harmonieuse Propriété’, i.e., ‘une touchante Unité [...]"
non seulement de chaque Membre, par rapport à son Corps, mais même de chaque Partie, par rapport au Membre dont elle est Partie’ (1728a: viii). In the words of Dobai (1974: 662): to ten Kate the ‘Ideal’ is ‘die harmonische Beziehung der Teile zueinander auf der Linie der Poetica Aristoteles’, in other words, a unified whole. What ten Kate seeks to propound is a ‘harmonische Proportionslehre’. When applied to language, this ‘unified whole’ may be called a ‘system’.

4. Linguistics and philology

There is another interesting aspect of ten Kate’s metaphilology which deserves a mention here. As has been established elsewhere, both Adriaen Verwer and his ‘student’ Lambert ten Kate made crucial use of Isaac Newton’s (1642-1727) ideas in their own philosophical-religious treatises. That the religious and prestigious Isaac Newton had also paved the way for an attractive methodology, namely a firm empirico-inductive approach, stood them in good stead.

Adriaen Verwer introduced Newton’s views into his own linguistic works, but he left it to his younger friend Lambert ten Kate to apply this new approach to a major linguistic research project. The allure of a natural science approach to linguistics prompted these linguists to make a de facto distinction between linguistics and philology (cf. van de Bilt 2009: 83).

As is well-known, it was August Schleicher (1821-1868) who in the 1850s drew a sharp conceptual and terminological distinction between linguistics and philology. Linguistics, ‘Glottik’, is a Naturwissenschaft, whereas philology belongs to the Geisteswissenschaften. For Schleicher, ‘Philologie’ was a ‘historical discipline’; it sees language (usually in the form of written texts) as a means of investigating the thought and cultural life of a people. ‘Linguistik’ is a field that concerns itself ‘with the natural history of man’. Linguistics is a natural science; language is subject to unalterable, natural laws. ‘Philologie’ has to do with ‘Kritik’, with the interpretation of historically transmitted texts.

In fact, what we see here is nature versus culture. Within the Dutch linguistic context of the early-eighteenth century this implies: description versus prescription. The national language was well looked after by interested men of letters, who sought to regulate and to ‘improve’ the mother tongue, whereas ‘Newtonian linguists’ such as Verwer and ten Kate were looking for the system that underlies concrete language phenomena, and seeking to demonstrate, as in the case of ten Kate, the regularity of language with the help of historical-grammatical language data. In the eyes of Verwer and ten Kate saw it, their goal in the study of language was quite different from that of the band of their literary contemporaries, from whom Verwer explicitly dissociates himself in one of his writings dating from 1708. The language system should not be excavated for the formulation of prescriptive language rules, but first and foremost, to demonstrate God’s providence (van de Bilt 2009: 86). Beyond that, ten Kate (1723, I: 1-2) argues, linguistics is nothing but a ‘poor pasture’.

12 ‘I shall call it an harmonious Propriety, which is a touching or moving Unity, or a pathetick Agreement or Concord, not only of each Member to its Body, but also of each Part to the Member of which it is a Part’ (ten Kate 1732b: 2).

13 ‘[...] just as in the other imitative arts, each individual representation is the representation of a single object, so too the plot of a play, being the representation of an action, must present as a unified whole; and its various incidents must be so arranged that if any one of them is differently placed or taken away the effect of wholeness will be seriously disrupted. For if the presence or absence of something makes no apparent difference, it is no real part of the whole’ (Aristotle, On the art of poetry, in T.S. Dorsch (ed.), Classical Literary Criticism, Harmondsworth 1967, p. 43).

14 ‘Die Philologie ist eine historische Disciplin ... Die Sprachwissenschaft dagegen ist eine naturhistorische Disciplin. Ihr Object ist ... nicht die Geisteshäigkeit (die Geschichte), sondern die vonder Natur gegebene Sprache, deren Beschaffenheit ... ausserhalb der Willensbestimmung des Einzelnen liegt’ (Schleicher 1874: 119-120).

5. **Encore: kindred spirits**

In the works of one of the most popular linguistic scholars of the nineteenth century, viz. the German-born Oxford professor Friedrich Max Müller (1823-1900), we find a number of basic assumptions which remind us of ten Kate. Müller who, in his widely read *Lectures on the science of language* (1861-1864), also drew a clear, but often misinterpreted distinction between linguistics and philology. The study of language is ‘a physical science’, Müller argued, which means he had opted for the empirical-inductive approach in language study. As he says in his first lesson:

> We have entered into altogether a new sphere of knowledge, where the individual is subject to the general, facts to law; we discover thought, order, and purpose pervading the whole realm of nature, and we seem to perceive the dark chaos of matter lighted up by the reflection of a divine mind

(Müller 1913 I: 15-16, italics added.)

The last phrase demonstrates an ‘accord entre un programma scientifique et l’effort théologique visant à révéler le divin en tout chose’. It points to the ‘intentions théologiques qui régentent la méthode de Max Müller’ (Olender 2002: 173). Indeed, in his extensive study on the life and times of the *polyhistor* Max Müller, van den Bosch (2002) shows that a firm religious dimension can be found in all of Müller’s works – he published extensively on the science and philosophy of religion. Müller clearly placed himself in the tradition of Logos theology (2002: 152) and he was evidently well acquainted with the ideas of Philo. He referred regularly to the teachings on the *logos* by John, the Alexandrian fathers and the later Christian mystics (2002; 389).

Be that as it may, a more extensive comparison between the metaphilological considerations of ten Kate and Max Müller must be the subject of another study. Such a study might demonstrate the extent to which the rise of modern linguistics was inspired by theological or theosophical (Max Müller) ideas.

6. Concluding remarks

In this essay I have shown that Lambert ten Kate’s works are characterized by a drive to discover harmony, regularity or analogy, and matters religious. This was not very remarkable in the first decades of the eighteenth century, when the idea of order was predominant.

Ten Kate found confirmation for the belief that such a regularity does exist in amongst other things Philo’s religious philosophy which extensively discussed an all-pervading Christian *Logos*.

I have not found such a clear case of religious inspiration in Dutch eighteenth-century linguistic treatises so far. Lambert ten Kate, the linguist who turned into a true theologian, stands out as a fine example of doing linguistic research which is first and foremost subservient to a better understanding of the Divine Revelation.

References


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Appendix

The frontispiece of the two-volume *Aenleiding* (1723) provides a fine illustration of ten Kate’s methodological principles. The two scholars engaged in discussion are ten Kate (left) and (probably) his friend Adriaen Verwer (right). In the left corner one sees a piece of ribbon on which is written ‘Qui quaerit invenit’, he who seeks will find; and in the foreground a cherub is tearing down a banner reading: ‘There is no rule without exception’. It was not without great satisfaction that ten Kate concluded that following his investigations ‘the common statement ‘there is no rule without exception’ no longer holds in our language’ (1723, I: x). Left in the middle somebody is rolling a snowball: it means that scientific knowledge comes into being only *paulatim*, ‘gradually’. At the top of the monument one sees the laurelled head of Pieter Cornelisz. Hooft (P.C.H., 1581-1647). This position reflects ten Kate’s great appreciation for this distinguished Dutch writer and ‘language builder’.

Warriors having spears and cuirasses point to the fact that the *Aenleiding* deals not only with the contemporary Dutch language (*Nederduitsche sprake*), but is also directed to the past. The stone tables with the Old-English (A-S: Anglo-Saxon), Gothic (M-G: Moeso-Gotthisch) and Rune (Run.) alphabets illustrate ten Kate’s interest into the older phases of the cognate Germanic languages.