

## Lecture prof. dr. Pancras Hogendoorn – “Die Gedanken sind frei”

Madam rector Magnificus, dear listeners,

Die Gedanken sind frei, wer kann sie erraten,  
sie fliehen vorbei wie nächtliche Schatten.  
Kein Mensch kann sie wissen, kein Jäger sie schießen  
es bleibt dabei: Die Gedanken sind frei!

This is the first verse of a song in German about the freedom of thought. The text first appeared around 1780 and was first printed in *Lieder der Brienzer Mädchen*, in Bern around 1810. In the nineteenth and twentieth century, the song gained acclaim as a protest song against political repression and censorship; as such, it was also popular with resistance groups during the Nazi regime. The song thematizes freedom of thought, and the idea that nobody can know your thoughts or punish you for them, and that is how it should be.

This freedom of thought may be an intangible asset, but it can brush up against, and come into conflict with daily practice, when we force ourselves, or are forced by our environment to take a stand. Especially if this is directly against the established or imposed order.

In this lecture, I will recall some of the moments when people were placed before these diabolical dilemmas. Often guided by their own convictions, they had to express and act on their thoughts, while knowing the hunter *could* actually shoot them down. Given my background as a physician, it may not surprise you to hear that I will mainly illustrate this with examples from the field of medicine. However, I will also refer to examples from other branches of academia where that freedom or interpretation of thought has been knowingly tested.

I will first take you back to my younger years. As a 15-year-old boy in 1975, I saw the film “Esther, voorgoed op reis” (*Esther, on a Journey Forever*). This television film written by Dick Walda, is based on the deportation of all the patients and personnel of the Jewish psychiatric institution “Het Apeldoornse Bos,” by the occupier on January 23, 1943.

Until that moment early in 1943, the war had passed relatively unnoticed by its staff and patients. The facility is located in the quiet forest around Apeldoorn. Despite the news about the war, patients and staff felt safe there. The Nazi regime seemed distant. Quite unexpectedly, on April 1,

1942, non-Jewish personnel were fired. From June 1942, Jews were no longer allowed to travel, making it impossible for visitors to visit the institution, so that it became increasingly isolated.

In January 1943, the 1200+ patients and 50 staff members were deported to Auschwitz. Some of the Jewish personnel managed to escape this transportation by fleeing. The film 'Esther, voorgevoerd op reis' is a - by contemporary standards - somewhat slowly emerging plot starring José Ruiter and Henk van Ulsen. As I said, I saw this film when I was 15 years old and it made a lasting impression on me then, and again, watching it now in preparation for this lecture, because of the way the film presents dilemmas of loyalty and medicine, love and ordained duty.

Esther is a Jewish nurse in this facility. She meets Leo, a co-worker, and the two become engaged. When the transport of the Jewish patients seems to be impending, Esther and Leo have a heated dialogue: should they choose to go into hiding or remain faithful to the psychiatric patients and also be transported? Leo chooses to go into hiding.

What seemed unimaginable happens: all 1200 patients and 50 staff members are deported. No one will return. It is perhaps one of the most criminal events of the Second World War in the Netherlands, which took place almost unnoticed due to the refined efficiency of the occupation. Therefore, it could easily be forgotten if we are not careful. As Esther is transported to Westerbork, and then to Germany, where she remains with her patients, Leo and Esther lose sight of each other. Leo will never see Esther again, although despite his better judgment there is one moment after the war ends when he thinks he recognizes her in an American tourist. However, Esther is on a journey forever. She could not let go of the thoughts of, and duties to her patients.

In the beautiful book "Vergeet nooit dat je arts bent" (*Never Forget You Are a Physician*), Hannah van den Ende recounts the practice in which instead of curing patients, Jewish doctors sometimes thought it wiser to make their patients more sick, with the aim of avoiding their deportation. The book relates the fate of these Dutch doctors during this time of repression and terror. Moral dilemmas and personal experiences are recounted: to what extent could doctors stick to their occupation, and to what extent did they remain loyal to themselves as well as the oath of Hippocrates? And which of these thoughts did they share with patients and their families, let alone the outside world?

Van Der Ende focuses on a double quest: Being a doctor and being Jewish in threatening times. But how was that for other Dutch doctors?

This brings me to the organization “Medical Contact” which arose in the Second World War. To get a grip on the medical establishment, the occupier demanded all Dutch physicians become part of a new organization in May 1942: the so-called Doctors’ Chamber. This was essentially an extension of the Royal Dutch Society for Advancement of Medicine, but then according to German principles. The occupier’s aim was to gain control over the doctors’ actions. This Doctors’ Chamber is not successful. Only a limited number of doctors register. Most find the ideas of the Doctors’ Chamber to be in conflict with the oath of Hippocrates and, additionally, do not want to identify themselves with the occupier. From 1943, however, membership became compulsory.

A number of doctors delve into the background of the occupiers’ actions, leading to the rise of Medical Contact, a collective resistance group amongst Dutch doctors. It is more of an information network than an organization, from which directions are distributed on how to behave in situations of conflict.

According to medical historian Van Lieburg, and I quote, “Medical Contact got the Dutch doctors on the same page fairly quickly.” In response to the compulsory membership of the Doctors’ Chamber, Medical Contact calls on the doctors to distance themselves from their title. During the so-called “sign protest,” Dutch doctors taped their doctor’s title on the door of their practice, symbolically relinquishing their title in doing so.

As Dr. Buiscool, one of the prominent members of Medical Contact has fiercely stated in a recent interview: “If membership of the Doctors’ Chamber is a condition for being a doctor, then I am not a doctor. Whatever! In the practice nothing changes; the patients continue to come and are treated.” After all, medical licenses were not revoked.

The situation of general practitioners differs here from medical specialists on one essential point. Where the medical practitioner could mostly continue an independent practice, the medical specialist in hospitals had to deal with the management of the hospital organization.

And when the boards of Dutch hospitals were increasingly filled by members of the NSB party, many specialists were confronted with the choice: continue working or quit? Who can you trust? Some immediately resign, others continue their work in their patients' interest. Those who resigned condemned those that stayed on, and after the war this obviously gave rise to heated discussion. What was good and what was bad?

Whether or not to treat Germans was not a difficult question for most doctors: you always treat people no matter their background. Van Lieburg calls the resistance of Medical Contact a resistance in quotation marks. I quote: "the word resistance evokes a suggestion of people walking the streets with rifles drawn. Medical Contact was rather about not joining this organization that was aimed at different ideals than those dictated by your doctors' oath. It was more of a tool to move the collective refusal in a specific direction."

How was this in Leiden, and specifically at Leiden's academic hospital? Before the outbreak of the Second World War, there were some concerns about the robustness of Leiden's academic society. Rector Magnificus Barge called out the increasing "Paroxysmal frivolity," Tendeloo called it the academy whose mind became emptier and more confused, the longer it existed, and Huizinga spoke of an obsessed world with overspecialization and a lack of metaphysical depth where people surrendered themselves to Jazz music. These - lets call them the free academic mores of the time - were the university's starting point for formulating the thoughts of how to deal with Nazi ideology.

Before the war's outbreak, rector magnificus Barge warned that anyone who carried out political propaganda could expect disciplinary action and anyone who insulted a certain population group would face the law.

With the outbreak of the war, victims were, following the oath of Hippocrates, nursed and cared for without discrimination in the AZL (the Academic hospital). Initially all wounded people lay side by side, until the different parties began to attack each other in the hospital. Subsequently, a separate German department was established. The medics were required to sign a statement of Aryan origins, which led to disputes within the faculty. Some signed, others signed under protest. Some resigned, and others - like Jewish associate professor Eugen Marx committed suicide.

In September 1941, people wondered whether collective resignation might be the best move. It should be noted that the only affiliated German connected to the faculty, Siemens, who initially had given his support to the Nazis, took a firm anti-German position after the invasion. During this collective resignation, he showed one of the most decisive standpoints: “Ich nicht” (not me). I will come back to this later. Eventually, the occupiers would deport him to the prison in Scheveningen, and later to the camp for hostages in Haaren.

Numerous professors, including the former rectors Barge and Flu, but also Kuenen, De Jongh, Bok, Lignac, Rademaker and many others, resigned. A few of these names will come back later. The clinical lecturers continued their poli-clinical practices at home, prompted by the need to provide an income in addition to their sense of medical obligation. In February 1942, director Maas of the AZL was ordered to place a sign “forbidden for Jews” at the hospital entrance. Maas considered this ethically unacceptable, and so did the Faculty Board, who considered it to be in conflict with the principles of medical ethics. This to the dismay of the president-curator appointed by the occupier: NSB member de Ruyter van Stevenick.

On the grounds of the AZL, extremes were found; the so-called ‘little green house’ - an old construction site shed - became the center of resistance. And in the attics of the pavilions, people were in hiding. Cardiologist Snellen, foreman of Medical Contact in Leiden hid Jewish children in the house right next to the AZL. He was helped by the neurology department, who arranged the hiding of Jewish children within the hospital. But there also were Nazi-sympathizing departments, such as gynaecology where Jewish women who were in mixed marriages, were forcibly sterilized. The psychiatric hospital in Oegstgeest also does not have a clean file.

It is clear that this heterogeneous setting with an imposed Nazi-friendly leadership was life-threatening and, in addition to the medical-ethical and personal moral considerations, it also carried dilemmas around the institution-bound nature of these medical specialists.

Others used science to try and frame things in such a way that helped people escape deportation. An example of this can be found in the book “Ontjoodst door de wetenschap” (*De-jewished By Science*) compiled by Machteld Roede and Jaap Cohen. In the summer of 1943, the University of Amsterdam published a report called “Die Anthropologie der sogenannten portugiesischen Juden in den Niederlanden.” It was written by the physical anthropologist Arie de Froe. The conclusion of his work was that Portuguese Jews belonged to the Western Mediterranean, or Alpine race,

arguing that they should be 'sperrt', or excluded from deportation. De Froe also managed to 'de-jewish' many Jews during the Second World War by forging individual certificates. Against oppression, he deliberately used and misused his scientific expertise to save human lives. De Froe's story is also interesting in light of contemporary discussions about scientific and professional integrity. Is it possible in times of war to practice value-free science? Does human integrity take precedence over professional integrity?

There also were powerful voices from Leiden that aimed to show the unscientific base of race theory. Professor Barge was a much sought-after orator due to his linguistic virtuosity, and he was popular among students for his lively lectures. On November 26, 1940, at the same hour Cleveringa gave his famous speech of disapproval about the dismissal of his Jewish colleague Meijers, Barge disproved the Nazis' views on the race doctrine in a public lecture with sharp and clear terms. Using scientific argument, he made clear that the "Jewish race" and the "German race" do not exist. This lecture caused quite a stir among medical students, who then decided to join the law students' strike. It was an unexpected and unforgettable event for the students that attended. One of them, who later became professor Willy Hijmans remembers: "Never for a moment did you think; 'That man is going beyond his scientific expertise.' He focused on heredity, anatomy, and he stuck to that. He made a strong and purely scientific argument."

Today, thoughts often turn to what happened in the Netherlands, which leads to a one-sided picture. I consciously chose an international text, "Die Gedanken sind frei," because freedom of thought, independent of its background, is something that has no borders and the repression of it, unfortunately, is ongoing.

This is expressed in an inspiring way in the book "Ich Nicht" by Joachim Fest. I already mentioned him. Fest was born in Berlin as the son of a teacher who opposed the new rulers from the day Hitler came to power January 30, 1933. In February 1933, when Joachim was seven years old, his father was fired and the struggle to survive the Nazi era began.

His father dominated Joachim's youth. He resisted the Nazis, sometimes with and sometimes in spite of his family. Joachim's father was a fierce opponent of the New Order. He therefore denied Joachim registration to the Hitler Youth to protect him from Nazi ideas. The Fest family had to suffer all kinds of humiliations because of this. Additionally, the children had to be careful not to publicly speak the opinions they were told at home. The characters of his parents, his

development as an adolescent... "Ich nicht" is an account of life at the cutting edge of history and gives a look into the often overlooked group of Germans that turned against the Nazis in Germany. Above all, it is an embodiment of the idea that you can maintain your integrity, even under the most extreme circumstances. In various newspapers, Fest argued that, for example, Günter Grass's critique of collective German guilt leads to moralism rather than to a sense of personal responsibility.

G 8581 in black block letters on a strip of cotton. It will not tell you much. It is in the right drawer of my desk in a yellowed cardboard box. Printed on this box is: Gevaert process Ortho 19. Tellingly, it is a box for photo printing paper: paper size 13x18 as if it were intended as a document from the past. This box contains a newspaper clipping from 1944. I quote from this: "In the evening of January 3, 1944, the director of the employment office, Diederichs, was murdered in Leiden. Diederichs was fatally injured on the public road by a gunshot, fired at him from behind. The newspaper called it a politically motivated crime. A curfew was imposed in Leiden. In addition, about 50 residents of the municipality were arrested, of whom it must have been assumed that they "approved the cowardly assassination attempt." According to the newspaper, three people resisted or tried to flee during the arrest which resulted in them being shot. History knows better. It was the deputy headmaster of the municipal Gymnasium, Chris de Jong, the general practitioner Hans Flu - son of the former rector magnificus of the university -, and the head of the school of the first Leiden School Association Harmen Douma, who were murdered by the S.S. It was a cold blooded liquidation, a result of the so-called Silbertanne action.

This measure of punishment had been commanded by Reichskommissar für das Sicherheitswesen, Rauter. With every attack or murder of a Nazi-friendly Dutchman, three prominent Dutchmen would be liquidated with the aim of deterring the population. Lists of people who were disliked by the occupying forces had been drawn up and the names of those who were the first to be considered for liquidation had been marked in advance with a pine twig. This measure owes its name to its marking. The others on the list were arrested as so-called hostages.

Among the 50 prisoners were professors and former Rector Magnificus Flu, Bok, Blok, Weststrate, and Cleveringa, the latter who was deported and imprisoned for the second time in the Second World War: this time to Sint Michielsgestel. Kees Schuyt wrote about this in his biography of Cleveringa: Perhaps this 4th of January is an even more important day in

Cleveringa's life than the 25th or 26th of November, 1940. This is when he realized, in his own words, "that this could be the end." He did not need much time to pack. As he wrote in his memoirs: "After my release from prison in Scheveningen in 1941... I always had a packed suitcase ready." And when the German police rang the doorbell, he wrote: "So I didn't have to pack much and could limit myself to saying goodbye to my wife and children."

There are two names on the list that hit closer to home for me: my grandfather and G 8581, the prisoner number stitched on my father's prison suit. They both survived the internment in Sint Michielsgestel and SS-Konzentrationslager Herzogenbusch (better known as Camp Vught), respectively, as otherwise I would not have been here. Three people shot without charge or trial, murdered. And 47 interned, some of whom fortunately returned, and others, like Esther, on a permanent journey. All because of their anti-German... no, because of their anti-Nazi thoughts and remaining true to them.

Although today we reflect on the horrors of the Second World War, the world does not seem to have learned much. War is accompanied by refugees. The refugee crisis is one of the major issues of our time: How can we offer refugees in the Netherlands, and in Europe, the help they need? And what have we learned from history? I fear not enough. In 2016, the international chairwoman of Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors without borders), prof. Joanna Liu gave the Cleveringa lecture, titled "whose lives matter." Dr. Liu, a Canadian pediatrician, decisively led her staff, who provided outpatient care and help to refugees with physical or psychological problems, in the most difficult circumstances and without regard for their backgrounds.

Such champions and organizations deserve the utmost respect and we must realize that they are essential for the fight against non-human and sometimes invisible enemies. In 2014, Médecins Sans Frontières helped contain the worldwide Ebola outbreak with great risk to their own health. But also with other disasters worldwide, they were committed to help people. The first phases of the COVID pandemic is an even more recent example. It is not often that it is not mankind that is the source of evil to be combatted. Chinese colleagues selflessly and directly shared the early experiences and protocols in English in the fight against Covid. In the present day we do not often see this anymore. Consequently, they have greatly helped colleagues here in Europe by sharing their knowledge and experience at an early stage. This happened despite the Chinese government not always appreciating it.

The wave of open-access literature that has washed over the world has meant that we have been able to get the situation under control fairly quickly. Everyone working in care was able to express their thoughts. Die Gedanken sind frei. Internationally, we lean on the shoulders of what often remain anonymous people with high regards to their principles, who are willing to sacrifice a lot - sometimes perhaps too much. The lung covid epidemic amongst first responders deserves attention here.

After the war, for a large group of people, the war and its horrors are far from over. Leiden, or actually Oegstgeest, has a tradition in the study and treatment of post-traumatic stress experiences. Professor Bastiaans was praised and crushed for his recognition of - and experimental treatment of - KZ syndrome with LSD. Recently, a book was published about Bastiaans and his therapy, placed in the controversies of his time but also with a connection to the present and the current emerging therapies using a comparable drug called MDMA: liberated.

In 1994, the Canadian UN General Roméo Dallaire led the UN peacekeeping mission in Rwanda. He could not prevent a genocide taking place before his eyes, in which 800 000 people were killed. In his Cleveringa lecture “Are all Humans Human? Ethical Responsibility in a New World Disorder,” the Canadian general spoke candidly about his horrific experiences and the trauma he was left with. His book, *Face to Face with the Devil* is not something to read before bedtime, but is something that keeps our eyes open about the real meaning of war.

The story about the Rwandan genocide is intense. Why is it so important that we keep repeating these horrific stories? As Dallair argues, it is important not to let the story of genocide die. He writes in his speech: “After the Holocaust, we said ‘never again,’ but it is obvious that we have not delivered on that promise.”

“In fact, the international community has not even done its best to prevent or stop the massacre in Rwanda. If we do not keep talking about it, this story will disappear. It is essential to remember the lives lost, and to remember them as people like you and me. Only reconciliation can prevent future conflict.”

Dallair eventually went into the history books as the “Commander who stayed.” The peacekeeping mission he commanded was recalled to ensure the safety of the soldiers, however,

together with some of the troops, he decided to disregard this order so as not to abandon Rwanda. I quote: "Like Cleveringa, I saw a great ethical responsibility not to obey."

In addition to this principled stance against the UN leadership, there is another remarkable point. He was one of the first senior commanders to openly admit to suffering from PTSD, which was so intense he considered ending his life on multiple occasions. It was vital that a two-star general spoke out to break these taboos. He told his colleagues that the high suicide rate amongst soldiers was a direct result of their participation in foreign missions. This made a lot of people angry but also raised awareness. And more importantly, he used his position to speak out, believing it to be his responsibility to do so.

Whomever thought that war was cleaner, and far away, has roughly been awakened from this naivety in recent months. Let us timely consider that when this terrible conflict in Ukraine is resolved - which hopefully is soon - the civilians and soldiers need more than economic and physical recovery. If we do this, we can show that commemorating and thinking sometimes *can* teach us something.

I started this speech with the first verse of "Die Gedanken sind frei." A song of hope in different circumstances. An expression of our Praesidium Libertatis in a different context, but which can also serve as a guideline. In the program book you can find the text of two verses from the song. I started this speech with the first verse. In conclusion, may I ask you to read the last verse aloud with me:

Und sperrt man mich ein - im finsternen Kerker,  
das alles sind rein - vergebliche Werke;  
denn meine Gedanken zerreißen  
die Schranken und Mauern entzwei:  
die Gedanken sind frei.

I have spoken.

