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In search of an ardent neutrality. Dutch intellectuals, the Great War and the call for a cultural regeneration

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the works of two leading figures of the Dutch public and intellectual debate on the First World War: novelist and psychiatrist Frederik van Eeden (1860–1932) and art critic Just Havelaar (1880–1930). Both Van Eeden and Havelaar reconciled a call for an ardent neutrality with an aversion to the violence of war and an understanding of the war as a kind of ‘redemptive suffering’ that would eventually bring about cultural regeneration in Europe. Their visions of a forceful neutrality that would allow the Dutch – while remaining neutral in the actual conflict – to benefit from and contribute to the alleged regenerative potential the war had so violently revealed were formulated in response to a negative vision of neutrality as a spineless, pusillanimous, and selfish stance and informed by *Lebensphilosophie* (‘Philosophy of life’), a heterogeneous neoromantic school of thought that during the war served as an important intellectual source for cultural propaganda in the belligerent states. In this way, this article sheds light on a remarkable parallel between, on the one hand, the self-definitions of the Netherlands as a neutral nation put forward in Dutch public debate by cultural critics and, on the other hand, the war propaganda notion of the conflict as a ‘cultural crusade’ that held out the prospect of a rejuvenation of Europe’s decayed and ‘lifeless’ civilization – an idea invoked by various German, French, and British intellectuals to legitimize their countries’ war efforts.

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Introduction

In his famous work *Die Welt von Gestern* (1942), Austrian writer Stefan Zweig recalls perceiving the outbreak of the First World War as the tragic result of a ‘surplus of force’ that had accumulated over the past forty years of peace and that in 1914 suddenly sought a violent release. Zweig regarded war frenzy as exposing ‘a deeper, more secret power’, which had liberated the unconscious drives and hidden instincts of men and was capable of helping Europeans escape the banality of everyday life in modern bourgeois society.¹ This idea that the war had released a mysterious, turbulent energy or vital power that possessed destructive and regenerative potential resonated widely in 1914 in intellectual debates. Moreover, the view inspired various artists, writers and philosophers in the belligerent states to glorify their nations’ unique moral vitality or to depict the war as a cultural crusade aimed at a regeneration of Europe’s decadent and ‘lifeless’ civilization.²

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This article seeks to explore how cultural critics in the neutral Netherlands invoked the notion of the First World War as an explosion of an irrational and uncontrolled ‘life force’ with both destructive and regenerating capacities to reinforce the cultural significance of Dutch neutrality. In this way, this work sheds light on a remarkable parallel between, on the one hand, the self-definitions of the Netherlands as a neutral nation put forward in Dutch public debate and, on the other hand, the belligerent propaganda view of the conflict as a ‘just, cultural war’ that could save Europe from cultural decay and fossilization.

This article focuses on the ideas of two key figures of Dutch intellectual debate: novelist and psychiatrist Frederik van Eeden (1860–1932) and art critic Just Havelaar (1880–1930). Both Van Eeden and Havelaar reconciled a call for an ardent neutrality with an understanding of the war as a kind of ‘redemptive suffering’ that could bring about cultural regeneration. Before delving deeper into their visions of a forceful and courageous neutrality that would allow the Dutch – while not participating in the actual conflict – to benefit from and contribute to the alleged regenerative potential the war had so violently revealed, I will first examine the multifaceted nature of Dutch neutrality. Subsequently, I will briefly discuss the allure of *Lebensphilosophie*, a heterogeneous antirationalist school of thought that inspired Van Eeden and Havelaar but also served as an important source for intellectual propaganda in the belligerent states.³ Additionally, the cultural and institutional contexts in which Havelaar and Van Eeden operated will be examined to clarify their role in Dutch intellectual life as well as the broader resonance of their ideas.

A versatile and variable neutrality

From Belgium’s secession in 1830 onwards, The Netherlands upheld a policy of neutrality. This was a logical political choice for a small trading nation with a large overseas colonial empire that depended on international stability. Certainly, since the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–1871, virtually no one disputed that neutrality was the best means to secure Dutch economic and imperial interests. At the end of the nineteenth century, Dutch neutrality became firmly anchored in self-definitions of the Netherlands as a moral superior ‘guiding nation’ characterized by alleged ‘national virtues’ such as impartiality, a preference for right over might, and an aversion to violence.⁴ This widespread self-image of the Netherlands as ‘small, but great’⁵ seemed to be confirmed by the request to the Dutch government to host the Peace Conferences of 1899 and 1907 as well as by the selection of The Hague as the seat of the new Permanent Court of Arbitration. The military campaigns in Aceh (1873–1900), Bali (1906) and Celebes (1910) did not damage this self-congratulatory perception of Dutch neutrality and peacefulness and were considered a ‘domestic matter’.⁶

Although the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905 had posed a genuine threat to Dutch neutrality in the Dutch East Indies, the First World War was the first serious challenge to the neutral status of the Netherlands itself since 1870. The Great War ruthlessly demonstrated that the rights of neutrals, which in the decades before the war had been carefully codified in international law, had crumbled in the face of the ‘might’ of the belligerents, who waged a war framed as one for their very existence. Neutrality had now lost its value in maintaining a stable and peaceful international system and

instead had to serve the interests and strategic calculations of the warring states. In 1914, the Dutch were relieved, as their country was spared involvement in combat, but they were also shocked, as they realized that the Netherlands could have met the same fate as neutral, neighbouring Belgium. The Dutch government's policy of armed neutrality and the mobilization of armed forces were supported by the vast majority of the population as well by all political parties in parliament, which in August 1914 established a truce of national unity. However, despite the country's neutral status, the war soon proved that aloofness was impossible for the Netherlands to maintain due to the open economy of the country, its geographic position between the warring states, and its reliance on international trade.

Over the course of the war, the Netherlands was increasingly forced by both the Allies and Central Powers to compromise its neutrality. To stay out of the war, the country had to comply with the whims of the belligerents and to continuously ensure that, in their eyes, the benefits of Dutch neutrality outweighed those of belligerency. The Netherlands was one of the few remaining neutral countries, but this came at the cost of a loss of sovereignty and economic hardship, particularly in the last two years of the war.⁷ Moreover, over the course of the war, neutrality had lost much of its moral high ground. While in 1914 the neutrals were seen by the warring states as potential friends or enemies and as moral judges whose support could be instrumental in legitimizing their own war efforts, by the end of the war, many of the belligerents regarded the neutrals as selfish, spineless freeloaders.⁸ This heteroimage of the neutrals as immoral war profiteers who only cared about their own immediate interests and safety and were unwilling to fight and die for lofty ideals such as 'civilization' or *Kultur* also strongly impacted the Dutch self-image as a neutral nation in the last stage of the war.⁹ Dutch neutrality during the First World War was, in other words, multifaceted and variable and a concept to which contemporaries assigned various meanings.¹⁰

In recent years, there has been an increased scholarly interest in the experiences and roles of small neutral states, such as the Netherlands, from 1914–1918. Wim Klinkert identified three factors driving this trend: the awareness that the war deeply impacted the neutral nations located in close proximity to the warring states, the realization that the existence of small neutral states in turn had influenced the behaviour and strategic considerations of the belligerents, and the insight that some domestic changes occurring in the neutral states resembled the transformations taking place in the belligerent nations.¹¹ In particular, this last insight has in recent years encouraged historians to adopt a comparative and transnational perspective when studying neutrality from 1914–1918, a trend on which this article builds.¹²

Many of the studies on the role of the Netherlands during the First World War appearing over the last two decades have been concerned with the obvious question of how the country managed to stay out of the war and have explored the diplomatic balancing act of the government as well as the role of the military and economic elite in the maintenance of Dutch neutrality.¹³ Additionally, the domestic consequences of the war for Dutch society have been studied in various monographies and essay collections which focused on topics such as the influx and reception of Belgian refugees, the internment of prisoners of war, the mobilization of the armed forces, food rationing and scarcity, the ways in which the war at sea obstructed Dutch fishery and overseas trade, and responses to the conflict in the Dutch East Indies.¹⁴ Last, various historians

have paid attention to the continuities and discontinuities of Dutch foreign policy over the First World War and the interwar years, particularly in the face of the principle of collective security and Dutch membership of the League of Nations.¹⁵

While the political, diplomatic, military and economic aspects of the history of the Netherlands during the First World War have been analysed in greater detail, in recent years, Dutch neutrality has also been studied from a cultural-historical perspective. This research trend has produced highly interesting studies on the collective perception of military violence,¹⁶ (German) cultural propaganda in the Netherlands,¹⁷ the pro-French war enthusiasm of a select group of avant-garde artists and writers who converted to Catholicism,¹⁸ and the impact of the Great War on images and fears of future warfare.¹⁹

A key study on the Netherlands from 1914–1918 from the angle of intellectual history, which is particularly relevant for this article, is Ismee Tames' dissertation on Dutch public debate about the war. Tames has shown that in the Netherlands, a specific form of cultural mobilization took place. Of course, the scale, intensity and goal of this process differed greatly from cultural mobilization in the warring states: Cultural mobilization in the Netherlands involved a bottom-up process led by opinion makers (as there was no state propaganda bureau) and aimed at ensuring broad popular support for the government's neutrality policy instead of waging war.²⁰ The opinion makers involved regarded themselves as ambassadors of the national idea and interests and defined the Netherlands as a neutral state by tapping into pre-existing self-definitions of the Dutch as impartial defenders of law and justice or as peace mediators.²¹ A last relevant insight from Tames' study is that Dutch 'neutral cultural mobilization' should be studied from a transnational perspective, as Dutch public debate was receptive to propaganda and other elements of belligerent cultural mobilization, and the debate on the origins, nature and purpose of the conflict was, at least partly, transnational itself.²²

This article seeks to supplement Tames' analysis by shifting the focus to the ways in which two Dutch cultural critics, in their efforts to mobilize public opinion for neutrality, drew upon ideas that also played a prominent role in the war enthusiasm and propaganda of the artistic elite in belligerent states. Before analysing Van Eeden's and Havelaar's views on the identity and role of the Netherlands as neutral, I will first briefly examine the increased appeal of *Lebensphilosophie* since 1914 to European intellectuals who were dissatisfied with modernity and who believed that the dominance of the overly rational, calculating world view of the liberal bourgeoisie had produced a fragmented and decadent society. Both Van Eeden and Havelaar tapped into this intellectual current, translating it for Dutch audiences and thereby providing them with a powerful new framework for understanding the place of their neutral country in the midst of a global war.

Lebensphilosophie as a vehicle for cultural mobilization

Lebensphilosophie was a very heterogeneous, antirationalist movement. Although Friedrich Nietzsche, Wilhelm Dilthey and Henri Bergson are often regarded as its founders, the movement has older roots in the Romantic era, when writers and philosophers stressed the importance of intuition and emotion in reaction to the scientific rationalism of the Enlightenment.²³ The movement reached its peak in popularity in the first three decades of the twentieth century, when mainly German intellectuals further elaborated on the ideas of Nietzsche, Dilthey, Bergson and the Romantics.

Lebensphilosophie appealed in particular to cultural critics because of its claim to totality, its prospect to restore the shattered unity of modern society and its fierce assault on the rationalist and positivist ‘mechanic’ worldview of the liberal bourgeois. Although the thoughts of its exponents differed widely, all adherents believed in the existence of an elemental, irrational ‘life force’ or vital power that was hidden beneath the surface of visible, ‘superficial’ reality and that could not be captured by intellect. In their understanding, people could only access this deeper, concealed layer of reality through his inner world and a process of affirmation – *Bejahung* (Nietzsche), *Erlebnis* (Dilthey) or *intuition* (Bergson). Because the ‘life stream’ or ‘force’ was regarded as a pervasive, omnipresent and all-encompassing dynamic power that comprised the material and spiritual world, followers of the philosophy of life believed that making contact with this universal, hidden ‘life force’ enabled the atomized individual to experience, or ‘live through’, his place in the totality of life. Moreover, *Lebensphilosophie* aroused fascination among intellectuals and artists who shared deep concerns about ‘decadent’, modern bourgeois society because of the salutary connotations surrounding the concept of ‘life’, which seemed to promise ‘authenticity’, youthfulness, ‘vitality’, ‘directness’, ‘spontaneity’ and ‘strength’.

After the outbreak of the First World War, the magnetism of the movement increased considerably. First, the war dramatically intensified a yearning for a national unity and a dissatisfaction with rationalism. Second, because in the eyes of many contemporaries, the philosophy of life seemed to offer an irresistible vision of history in times of war and turmoil. After August 1914, the liberal-bourgeois view of history as a process of continual progress had lost most of its attraction. Many intellectuals who were wary of modernity now came to embrace a perception of the war as an explosion of a furious, irrational and uncontrolled ‘life force’ that drove history and possessed regenerative and destructive potential.

Third, *Lebensphilosophie* gained new urgency because it seemed to fit extremely well with nationalism. In the Romantic era, the idealist philosophy, which searched for the ‘true’, spiritual essence of things, triggered the essentialist, nationalist perception that every nation had a distinct and unique ‘spirit’ or ‘soul’, which determined both its culture and its ‘national character’ as well as its role in international politics.²⁴ Around the turn of the century, *Lebensphilosophie* seemed to have reconfirmed and extended this perception by adding to the idea of a fundamental ‘national spirit’, the notion of ‘national strength’. In other words, the movement gave rise to the idea that the vital ‘life force’ manifested differently in different nations and was decisive for characteristics such as the cultural vitality of a country and its performance on the battlefield. In his *Jenseits von Gut und Böse* (1886), Nietzsche, for example, argues that the ‘Wille zur Macht’ seemed to manifest most vigorously in Russia and opposes the assumed vital energy of the Russians to the ‘lethargy’ and ‘decadence’ of Europe, which was weak not least because it was comprised of too many states.²⁵

After 1914, many intellectuals in the belligerent countries harnessed elements of *Lebensphilosophie* to support the assertion that their native countries exceeded their enemies in strength, energy and moral vitality. Henri Bergson, for example, by far the most popular philosopher in France at the time, claimed in pamphlets such as *La signification de la guerre* (1915) that the ‘barbaric’ and ‘mechanic-Prussian’ Germans were doomed to lose the war. In his view, Germany was an artefact that fought with a brute and impressive material force but lacked moral spirit and therefore would inevitably be defeated by the overwhelming ‘moral force’ of France. According to

Bergson, during the First World War, European culture was at stake, and it was his 'spontaneous', 'spiritually dynamic' and 'vital' fatherland that had the task of rejuvenating the decayed Western civilization.²⁶

In Germany, for instance Max Scheler, who studied the works of Bergson extensively, proclaims in his *Der Genius des Krieges* (1915) that the war embodied the liberating and creative principle of 'life' that could repel the perverse, calculating rationalism of modern society.²⁷ Georg Simmel shared the same view and wrote in his *Deutschlands innere Wandlung* (1914) that the collective experience of the mobilization had banned the 'mechanic rigidity' and enhanced the 'living' unity of the German people. Although Simmel's initial enthusiasm for the war would soon wane, in 1914, he publicly affirmed that the First World War had brought 'life a colossal increase of intensity'.²⁸

It was, however, not the First World War but the Second World War that gave *Lebensphilosophie* a rather dubious reputation in historiography. After 1945, the idea gained ground that it had contributed to paving the way for Hitler, in particular because the Nazis had distorted and exploited Nietzsche's philosophy for their racist ideology and dream of a vigorous 'Dionysian' rebirth of the German nation.²⁹ While the ways in which ultranationalist fascists tapped into a vulgar Nietzscheanism in order to promote a national regeneration and redemption from the decadence of liberal modernity are well known, the ways in which similar ideas also informed a nationalist internationalism or Europeanism during the First World War and interwar years, are still understudied.³⁰

Van Eeden and Havelaar

Both Van Eeden and Havelaar played considerable roles in Dutch intellectual and public debates about the war.³¹ Although their visions of an ardent neutrality were certainly not prevalent in Dutch public debate, their understanding of the war found resonance in wider circles, particularly among intellectuals who were dissatisfied with modernity.³² Van Eeden and Havelaar were leading figures of the cultural critical 'humanitarian movement'. The adherents of this heterogeneous movement, which resembled the German *Lebensreform* movement, all shared a strong antirationalism and longed for a better, more humane world as well as for a rejuvenation of European civilization. Many of them found solace in a vulgar form of *Lebensphilosophie*.³³ The idea that the war was a kind of 'redemptive suffering' that could lead to cultural renewal was popular within this 'humanitarian movement' but also resonated in liberal circles and was shared by many orthodox protestants who believed that the agony of war was an ill-fated symptom of modern man's depravity and loss of God.³⁴ In August 1914, Reformed-Protestant leader Abraham Kuyper, for instance, described the war as 'delightful' and 'healthy' and confided the following in a letter to a friend: 'Everything was corrupted. Now the violent operation comes. Only after this, purification can happen. God is helping us in a terrible way to redeem us from our social degeneracy'.³⁵

Havelaar and Van Eeden shared a desire for cultural renewal as well as a strong fascination for *Lebensphilosophie*: Van Eeden was an admirer of Nietzsche, and Havelaar had published on Arthur Schopenhauer and frequently referred in his writings to various other representatives of the philosophy of life, such as Nietzsche, Bergson, and Jean-Marie Guyau.³⁶ In numerous essays and lectures, art critic Havelaar propagated a synthesis between art and society as well as a form of religious humanism which was

strongly inspired by *Lebensphilosophie* as the designated antidote to modern society's degeneration. After the war, in 1919, he became visual arts editor for the liberal, national daily *Het Vaderland*. Havelaar was also one of the founders of well-known cultural monthly *De Stem* (The Voice, 1921–1941), which aimed to address the disunity between 'ethics and aesthetics' by publishing essays, stories and poems that displayed a strong 'life intensity' and a forceful 'humanity'.³⁷ Although Havelaar today is almost forgotten, in the 1910s and 1920s he was regarded 'one of the most important essayists of the Netherlands'.³⁸

Van Eeden was a renowned novelist and psychiatrist but was also nationally and internationally active as a utopian socialist. In 1898, he, for example, founded the rural colony of Walden, inspired by Henry Thoreau's ideals of living in harmony with nature as a remedy to the prevailing materialism of the modern age. In the years before the war, Van Eeden devoted himself to another utopian project. Motivated by a desire for cultural regeneration and the dream of a society led by 'poet kings', Van Eeden, unburdened by modesty, strove to establish a 'blood bond of European geniuses'. However, a month after the foundation of this 'Forte Kreis' in June 1914 – which apart from Van Eeden, among others, consisted of philosophers Erich Gutkind and Martin Buber, politician Walther Rathenau, anarchist Gustav Landauer, and psychiatrist Poul Bjerre – the war broke out and abruptly ended his dream of a European league of self-appointed brilliant minds.³⁹

Both Havelaar and Van Eeden were well aware of the cultural mobilization that took place in the belligerent states after the outbreak of the First World War. Van Eeden was deeply disappointed by his German friends of the Forte Kreis, who, apart from Landauer, in 1914 all suddenly seemed to be overwhelmed by the war frenzy. Similar to his friend, French writer Romain Rolland, who in September 1914 from Geneva had called upon Europe's intelligentsia to 'rise above the battle', Van Eeden made many efforts during the war to persuade Europe's intellectuals, and particularly the German poets and thinkers, to come to their senses. He, for instance, wrote forewords in the Dutch editions of two antiwar books written by German pacifists (Richard Grelling's *J'Accuse, von einem Deutschen*, 1915 and Hermann Fernau's *Gerade weil ich Deutcher bin*, 1916) and was one of the founding members of the 'The European Federation' Committee, which envisaged a guiding role for writers and academics in establishing moral, economic and political cooperation within Europe.⁴⁰ As an editor of progressive, liberal weekly *De Amsterdammer*, Van Eeden also tried to enhance international understanding by starting in December 1914 the 'The International Tribune' column in which intellectuals from both belligerent and neutral states could reflect on the war and exchange thoughts.⁴¹

Similar to Van Eeden, Havelaar also regularly published in *De Amsterdammer*.⁴² Interestingly, in the first months of the war, this weekly, which was one of the major Dutch news magazines, actively participated in the transnational pamphlet war and voiced deep concerns with the apparent nationalist intoxication of Germany's eminent scholars and novelists who justified the invasion of Belgium as part of a struggle for German *Kultur*. In September 1914, *De Amsterdammer*, for instance, reprinted Romain Rolland's letter to Gerhart Hauptmann from *Journal de Genève*, in which he called upon the German novelist to denounce the atrocities committed by the German army in Belgium.⁴³ In the same month, *De Amsterdammer* also published open letters to Germany's and Britain's intellectuals. In the first letter, an anonymous author

reprimanded ‘our German friends’ for the violation of Belgium’s neutrality and for mistaking militarism for *Kultur*.⁴⁴ The ‘Open letter to our friends in England’ had a slightly friendlier tone but accused the British of harassing Dutch steamers and of a lack of understanding for the difficult position of the Netherlands as neutral between the warring states.⁴⁵

Both open letters were circulated and reproduced in Germany and Great Britain. In particular, the open letter to the Germans sparked heated responses, which were discussed in *De Amsterdammer* at length.⁴⁶ The authors of some of these responses invoked an image of neutrality as a spineless and hypocritical stance, such as Berlin philosophy professor Adolf Lasson, who accused the neutral Dutch of a ‘miserable philistinism’ and contrasted their narrow-minded desire for a ‘comfortable existence in dressing gown and slippers’ with the higher obligations and ideals of Germans.⁴⁷

This association of neutrality with weakness and selfishness was not new, nor the sole preservation of the belligerents. Henk te Velde has shown that in the decades before and during the war, in Dutch liberal circles, advocating international law sometimes went hand in hand with a longing for strong defence and with the belief that war incited admirable qualities such as national vigour and solidarity.⁴⁸ It is this notion of a self-complacent and powerless neutrality vis à vis the heroic vitality of war that Havelaar and Van Eeden addressed and reframed in their writings on the identity and role of the Netherlands as a neutral nation.

A ‘cautious neutrality’ versus ‘courageous’ guardians of liberty and justice

Frederik van Eeden explained his rather ambiguous view of the Great War and of Dutch neutrality in a series of public lectures held in the winter of 1914–1915, which were extensively discussed in the major national newspapers,⁴⁹ and subsequently reworked and published under the title ‘Bij ’t licht van de oorlogsvlam’ (By the Light of the War’s Flame) in *De Amsterdammer* as well as in an essay collection with the same title.⁵⁰ According to Van Eeden, Sigmund Freud (whom he had met a few years before the war at a conference for psychiatrists) had given an excellent analysis of the conflict. Van Eeden shared Freud’s understanding of the war as a furious outburst of the long repressed, unconscious drives and primary instincts of modern man – a view that Freud had expounded in a letter to Van Eeden published in the ‘The International Tribune’ around the time Van Eeden gave his lectures.⁵¹

Similar to Freud, Van Eeden believed that the Great War had affirmed the bankruptcy of rationalism. However, the unconscious, irrational energy that had found a catastrophic outlet in 1914 seemed to hold out the prospect of both destruction and cultural renewal. The Great War had, according to Van Eeden, the potential to be a major unifying force because ‘the principle of life’ was unity, and Nietzsche’s ‘will to power’ should be understood as a will to unite.⁵² Unfortunately, since August 1914, this urge to band together had been solely national. Only within national borders did people join forces and become more heroic, courageous and selfless.⁵³ However, because, in Van Eeden’s opinion, the nation was an artificial entity in the long run, international ‘centralization’ seemed inevitable, and individual nations would dissolve into an international community or a European federation.⁵⁴ To bring about this envisaged international unity and to save Europe from cultural decay and disintegration, a synthesis of intuition and reason

was required. Only such a synthesis of on the one hand statesmen and businessman and on the other hand poets and wise man was, in Van Eeden's perception, able to redirect and harness the impressive, 'inexhaustible energy' that humanity had displayed in the war for cultural regeneration.⁵⁵

In his lectures, Van Eeden elaborated extensively on the shortcomings of his neutral Dutch countrymen and accused them of an unadmirable 'cautious neutrality', selfishness, pusillanimity, internal division and materialism. They seemed to be obsessed only with their own safety and convenience; as a result, their international reputation as 'freedom fighters' would make way for an image as 'shrewd cheese mongers'.⁵⁶ Van Eeden in particular castigated the Dutch advocates of antimilitarism for being haughty and arrogant.⁵⁷ In his view, pure and fearless pacifism was needed.⁵⁸ Therefore, as 'a small neutral people', the Dutch should not be pedantic pacifists but should respect and learn from the tremendous war courage, selfishness and sense of solidarity of the combatants.⁵⁹ Instead of criticizing the nationalist energy of warring nations, they should embrace and affirm their own national strength. Despite their serious shortcomings, the Dutch, in Van Eeden's view, had an unparalleled strong sense of 'spiritual and moral freedom'.⁶⁰ They were called to guard this pure sense of freedom and justice and to listen to the 'true direction of the compass of Life' amidst the darkness and uncertainty of war. This task required courage and resilience but was the designated means for the neutral Netherlands to play a noble role during the war.⁶¹

An ardent neutrality and internationalist nationalism

Similar to Van Eeden, Just Havelaar was deeply shocked by the outbreak of the war.⁶² In four essays appearing in September-December 1914 in *De Amsterdammer*, renowned liberal journal *De Gids* and leftist weekly *De Nieuwe Amsterdammer* and collected in volume *Strijdende onzijdigheid* (Ardent neutrality – 1915), Havelaar reflected on the cultural significance of Dutch neutrality and the Great War.⁶³ Havelaar counted himself fortunate that his homeland was spared bloodshed but complained that neutrality could easily lead to a 'life without the joy of experiencing danger, without heroism, without spirit [...] or will'.⁶⁴ Therefore, the Dutch needed to acknowledge and 'live though' the creative powers of war, regardless of their abhorrence of the conflict. If they failed to do so, according to Havelaar, a horrific scenario would unfold, and the Dutch would end up 'a self-satisfied and small-minded people'.⁶⁵ In his perception, the lifeless 'status quo pacifists' who set the tone in his home country had weakened the 'intensity of life', despite their good intentions. He expressed his respect for the French and German intellectuals who had vigorously supported the war, although their impressive vital energy lacked the essential 'creative power of love'.⁶⁶

Havelaar proclaimed that he admired Germany, loved France and refused to take sides in the war because in his view, a restoration of the unity of Europe was an absolute condition for a regeneration of European culture. Although he appreciated the ideal of a United States of Europe, advocated during the war by Van Eeden and his fellow members of the 'The European Federation' Committee, he emphasized that such a federation had to be a 'living organism' that could rely on the true support of the people instead of an ineffective, 'artificial' product of 'suspicious diplomats'.⁶⁷ Havelaar

wanted to replace both this kind of dispassionate, feeble internationalism and the violent 'hypernationalism' of the belligerents with a more profound and vibrant internationalist nationalism, for which the Dutch, he believed, seemed to have a special talent.⁶⁸

In an essay on the 'significance and value' of the Dutch 'national character' that appeared in *De Gids* in 1916, Havelaar stressed the conviction that the universal and eternal 'life force' was manifesting differently in the 'national spirits' of different nations. According to Havelaar, the Germans were driven by a 'mystical' and 'abstract' 'will of life', whereas the French were galvanized by a 'frivolous' and 'spontaneous' 'life-instinct'. The Dutch, who appeared to be phlegmatic at first sight, in his view, possessed a 'modest', 'sober' and 'persistent' 'mystic vitality'.⁶⁹ Because of their international openness and supposed unique 'democratic', 'national spirit', he believed his countrymen could play an important role after the war as a 'force [...] to achieve Europe's future unity'.⁷⁰ However, to fulfil this ambitious task, the Dutch needed to build a stronger sense of community among themselves and to acquire the same level of national cohesion that the German, French and British people had reached. Moreover, they had to distance themselves from weakness, self-interest and narrowmindedness and to realize that vigorous 'internationalism' was of crucial importance to the vitality of their own 'national spirit'.⁷¹

Conclusion

This article supplements Ismee Tames' conclusion that the self-definitions of the Netherlands as a neutral nation in Dutch public debate during the war were in various ways informed by the process of cultural mobilization occurring in the belligerent nations, by highlighting how two well-known Dutch cultural critics and leading figures in intellectual debate tapped into the same ideas as intellectuals in the belligerent states did, and like them, presented themselves as ambassadors of the national idea. However, while artists, writers, and philosophers in belligerent states instrumentalized these sources for war propaganda purposes, Frederik van Eeden and Just Havelaar, who were both well aware of the intellectual propaganda of the warring nations, used these ideas to generate support for an ardent neutrality instead.

In particular, *Lebensphilosophie*, which, in its vulgar form, served as an important source for intellectual war propaganda, proved to be instrumental to underline the international significance of Dutch neutrality. Similar to some intellectuals in the belligerent states, Van Eeden and Havelaar used elements of *Lebensphilosophie* to endorse their nation's assumed unique 'national character' and strength and to underline the perception of the war as a cultural conflict that could save modern Europe from lethargy and decadence.

With their call for courageous, concordant and ardent neutrality, Van Eeden and Havelaar accomplished two goals at once. First, they addressed and reframed the notion of a dichotomy between a weak, self-complacent neutrality vis à vis the heroic vitalism of war – which was used by belligerents such as Adolf Lasson but which also played a role in Dutch debates before and during the war – while at the same time invoking existing positive self-images of the Dutch as guardians of moral liberty and justice or European mediators, which from the end of the nineteenth century onwards had functioned as important cultural pillars of the Netherlands' neutrality. Second, they acculturated the narrative of the First World War as an explosion of turbulent, vital power with

destructive and regenerative potential in the Dutch neutral context by emphasizing that by remaining neutral in the conflict, the Dutch could benefit from and contribute to the cultural renewal that seemed to be taking place in Europe. Both Van Eeden and Havelaar were grateful that their country was spared involvement in combat and made clear that they found the violence of war appalling. However, they also expressed their genuine, although not uncritical, admiration for the vigorous, irrational, patriotic energy the belligerents had displayed since August 1914. In their perception, this energy had violent as well as salutary and unifying capacities and could be channelled and harnessed to eventually bring about a better world and even an 'organic' international unity. Van Eeden and Havelaar criticized the Dutch advocates of sterile, presumptuous antimilitarism or pacifism and emphasized that to benefit from and actively contribute to the envisaged European renewal, the Dutch should not behave as self-complacent nonbelligerents but instead give expression to fearless and forceful neutrality.

Although Havelaar's and Van Eeden's views on the war and the identity of the Netherlands as a neutral nation were certainly not dominant in Dutch public debate, their ideas resonated in wider circles and appealed especially to intellectuals who were dissatisfied with the 'disenchantment of the world' that modernity seemed to have brought. In particular, their interpretation of the war as a kind of 'redemptive suffering' was shared by a larger segment of Dutch society, ranging from the adherents of the cultural critical 'humanitarian movement' to cultural pessimist liberals and orthodox protestants. It is unlikely that Van Eeden and Havelaar convinced some of their readers not to take up arms, as virtually no one in Dutch society seriously disputed the nonbelligerency of the country. However, they did contribute to the process of 'neutral cultural mobilization', as they raised enthusiasm for Dutch nonbelligerency by framing neutrality as an admirable, ardent, courageous and internationally significant stance and for holding out the prospect of cultural regeneration for belligerents and neutrals alike.

Notes

1. Zweig, *The World of Yesterday*, 196 and 223.
2. Zweig's enthusiasm for the war was short lived; he soon came to support his friend Romain Rolland's efforts to restore the intellectual fraternity in Europe.
3. Strachan, *The First World War*, 138; Aschheim, *The Nietzsche legacy in Germany*, 135; Stromberg, *Redemption by War*, 82–83.
4. Abbenhuis, *The Art of Staying Neutral*, 29–31.
5. In 1898, Queen Regent Emma urged the Dutch people to be 'great at everything a small country can be great at.' This (popular) Dutch self-identification as a 'small, but great' nation and the impact of notions of smallness on foreign policy are explored in: Samuel Kruizinga, "A small state?"
6. See note 4 above.30.
7. *Ibid.*, 36–37.
8. Tames, *Oorlog voor onze gedachten*, 254, 267 and 270; Tames, "War on our minds," 4.
9. *Ibid.*
10. Amersfoort and Klinkert, "Introduction," 24; Klinkert, Kruizinga and Moeyes, *Nederland neutraal* 9.
11. Klinkert, *Defending Neutrality*, 1–2.

12. A transnational and/or comparative approach is, for instance, adopted in: Tames, *Oorlog voor onze gedachten*; Amersfoort and Klinkert, eds. *Small Powers in the Age of Total War*, Den Hertog and Kruizinga, eds. *Caught in the Middle*; Klinkert, *Defending Neutrality*.
13. Key studies on this topic include the following: Frey, *Der Erste Weltkrieg und die Niederlande*; Van Tuyll van Serooskerken, *The Netherlands and World War I*; Abbenhuis, *The Art of Staying Neutral*; Kruizinga, *Overlegeconomie in oorlogstijd*; Klinkert, *Defending neutrality*; Klinkert, Kruizinga and Moeyes, *Nederland neutraal*.
14. De Roodt, *Oorlogsgasten*; Binneveld, Kraaijestein and Roholl, eds., *Leven naast de catastrofe*; Blom and Stelling, *Niet voor God en niet voor het Vaderland*; Van Dijk, *The Netherlands Indies and the Great War*; Kraaijestein and Schulten, *Wankel evenwicht*; Wolf, *Guarded Neutrality*. An overview of the impact of the Great War on Dutch society appears in 2006: Moeyes, *Buiten schot*.
15. Wels, *Aloofness and Neutrality*; Hellema, *Neutraliteit en Vrijhandel*; Van Diepen, *Voor Volkenbond en vrede*; Den Hertog, "Zelfstandigheidspolitiek"; Braat, "Dutch neutrality in the Pacific".
16. Kristel, *De oorlog van anderen*.
17. Eversdijk, *Kultur als politisches Werbemittel*; Van den Berg, "The autonomous arts as black propaganda".
18. Kieft, *Tot oorlog bekeerd*.
19. Linmans, *De oorlog van morgen*.
20. Tames, *Oorlog voor onze gedachten*, 24–25; Tames, "War on our minds," 4.
21. Tames, *Oorlog voor onze gedachten*, 23.
22. Ibid. 25–26; Tames, "War on our minds," 6–8, 15–16.
23. The general information about *Lebensphilosophie* provided in this paragraph is derived from: Rickert, *Die Philosophie des Lebens*, 3–16; Lieber, *Kulturkritik und Lebensphilosophie*, VII–XVI; Albert, *Lebensphilosophie*, 7–15; Boterman, *Oswald Spengler*, 67–73 and Jason Gaiger, "Lebensphilosophie."
24. Leerssen, *National thought in Europe*, 110–114.
25. Malia, *Russia under Western Eyes*, 230–231.
26. Groging, *The Bergsonian controversy in France*, 197–202; Strachan, *The First World War I, To Arms*, 1123.
27. Strachan, *The First World War*, 141; Stromberg, *Redemption by War*, 68.
28. Quoted in: Flasch, *Die geistige Mobilmachung*, 329; Stromberg, *Redemption by war*, 85–86.
29. Albert, *Lebensphilosophie*, 185–186; Kozljanič, *Lebensphilosophie*, 19–28.
30. Highly interesting exceptions are: Griffin, "Europe for the Europeans" and D'Auria, "Decadence, messianism, and redemption."
31. Tames, *Oorlog voor onze gedachten*, 21 and 42.
32. A similar understanding of the war is, for instance, illustrated in the following: Kees Meijer, "De nationale plicht tot zelfhandhaving en het socialisme," *Het Nieuwe Leven* (1915–1916) 321–334 or Cornelis Karel Elout, "De reactie der kracht," *Onze Eeuw III* (1915) 469–484 and idem, "Liliput en Brobdignac," *Onze Eeuw I* (1915) 109–138, there 131–132 and 136–137. Meijer was the leader of free religious movement De Nieuwe Gedachte (The New Thought), which aimed at cultural regeneration through propagating *Lebensphilosophie* as a 'new religion'. In his article, Meijer calls upon his countrymen to embrace and sublimate the vigorous sense of unity, unselfishness and energetic patriotism that since August 1914 had arisen in the subconsciousness of all Europeans, belligerent and neutrals alike, as only in this way the war – although in itself a 'horrible' conflict – could lead to purification. Liberal journalist and cultural pessimist Elout interpreted the war as a touchstone for the vitality and qualities of nations. He was grateful that the Netherlands did not participate in the actual warfare, because the country was very unfit for war, but he warned his fellow citizens that they should not behave as 'lilliputians' and elevate themselves above the belligerents, as in the future man would realize that the Great War was a struggle for cultural renewal and

- that Nietzsche was right when he wrote ‘Die Schaffenden nämlich sind hart’. For more on Elout and other examples, see the following: Te Velde, “Neutralismus und kriegerische Tugenden,” 123–124.
33. Brolsma, ‘*Het humanitaire moment*’.
 34. Te Velde, “Neutralismus und kriegerische Tugenden,” 113–124; Koops, “Een conflict van strijdende levenswijzen,” 66–83.
 35. Kuyper, “Kuyper aan Idenburg, ‘s Gravenhage, 19 augustus 1914”. In: *Briefwisseling Kuyper-Idenburg*, edited by J. de Bruijn and G. Puchinger, 467–468. Franeker: Uitgeverij T. Wever, 1985.
 36. Fontijn, *Trots verbrijzeld*, 151–154; Brolsma, ‘*Het humanitaire moment*’, 166–170, 182–183; Just Havelaar, “De mensch Schopenhauer,” *Groot Nederland I* (1912) 501–532.
 37. Dirk Coster and Just Havelaar, “Brief aan de medewerkers van De Stem,” *De Stem I* (1921) 2–6.
 38. Ritter, “Geestelijke stroomingen in de Noord-Nederlandsche letterkunde,” 1005.
 39. The Forte Kreis episode is in detail discussed in: Fontijn, *Trots verbrijzeld*; Faber and Holste, *Der Postdamer Forte-Kreis*; Van Hengel, *De zieners*.
 40. More information about Van Eeden’s internationalist activism during the First World War in: Fontijn, *Trots verbrijzeld*; Brolsma, “Frederik van Eeden. Zelfbenoemde vredesapostel”; idem, ‘*Het humanitaire moment*’; Lobbes, “Designing a Peaceful World in a Time of Conflict.”; Van Hengel, *De Zieners*.
 41. This column ran from December 1914 to July 1922 and contained contributions from over forty authors from across Europe and the US, including Romain Rolland, Alfred Fried, Norman Angell, Stefan Zweig and Maurice Barrés.
 42. In early 1915, the editor in chief of *De Amsterdammer*, Henri Wiessing, was fired, and he then founded his own journal, *De Nieuwe Amsterdammer*. Havelaar joined Wiessing and became the visual art editor of this new weekly.
 43. Romain Rolland, “Een brief van Romain Rolland.” *De Amsterdammer* (13 September 1914) 3.
 44. “Offener Brief an unsere deutschen Freunde.” *De Amsterdammer* (6 September 1914) 1.
 45. “Open letter to our friends in England,” *De Amsterdammer* (20 September 1914) 1.
 46. “Deutsche Antworten.” *De Amsterdammer* (4 October 1914) 1; “Deutsche Antworten II,” *De Amsterdammer* (11 oktober 1914) 1.
 47. Adolf Lasson, “Ingezonden: verehrter Herr und Freund.” *De Amsterdammer* (11 October 1914) 7. The Berlin Academy of Sciences distanced itself from Lasson’s letter in a declaration signed by 41 members, including Albert Einstein: “Spreekzaal: minachtende brieven van den Duitschen Prof. over Nederland.” *De Amsterdammer* (27 December 1914) 9.
 48. Te Velde, “Neutralismus und kriegerische Tugenden,” 113–124.
 49. ‘Het streven naar vrede’, *Algemeen Handelsblad* (08–12-1914) 2; ‘De voordracht van dr. Van Eeden’, *De Telegraaf* (08–12-1914) 3; ‘Oorlog en vrede’, *Het Vaderland* (25–11-1914); ‘Laatste nieuws’, *De Telegraaf* (27–01-1915).
 50. ‘Bij ’t licht van de oorlogsvlam’ was published in 12 parts in *De Amsterdammer* in March–November 1915, and appeared as an essay collection in the same year. It was translated into Swedish by Arnold Nordlind a year later: *Vid skenet av krigslågan*. Stockholm: Svenska Andelsförlaget, 1916.
 51. Freud, Sigmund. “Internationale tribune. Prof. Sigmund Freud.” *De Amsterdammer* (17 January 1915), 3; Van Eeden, *Bij ’t licht van de oorlogsvlam*, 32, 43 and 134.
 52. *Ibid.*, 37–38.
 53. *Ibid.*, 43.
 54. *Ibid.*, 81–83 and 102–103.
 55. *Ibid.*, 50–51, 112–113 and 139.
 56. *Ibid.*, 117–119.
 57. *Ibid.*, 120.
 58. *Ibid.*, 115–116.

59. Ibid., 123 and 128.
60. Ibid., 128, 130–131
61. Ibid., 125 and 130.
62. Just Havelaar, “Werkelijkheid en droom. Een nabetrachting.” *De Stem* I (1921) 293–321, there 299; Jacob Nieweg, “Van schilder tot schrijver 1912–14.” *De Stem* II (1930) 525–539, there 538; De Vries, *Gemeenschap en wereld-ik*, 109.
63. Havelaar’s essay collection was positively reviewed in the regional newspapers *Leeuwarder Courant* (13 March 1915) and *Middelburgsche Courant* (27 February 1915), as well as in the monthly *Onze Eeuw* (April 1915, 167–168).
64. Havelaar, *Strijdende onzijdigheid*, 1–2.
65. Ibid., 31–32 and 34.
66. Ibid., 4 and 16–17.
67. Ibid., 25–26.
68. Ibid., 6, 25–26, 61, 65 and 68–69.
69. Just Havelaar, “Holland. Wezen en waarde van ons nationaal karakter.” *De Gids* II (1916): 243–280, there 256–257.
70. Ibid., 279–280.
71. Ibid., 280.

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