

Herman Dooyeweerd

## 2. Cornelius Van Til And the Transcendental Critique Of Theoretical Thought

My good friend,

You have from the beginning expressed your sympathy with the reformatory tendency of the Philosophy of the Cosmonomic Idea. It is no wonder that, as a professor of apologetics, you are especially interested in the transcendental critique of theoretical thought, which this philosophy has laid at the foundation of every further philosophical investigation. No wonder, indeed, since this critique has been presented as the only critical way of communication between a really reformatory Christian philosophy and philosophical schools holding in one sense or another to the supposed autonomy of theoretical thought. It is this very method of communication which could be also of fundamental import for a reformatory apologetics that seeks to avoid any compromise with the traditional scholastic conception of the relative autonomy of human reason with respect to so-called "natural knowledge." You have tried to develop such an apologetics in a consistent way in your book, *The Defense of the Faith*. In your class syllabus on "Biblical Dimensionalism,"<sup>1</sup> which was kindly placed at my disposal, you have dwelled at length on the question about whether my transcendental critique can indeed clear the way for a real communication with philosophical trends that hold to the autonomy of theoretical thought.

From your critical comment on this discussion it appears that you are not satisfied with the way in which I have applied this critique in the dialogue with neo-thomistic and other philosophers. Your main objection is that, in your opinion, I do not carry through my reformatory biblical starting point in such a dialogue in a consistent manner. This failure would already appear from my distinction between a transcendental and a transcendent criticism of philosophical views.

I am afraid that you have misunderstood what I mean by this distinction. You think that by transcendental critique I understand a critique that starts from the (transcendent) "fulness and unity of truth accepted on the authority of Scripture."<sup>2</sup> By my opposing such a transcendent critique to the transcendental one, as the "dogmatical" to the "critical" method of communication, I am supposed to forget "that the whole point of transcendental criticism is lost unless it is based upon transcendent criticism."

In the syllabus this latter statement is wrongly ascribed to Berkouwer. I suppose it is,

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<sup>1</sup> This is part 3, ch. 9 of Vol. 2 of *CC*.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

in fact, your own as appears from your explanatory addition: "That is to say, the entire transcendental method hangs in the air except for the fact that it rests upon the fullness and unity of truth accepted on the authority of Scripture."

But by a transcendent criticism, as opposed to the transcendental critique of theoretic thought, I understood something quite different from what you suppose. I meant by transcendent criticism, the dogmatic manner of criticizing philosophical theories from a theological or from a different philosophical viewpoint without a critical distinction between theoretical propositions and the supra-theoretical presuppositions lying at their foundation.

In *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, I have explained in detail why I reject such a transcendent critique, which in scholastic theology has been repeatedly applied to condemn scientific and philosophical ideas that did not agree with traditional scholastic views. In view of this state of affairs I remarked: "Besides, there is another ever present danger" (viz. in transcendent criticism). "What is actually a complex of philosophical ideas dominated by unbiblical motives, may be accepted by dogmatic theology and accommodated to the doctrine of the church. The danger is that this complex of ideas will be passed off as an article of Christian faith, if it has influenced the terminology of some confessions of faith."<sup>3</sup> Among the Reformed confessions I am reminded of that of Westminster, which renders the Christian belief concerning human nature in terms of the dualistic Thomistic-Aristotelian conception, just as the Council of Vienne had done before. To clear the way for a reformatory philosophy it was necessary to subject this traditional scholastic view, inclusive of its whole Greek metaphysical background, to a transcendental critique from the radical biblical standpoint.

This criticism laid bare the unbiblical ground-motive lying at the foundation of this metaphysics. Valentine Hepp, the late professor of dogmatic theology at the Free University of Amsterdam, was of the opinion that rejection of the traditional scholastic view of human nature was a deviation from the Reformed confession; and the theological faculty of that time shared this opinion. We are confronted here with a transcendent critique in *optima forma*.

I guess that you will gladly agree that this kind of criticism is rejectable. But the point at issue is whether, and if so, how, the transcendental critique meant in the sense of the Philosophy of the Cosmomic idea is able to join issue with philosophical trends which do not share its radical biblical starting point, but rather in one sense or another hold to the autonomy of theoretical human thought.

To understand the true meaning and purport of this transcendental critique, it is necessary to realize that its primary purpose was to institute a radically transcendental inquiry into the inner nature and structure of the theoretical attitude of thought and experience, and into the real nature of the presuppositions lying at the foundation of every possible philosophical reflection.

This inquiry was necessary to answer the question whether the traditional dogma concerning the autonomy of theoretical thought may in some way or another be based

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<sup>3</sup> Herman Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, Vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1953), pp. 37–38.

upon the inner nature and structure of the latter. This critical investigation was concerned with philosophical problems of a primordial transcendental character, for these problems arise from the inner nature and structure of the theoretical attitude of thought and experience itself.

The task of a transcendental critique, which makes this theoretical attitude as such a critical problem, is quite different from that of a theological apologetics. It does not aim at a “defense of the Christian faith” but at laying bare the central influence of the different religious, basic motives upon the philosophical trends of thought. For that purpose it was necessary to show the inner point of contact between theoretical thought and its supra-theoretical presuppositions which relate to the central religious sphere of human existence. This is why this transcendental critique is obliged to begin with an inquiry into the inner nature and structure of the theoretical attitude of thought and experience as such and not with a confession of faith. In this first phase of the critical investigation such a confession would be out of place. Not because the first question raised by our transcendental critique might be answered apart from the central religious starting-point of those who take part in the philosophical dialogue, but because the necessity of such a starting-point has not yet come up for discussion. For, so long as the dogma concerning the autonomy of theoretical thought has not been subjected to a transcendental critique, adherents of this dogma who enter into a dialogue with the Philosophy of the Cosmomic Idea might rightly confine themselves to the simple statement that theoretical philosophy has nothing to do with questions of faith and religion. In other words, the dialogue would be cut off before it could start.

The confrontation of the biblical and the non-biblical groundmotives of theoretical thought belongs to the third and last phase of the transcendental critique. Only in this phase the transcendental problem crops up concerning the possibility of a concentric direction of theoretical thinking to the human ego, as its central reference point, and concerning the inner nature of the latter.

This problem, too, arose from the inner nature and structure of the theoretical attitude of thought and experience itself. For, this attitude turned out to be characterized by an intentional antithetical relation between the logical or analytical mode of theoretical thinking and the non-logical modal aspects of human experience within the horizon of cosmic time. Both this theoretical antithesis and the intermodal theoretical synthesis, necessary to gain a conceptual insight into the modal structures of the non-logical aspects of our temporal horizon of experience, bind theoretical thought to a divergent direction. Nevertheless both of them presuppose the human ego as the central reference point of our consciousness which as such must transcend the modal diversity of the temporal horizon of human experience.

This means that the third problem of the transcendental critique, though it be evoked by the transcendental critical turn of theoretical thought to the thinking ego, cannot be solved within the boundaries of theoretical thought and experience.

Self-knowledge is here at issue and true self-knowledge is, as you so rightly remark, completely dependent upon true knowledge of God, which is to be obtained only from his Word-revelation fulfilled in Jesus Christ. This central knowledge is, however, certainly not of a theoretical conceptual character. In his high priestly prayer Jesus says

that this knowledge is eternal life in the love-communion with the Father and the Son. In his earthly life in which the Christian is still subject to the consequences of sin, he can have only a principle of this religious knowledge. The latter presupposes the opening up of his "heart," i.e., the religious center of his existence, by the Holy Ghost to the moving power of the Word-revelation. Since man has been created in the image of God, the religious impulse, as Calvin rightly observes, is an innate impulse of the human heart. He calls it "*semen religionis*." It is a natural disposition which in itself is unable to lead man to true self-knowledge and knowledge of God. But it brings about the restless longing for communion with the absolute upon which he may concentrate all the relative, primarily his own self as the creaturely religious concentration-point of his existence. The religious impulse was, from the beginning, thrown on the central motive power of God's general Word-revelation, which alone could give it true content and a right direction.

By the fall into sin it got an apostate trend. Turning away from the Word of God and lending ear to the temptation to be like God in his self-sufficiency, man directed his innate religious impulse towards idols originating from an absolutization of creaturely meaning-structures of the temporal world.

Hence the necessary ambiguity of the term "religious" in the Philosophy of the Cosmomic Idea. It always refers here to the central sphere of human existence and consciousness in its active relation to God, and to the central motive power operating in it. But Holy Scripture teaches us that this central dynamis may be that of the Word-revelation leading us into the Truth, as well as that of the spirit of apostasy who leads the innate religious impulse of the human heart in a false direction.

Naturally it is possible to eliminate this ambiguity of the terms "religious" and "religion" by ascribing to them only an idolatrous or a Christian sense respectively. Karl Barth did so in the former sense and consequently opposed all religion, including the Christian, as a supposed product of the apostate human nature, to the Word of God and the life out of grace alone. But this arbitrary restriction of the meaning of the term, which is in line with Barth's antithetical conception of the scholastic basic motive of nature and grace, is unacceptable.

The innate religious impulse of the human heart does not result from man's apostate nature, but, as we observed above, from his creation in the image of God.

I was therefore really surprised by your comment on the ambiguous use of the term "religious" in my transcendental critique.<sup>4</sup> "The basic trouble," you said, "is that the term religious is used by both Dooyeweerd and Berkouwer first in one way and then in another. Basically it means for them the biblical scheme of things.... But then they also use the term religious in a general sense of any position that recognizes the need of religious presuppositions in addition to logical thought or theoretical reason." You apparently view this general use of the term (that for the rest of this form is not to be found with me) in close connection with (1) the contradistinction between a transcendent and a transcendental critique and my rejection of the former; (2) my supposed idea that the "states of affairs" "have an objectivity" apart from the biblical

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<sup>4</sup> CC/2:3.9, p. 51.

presuppositions; and, (3) in particular, my supposed view “that irrationalism and subjectivism can be answered without reference to biblical content.”

The first point can now be considered settled as resting on a misunderstanding. As to the third point I must remark that I have rejected both rationalism and irrationalism, both subjectivism and objectivism from the biblical view concerning the correlation and mutual irreducibility of law and subject. As to the second point, I wonder how you could ascribe to me the opinion that the “states of affairs” would have an objectivity which gives them a neutral position over against the biblical presuppositions of my transcendental critique. You have apparently deduced this opinion from my explanation of my standpoint with respect to the “states of affairs” in the controversy with van Peursen in the year 1960 of *Philosophia Reformata*. You seem to have been particularly impressed by van Peursen’s question if there does not exist a dialectical tension between my statement that there are undeniable states of affairs which can be discovered by both Christian and non-Christian scholars, and my thesis according to which, for instance, the statement  $2 \times 2 = 4$  has no truth in itself, but can function only within the total dynamical meaning-context of our experiential horizon. You understood van Peursen’s question as follows: “On the one hand, ... Dooyeweerd tells us that the truths of arithmetics must be seen as a part of the whole cosmic structure as this in turn is seen in the light of Christian truth, and then again he speaks of it as though it were a truth independent of this Christian scheme.”<sup>5</sup>

This was not exactly the point in van Peursen’s question. Van Peursen started from the erroneous opinion that I would have conceived the “states of affairs” in the sense of “brute facts” apart from their meaning. If this were true there would naturally exist a striking antinomy between my conception of the “states of affairs” and my fundamental view concerning the meaning-character of creaturely reality. In my reply I gave therefore, once more, an ample exposition of my conception concerning this point. In this exposition I stressed the fact that the “states of affairs” have never been conceived by me as “brute facts” in the sense of a positivistic empiricism.

The “states of affairs” presenting themselves within the temporal order of our experience are, in my opinion, of a dynamic meaning-character, i.e. they refer outside and above themselves to the universal meaning-context in time, to the creaturely unity of root and to the absolute Origin of all meaning. This was the religious presupposition resulting from the biblical ground-motive of my philosophical thought. But it would naturally be a serious error to suppose that this religious presupposition as such would provide us with a philosophical insight into the transcendental meaning-structures of our temporal world.

To acquire such an insight we need, in the first place, a careful investigation of a great number of “states of affairs” which appear to be helpful to a theoretical analysis of these meaning-structures, but which, as such, must be considered independent of our subjective philosophical interpretation. Van Peursen wrongly considered my insistence on this latter point as an indication of an objectivistic view of the “states of affairs.”

In fact it was nothing but a result of my biblical conviction that the “states of affairs”

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

in which the transcendental meaning-structures of our temporal horizon of experience reveal themselves are not founded in our subjective consciousness, but in the divine order of creation to which our subjective experience is subject. For this very reason they also cannot be dependent upon the religious conviction of the investigator, so that they may be discovered in a particular context by both Christian and non-Christian thinkers.

It is not so that the discovery of “states of affairs” which turn out to be of great importance for our insight into the modal meaning-structure of a transcendental aspect, is seen by everybody in that way. It may be that they are immediately given a philosophical interpretation which is incompatible with the modal meaning-structure of the aspect concerned.<sup>6</sup> The “states of affairs” may also be too hastily interpreted in terms of a particular conception of the modal meaning-structure concerned which turns out to be liable to justified criticism. This is why I consider it a critical requirement to suspend our philosophical interpretation of the “states of affairs” at issue until we have so many of them at our disposal, relating to all the modal aspects of our temporal experiential world which until now we have learned to distinguish, that we can try to conceive them in a philosophical total view. In this whole explanation to van Peursen of my standpoint with respect to the “states of affairs” there is not a trace to be found of the ambiguity which you think to have discovered in it. Nowhere have I said that the “states of affairs,” lying at the foundation of my philosophical theory of the modal spheres, have an “objectivity” apart from the “biblical presuppositions.” On the contrary, I have stressed the fact that they are founded in the divine order of creation. Nowhere have I claimed “to use a transcendental method that is not directly (?) dependent upon the truths of Scripture,” nor have I appealed “to supposedly objective states of affairs that have an objectivity not depending upon the truths of Scripture.”<sup>7</sup>

Asking myself what may have induced you to ascribe to the Philosophy of the Cosmomic Idea such a dialectical dualism, I find myself confronted with, what I fear to be, a typical rationalistic scholastic tendency in your theological thought. This tendency reveals itself first in your objections against my distinction between theoretical conceptual knowledge, and the central religious self-knowledge and knowledge of God. On this point you appear to agree with the neoscholastic thinkers, Robbers and Mrs. Conradie, and in some degree also with van Peursen. I fear your rationalism may go even further than that of the neo-scholastic thinkers mentioned, for the latter have never claimed that philosophical ideas are to be derived from the supra-natural truths of divine revelation, and that is exactly what you seem to defend. In “Biblical Dimensionalism” you mention my rectification of van Peursen’s erroneous assertion that according to vol. 2, p. 54 of *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* my transcendental idea of cosmic time has been borrowed from revelation.<sup>8</sup> The passage to which van Peursen refers reads in fact as follows: “It is only the biblical religious basic

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<sup>6</sup> I refer, for instance, to the discovery of the principle of logical economy in theoretical thought, which, by the positivistic thinkers Mach and Avenarius, was reduced to what they called the fundamental bio-physical law of labor saving.

<sup>7</sup> CC/2:3.9, p. 55.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 55–56.

motive that gives the view of time the ultimate direction to the true fulness of meaning intended by our cosmonomic Idea.”

In this context I observed that none of the three transcendental ground-ideas of the Philosophy of the Cosmonomic Idea is to be derived from the biblical basic motive which controls the ultimate direction of its theoretical reflection, since this basic motive is of a supra-theoretical character. Upon this statement you comment as follows: “We would ask Dooyeweerd, however, how he can put an intelligible content into the phrase ‘Christian thinking’ in terms of control (*beheersen*) rather than in terms of derivation (*afleiding*). If we are to avoid mysticism, then we must do something with the actual revelational content of Scripture. Dooyeweerd needs to borrow nothing from any theologian. But revelation is expressed in thoughtcontent. And it is this thought-content, unmixed with any interpretation of any man, which controls his own thinking. This being the case, what difference remains between the idea of his thinking being controlled (by) or being derived from Scripture. Control without derivation is an empty mystical phrase.” In reply to this comment I can only ask the counter question, how it would be possible to derive from the biblical revelation a philosophical idea of cosmic time with its diversity of modal aspects, of which it does not speak in any way.

The Bible does not provide us with philosophical ideas, no more than it gives us natural scientific knowledge or an economic or legal theory. But theoretical thought needs a central starting-point which transcends the modal diversity of our temporal horizon of experience and must consequently be of a supra-theoretical character. It is only by virtue of its supra-theoretical character that this starting-point can give central lead to our theoretical thought. This has been shown by the radical transcendental critique of the theoretical attitude of thought and experience which I have laid at the foundation of all my further philosophical investigations. This critique could be truly radical only because in the three phases of its critical investigation it had its supra-theoretical starting-point in the central ground-motive of the Word-revelation, viz., that of creation, fall into sin, and redemption by Jesus Christ, as the incarnate divine Word, in the communion of the Holy Ghost.

In my various explanations of the transcendental critique both within and outside my work, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, I have always emphasized its biblical starting-point. What, then, so I ask myself again, may have made you think that this critique would be not “directly” dependent upon the transcendent “biblical truths?” It seems to me that it is again a certain rationalistic view of the divine Word-revelation that hinders you from seeing the fundamental difference and the true relation between the central religious and the theoretical-conceptual sphere of knowledge. The difference you apparently deny, and this is why the question concerning their true relation does in fact not come up for discussion in your train of thought.<sup>9</sup>

This appears, in my opinion, from your objections to what I have observed with respect to true self-knowledge and true knowledge of God in their unbreakable

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<sup>9</sup> In *DF*, 1st ed., p. 235, you speak of the “theory of reality” which the Bible contains, and of the definite philosophy of history involved in the biblical conception of eternity (p. 26).

coherence, and especially with respect to the central ground-motive of the biblical revelation as moving power or *dunamis* addressing itself primarily to the heart or the religious center of our existence.<sup>10</sup> As to the first point you ask me (1) how I may avoid falling into the trap of Kant's idea of the primacy of practical reason,<sup>11</sup> and (2) how I can avoid placing the self in a vacuum over against all the conceptual knowledge that we have of anything.

Why not rather say that since a true knowledge of self and the world depends upon a true knowledge of God and since the knowledge of God about himself, about man, and about the world was mediated to man from the beginning through ordinary language, including conceptual terms, we now, as sinners saved by Christ, subordinate all our thinking to the truths of Scripture.... Listening to Scripture, obeying the voice of God speaking through Christ in Scripture, means making every human thought subject to divine thought.

"In Christ, says Dooyeweerd, our hearts are enlightened. But who then is Christ? He is what the Bible says he is in thoughts expressed in words, in concepts. Dooyeweerd speaks of the '*central dunamis*' of the Divine 'Word' as taking hold of us in the depth of our being. If this idea of *dunamis* is not to lead us into a Kantian sort of noumenal, then it must be based upon the spoken Word, full of thought-content.... Dooyeweerd's discussion of the *dunamis* of the divine revelation as over against the simple thought-content of Scripture adds still further to the ambiguity contained in what he says about the transcendental method.... Why did not Dooyeweerd tell van Peursen that his basic view of objectivity is the normativity of the Scriptural concepts of creation, of sin and of redemption? ... It is concepts that need interpretation, yes, by human concepts based on revealed concepts. The whole attempt at reforming philosophical thought in terms of

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<sup>10</sup> CC/2:3.9, pp. 56–57.

<sup>11</sup> You do not explain how it might be possible to connect my view of the supra-rational character of the central religious ground-motive of the Word-revelation with Kant's doctrine concerning the primacy of practical reason and with his metaphysical ethical idea of the *homo noumenon*. I fear that you have come to this misconception in consequence of the scholastic framework of your Reformed theological thought. You hold to a Christian theoretical metaphysics which, according to you, is to be derived from the Bible. This metaphysics contains a "two layer theory of being," i.e., first a concept of the triune God in his aseity, and second a concept of created being. Man's creation in the image of God involves, you say, of necessity, a true metaphysical knowledge of God. Sin and redemption are not of a metaphysical but of an ethical character. In consequence you distinguish the merely theoretical knowledge of God from the ethical which combines this rational knowledge with loving. Only the latter is true in a rational ethical sense. In this way the central religious sphere of human existence and knowledge is reduced to the rational ethical aspect of human behavior, which according to both scholasticism and Kantian criticism is controlled by practical reason. Within this framework of thought, attribution of the central place to the religious knowledge of God, not conceived of as a theoretical metaphysics, must seem to be tantamount to accepting the primacy of practical reason.



the modalities of thought as set forth by Dooyeweerd breaks down unless he reforms the concept of *dunamis*.”

I guess this ample quotation sheds a clear light on the rationalist tendency in your thought in consequence of which you are unable to escape dilemmas which the Philosophy of the Cosmonomic Idea has unmasked as polarly opposite absolutizations.

Rationalism as absolutization of conceptual thought evokes necessarily irrationalism as its alternative.<sup>12</sup> The objectivism implied in traditional scholastic rationalism evokes as its alternative subjectivism, etc. It is consequently quite understandable that from your standpoint you consider my distinction between conceptual knowledge and central religious knowledge a result of an irrationalist mystical view of the latter. In line with Robbers and van Peursen you interpret this distinction as a separation, so that the central supra-conceptual sphere and the conceptual sphere of knowledge are conceived of as opposite to, and independent of, each other. In this way the distinction is naturally transformed into a dialectical tension, testifying to a dualistic trend in my thought. In my discussion with van Peursen I have dwelled at length on this radical misrepresentation of my view and I have given an ample rectification. You do not go into this rectification, and I fear that so long as you stick to this rationalist standpoint you will not be able to understand what I have written in this context.

In your train of thought the matter seems to be quite simple. The Word-revelation results from divine thought. It is mediated to man through ordinary language. Its content is thought-content expressed in words (wrongly identified with concepts).<sup>13</sup> Consequently, listening to Scripture, obeying the voice of God speaking through Christ in Scripture, means making every human thought subject to divine thought expressed in scriptural concepts, so that man has to “think God’s thoughts after him.”

Is this really a biblical view? I am afraid not. Nowhere does the Bible speak of obeying the voice of God in terms of subjecting every human thought to divine thought. The New Testament understanding of obedience is doing the Father’s will revealed in

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<sup>12</sup> In *DF*, 1st ed., p. 58, you emphatically accept this alternative. Christianity is opposed here to “absolute irrationalism” as an “absolute rationalism.” The only restriction is that our rational knowledge of God and the universe is “not comprehensive,” such as God’s self-knowledge and knowledge of the universe. I do not overlook that by “absolute rationalism” you understand the view that every fact has been pre-determined and pre-interpreted by God according to his rational providential plan, so that no single fact comes about by chance. Nor do I overlook that in another context you seek the origin of both rationalism and irrationalism, viewed in their historical forms, in the apostate belief in the autonomy of man over against God. But why do you speak then of the biblical Christian view as an absolute rationalism? Because you identify God’s providential plan with absolute rationality. But “absolute rationality” is an obvious metaphysical absolutization, just like Occam’s *potentia Dei absoluta*. I shall return to this point in the text.

<sup>13</sup> If this identification were correct, an English translation of Dutch conceptual terms would be impossible, since there would be no identity of concepts for lack of identical words.

the gospel of Jesus Christ, by believing with all our heart that we belong to him. There is no real obedience to the will of God that does not result from the heart, in the pregnant biblical sense, as the religious center of our existence, which must be regenerated and opened up by the divine moving power of the Holy Ghost. It is exactly this central biblical condition that is lacking in your circumscription of obedience. You do not, of course, at all deny the necessity of rebirth. But I fear that the biblical conception of the religious center of human existence does not fit in with your view of the human nature.<sup>14</sup>

That the Word-revelation was from the beginning mediated to man through human language is naturally unquestionable. But that verbal language would necessarily signify conceptual thought-contents is a rationalist prejudice that runs counter to the real states of affairs. By means of language we can signify symbolically not only conceptual thought contents, but all sorts of contents of our consciousness, such as subjective moods and emotional feelings, volitional decisions in a concrete situation, our faith in Jesus Christ, pre-theoretical aesthetical and moral experiences, often expressed in short exclamations such as "How wonderful!" or "Shame on you!" etc., which certainly do not give expression to conceptual knowledge of the experiential modes concerned.

The transcendental critique of theoretical thought has shown why true self-knowledge in its biblical sense, i.e., in its dependence upon true knowledge of God, cannot be itself of a conceptual character. The reason is that all conceptual knowledge in its analytical and inter-modal synthetical character presupposes the human ego as its central reference-point, which consequently must be of a supra-modal nature and is not capable of logical analysis. This does not mean, as you suppose, that the human self is placed in a vacuum over against all the conceptual knowledge that we have of everything. The human ego cannot be theoretically opposed to conceptual knowledge since, as the central reference-point of the latter, it transcends every theoretical antithesis.

It would be placed in a vacuum only if we would try to conceive it apart from the three central (and consequently supra-logical) relations without which it loses all meaning and content. I mean its relation to our multi-modal existence and experience in the temporal world, the I-thou relation to our fellow-men, and the religious I-Thou relation to God, in whose image man has been created. Since the last mentioned relation encompasses the two others, we may say that, according to its positive meaning, the human ego is the religious concentration point or center of man's existence. This is what the Bible, in a pregnant sense, calls the "heart," from which are the issues of life, from which proceed all sins and in which takes place rebirth out of the

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<sup>14</sup> In your *DF*, 1st ed., p. 93, you seem to join in with Hodge, who identifies the heart in its pregnant biblical sense with "that which thinks, feels, wills and acts," i.e., with "the soul, the self." The soul is apparently conceived here in the traditional metaphysical sense as an immaterial substance embracing the feelings, the intellect, and the will. But this traditional view of the human soul is quite different from the radical biblical revelation of the human "heart" as the religious center of the integral whole of man's existence.

Holy Ghost.

The Bible does not speak of this religious center in conceptual terms, no more than Jesus in his night conversation with Nicodemus gave a conceptual circumscription of rebirth as the necessary condition of seeing the kingdom of God. The same holds good with respect to the biblical revelation of creation, man's fall into sin, and redemption through Jesus Christ. You often speak of the "scriptural concepts of creation, of sin, and of redemption," as revealed concepts, whose normativity ought to be our basic view of objectivity. But the Word-revelation does not reveal concepts of creation, sin, and redemption.

You do not seem to have seen that words and concepts cannot be identical. "Now, to be sure," you say, "when we speak of creation, we use concepts. There is no other way of speaking of God and of his relation to man." What, in my opinion, you should have said is that when we speak of creation, we use human words varying with the language of which we avail ourselves, and multivocal in common parlance. But in biblical usage they have got an identical revelational meaning in so far as they relate to God in his self-revelation as the absolute Origin of all that through his Word has been called into being. This revelational meaning transcends every human concept<sup>15</sup> since it is of a supra-rational character. Supra-rational should by no means be confused with irrational. It is not, like the latter, the opposite, but the presupposition of the rational, just like the human self-hood is presupposed in every human thought and every human concept. God's self-revelation in Holy Scripture as Creator and Redeemer concerns the central religious relation of man to his absolute Origin. Its true meaning is therefore to be understood by man only if his heart has been opened up to it through the moving power of the Holy Ghost, which is the *dunamis* of the biblical Word-revelation. What is said here about the *dunamis* of the Word-revelation and the central role of the heart in the understanding of its meaning is in complete accordance with the biblical testimony (cf. Is 6:10–13; Acts 16:14) and with the opinion of Calvin.<sup>16</sup> But you place it "over against the simple thought-content of Scripture" and are of the opinion that it adds still further to the ambiguity of my transcendental critique. You think so, however, not on biblical ground, but in consequence of a rationalistic view of the Word-revelation and of the religious relation of man to God, which, you feel, is of a rational-ethical character. This rationalism implies also a relapse into a metaphysical theory of the intrinsical divine

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<sup>15</sup> The explanatory theological addition of the words *ex nihilo* to the word *creatio*, which, since Augustine, has become usual in theological dogmatics, is naturally not to be considered as a conceptual definition. Augustine availed himself of this addition to prevent confusion with the Platonic idea of the divine *demiourgos* and with the neo-Platonic emanation doctrine. For that purpose it has been useful in a degree. But it is well known that the words *ex nihilo* have turned out to be not entirely harmless in Augustine's theological exposition of the doctrine of creation, since they foster the idea that nothingness would be a second origin of creaturely being bringing about a metaphysical defect in the latter.

<sup>16</sup> cf. the citations from the *Institutes* in *New Critique*, 1/516, 7.

being and its attributes, which Calvin called a “*vacua et meteorica speculatio*.”<sup>17</sup> That this theological metaphysics is necessarily involved in antinomies is, in your opinion, not a consequence of its vain attempt to exceed the boundaries of conceptual thought. It is only because of the necessary incompleteness of our theoretical knowledge about God and the created universe. The antinomies exist therefore only seemingly, but are nevertheless inevitable.<sup>18</sup>

But now you will ask me if I myself am not obliged to use concepts of God and the human ego in the threefold transcendental ground-idea whose necessity the transcendental critique has shown. It is true that I used the term limiting idea in this context and you appear to be willing to conceive of the “concept of creation” as a limiting idea. I guess that then the same must hold good with respect to what you call the other revealed concepts. But what is meant by the term “limiting idea” in the transcendental critique of theoretical thought as developed by the Philosophy of the Cosmologic Idea? Nothing else is meant but the concentric religious turn of our theoretic conceptual thought, which is bound to the modal diversity of our temporal existence and experience to its supra-conceptual presupposita. This means that the genuine conceptual contents of these transcendental limiting ideas do not transcend the modal dimension of our temporal horizon of experience. The same applies to the theological limiting concepts relating to the so-called attributes of God. In *The Defense of the Faith* you deal with these attributes within the traditional framework of a metaphysical theory of being. They are, you say, not to be thought of otherwise than as aspects of the one simple original being;<sup>19</sup> whereas in fact, they are taken from the modal dimension of our temporal horizon of experience and existence in its central relation to God as its absolute Origin. But since they are ascribed to God, such as he has revealed himself to man in Holy Scripture, i.e., within the human horizon of experience and existence, they are to be understood only in the analogical sense of belief as analogies of faith (*analogiae fidei*) whose material content is exclusively determined by God’s Word-revelation. For, in their sense-proper, the modal aspects of our temporal horizon cannot be ascribed to God’s being as its properties, since they are of a creaturely character. But the analogies of belief, insofar as they relate to God’s self-revelation, are preëminently fit to give expression both to God’s presence in the temporal world and to his absolute transcendence; to his presence, since they imply the whole temporal order of the modal aspects; to his transcendence, since they refer to God’s absoluteness, which transcends every creaturely determination. In any case, they cannot be given a metaphysical interpretation as if they would be determinations of God’s absolute being, for they too belong to the modal dimension of the human horizon of experience. Because they refer to God’s absoluteness, they are unbreakably bound to the central religious dimension of this horizon. For it is only in the religious center of his consciousness that man is confronted with the absolute, so that even the absolutizations in apostate philosophical views originate in the central religious impulse

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<sup>17</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 1:5.9, joined with 1:10.2.

<sup>18</sup> *DF*, 1st ed., p. 62.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

of the human heart, which has been led in an erroneous direction. Since the analogical moments in the modal structure of the different aspects of our experiential horizon are arranged in an unbreakable order and meaning-context, their meaning is bound to this context. As to the analogies of belief relating to what metaphysical theology called the “attributes of God’s being,” this implies that they should not be separately called absolute, or be identified with God’s absolute being. This is why I cannot agree with your statement that God’s being is exhaustively rational.<sup>20</sup> My objections concern your whole view of God’s self-revelation in Holy Scripture according to which it would contain a metaphysical theory of the divine being. It is true that it was not your intention to make deductions on the basis of one attribute by itself<sup>21</sup> and that, in line with Calvin, you say that no knowledge of God’s nature is available to man except such as is voluntarily revealed to him by God. But by interpreting God’s self-revelation in Holy Scripture in terms of a metaphysical theory of God’s being, you could not stick to this biblical standpoint. Nowhere can you find in the Bible support for your statement<sup>22</sup> that “logic and reality meet first of all in the mind and being of God,” so that God’s being would be “exhaustively rational.” We are, indeed, confronted here with a metaphysical absolutization of the logical analogy of belief in what the Bible reveals about God’s omniscience. This appears from what you observe with respect to Leibniz’s distinction between truth of fact and truth of reason.<sup>23</sup> According to you, the Reformed apologist should hold to the truths of fact presented in Scripture only because to him they are truths of reason. It is true that you yourself, as a creaturely human being, are not able to show “the exhaustive logical relationships between the facts of history and nature which are in debate as between believers and unbelievers in Christian theism,” but in the plan of God they function, you say, within an absolute system of logical relations which does not detract anything from their individuality. We should, however, realize what Leibniz meant by his distinction between truths of reason and truths of fact. The former are, according to him, those whose opposite is excluded by the logical principle of contradiction. The latter are those whose opposite is not impossible in a logical sense, because they are of a contingent, i.e., not necessary, character. This does, however, not mean that in Leibniz’s opinion the facts would happen by blind chance or that they would lack logical coherence. They happen according to God’s will and are subject to the logical *principium rationis sufficientis*, which in Leibniz’ logistic view embraces all kinds of causal relationships. Leibniz maintains the distinction between truths of fact and truths of reason even with respect to God’s mind: the former depend upon God’s will, the latter upon God’s reason. I am afraid that you have not realized that a theological reduction of the truths of fact to Leibniz’ truths of reason would make even the central facts of creation, fall into sin, and redemption a consequence of logical necessity in virtue of the principle of contradiction. This would result in an extreme logicistic view of “God’s world-plan” which would leave no room for the sovereign freedom of God’s will.

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 309.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 227.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 309.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134.

For God's will can, in your view only carry out the plan of God, not determine it.<sup>24</sup> I am sure that in fact the author of *The Defense of the Faith* will never accept this consequence.

In the above I have tried to answer the questions which you have asked me with respect to the transcendental critique. I could not do so without going into the background of the objections you have alleged against my standpoint. This has doubtless brought to light important differences between your view of a Christian philosophy and that of the Philosophy of the Cosmonomic Idea. At least if I have not misunderstood you on essential points, which might occur because, at times, your terminology is not always clear to me. In this case I shall be happy to be corrected by you, if you should wish to do so in your response.

Sincerely,  
Herman Dooyeweerd

## Response by C. Van Til

Dear Dr. Dooyeweerd:

You have written an enormous amount of material. All of it is profound and penetrating. Much of it I have read and re-read, especially your *De Wysbegeerte der Wetsidee* (1935). Perhaps this accounts for the fact that I have not fully appreciated what you later, in your *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* (1953), speak of as a "second way" by which "to subject philosophic thought to a transcendental criticism."<sup>25</sup>

By a truly transcendental criticism of the theoretical attitude of thought, you say, "we understand a critical inquiry into the universally valid conditions which alone make theoretical thought possible, and which are required by the immanent structure of thought itself." In this latter restriction lies the difference in principle between a transcendent and a transcendental criticism of science and philosophy.

"The former does not really touch the inner character and the immanent structure of the theoretical attitude of thought, but confronts, for instance Christian faith with the results of modern science and with the various philosophical systems, and thus ascertains, whether or not factual conflict exists."<sup>26</sup> "Transcendent criticism, in other words, is valueless to science and philosophy, because it confronts with each other two different spheres, whose inner point of contact is left completely in the dark. One can then just as well proceed to exercise criticism of science from the standpoint of art or of politics!

"In order to guarantee from the outset a really critical attitude in philosophy, transcendental criticism of theoretical thought should come at the very beginning of

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>25</sup> Herman Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* Vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1953), p. 34; hereafter *New Critique*.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

philosophical reflection.”<sup>27</sup>

You speak of your own earlier approach as “The First Way of a Transcendental Critique of Philosophic Thought.”<sup>28</sup> This first way you speak of as “the way from above” and then add: “But in this line of thought, we had to start from a supposition about the character of philosophy, which is not at all universally accepted in philosophical circles. Besides, it might seem, that a due account of the transition from the theoretical basic problem of philosophy to the central religious sphere was lacking.”<sup>29</sup> Accordingly you have in *The New Critique* directed all your attention to “a sharpening of the method of transcendental criticism, whereby the objection, mentioned above, might be met.”<sup>30</sup> This “sharpening of the method of transcendental thought” is accomplished by dropping all merely transcendent or “dogmatic” criticism and turning to an exclusive analysis of “the theoretical attitude of thought as such.”<sup>31</sup> Only by dropping the leftovers of a dogmatic approach can we face squarely “the primary question, whether the theoretical attitude of thought itself, with reference to its inner structure, can be independent of supra-theoretical prejudices.”<sup>32</sup>

You will understand, Dr. Dooyeweerd, that, with my interest in developing a Christian apologetic, I was much interested in your description of your second way. I had for many years rejected the Thomistic-Butler type of approach to apologetics. I had done so because of the unbiblical view of man and the cosmos which underlay this apologetic. I had over and over pointed out that non-Christian schemes of thought, whether ancient or modern, presupposed a view of man as autonomous, of human thought or logic as legislative of what can or cannot exist in reality, and of pure contingency as correlative to such legislative thought. I had for years pointed out that for a Christian to adopt these non-Christian presuppositions about man, together with the dialectical interdependence of legislative logic and brute contingency, and then to join the natural man in asking whether God exists and whether Christianity is true would be fatal for his enterprise. If we allow that one intelligent word can be spoken about being or knowing or acting as such, without first introducing the Creator-creature distinction, we are sunk. As Christians we must not allow that even such a thing as enumeration or counting can be accounted for except upon the presupposition of the truth of what we are told in Scripture about the triune God as the Creator and Redeemer of the world. As a Christian believer I must therefore place myself, for the sake of the argument, upon the position of the non-Christian and show him that on his view of man and the cosmos he and the whole culture is based upon, and will sink into, quicksand. If the unbeliever then points to the fact that non-Christian scientists and philosophers have discovered many actual “states of affairs,” I heartily agree with this but I must tell him that they have done so with borrowed capital. They have done so

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 37–38.

adventitiously. The actual state of affairs about the entire cosmos is what the Bible says it is.

In its response to what the Bible says is the actual state of affairs, the Christian church has written its creeds. In these creeds we have a response on the part of redeemed people of God to his revelation of sovereign grace to them and of his calling all apostate men to repent and submit themselves to Christ. In the creeds men who are made in the image of God, who have fallen into sin and who have been redeemed in principle by the death and resurrection of Christ in their place and subsequently born again by the Holy Spirit, think God's thoughts of mercy after him. The Reformed creeds have been more faithful in giving a proper response to the mercy of God to men in Christ than have other creeds. Roman Catholics, Lutherans, and Arminians have, to some extent, reduced the offer of the sovereign grace of God in Christ by means of a schematism of thought borrowed from the natural man. "We are, all of us, in the same boat," they say. "Let us see whether we can together stop the leaks and get to shore." "Let us together row harder and harder, till we reach the shore. Let us not despair. Let us keep telling each other that in all probability some great one, very likely Christ, will meet us and help us. In all probability there is a Father God who will send us food and drinking water on our way." Meanwhile, except for the grace of God, who in Christ forgives men such God-dishonoring tactics, lost men keep dying only to appear before the judgment of Christ whom they rejected by not taking him at his word.

One more thing I must mention here. I had criticized Warfield, the great Reformed theologian of Princeton, for taking over the traditional Butler type of apologetics and attaching it artificially to his own Reformed view of the relation of God and man. I agreed with Kuyper as over against Warfield on this point. Still further, when I saw that Kuyper, though opposing Warfield, yet retained elements of a scholastic methodology in his thinking, I proposed that we must go beyond Kuyper.<sup>33</sup>

I was criticized by the Calvinistic followers of the Butler-Warfield type of apologetics. How could I, with my method of starting from above, find a point of contact for the gospel with unbelievers? Had not Warfield shown that the unity of science cannot be maintained on Kuyper's view? I was also criticized by the followers of Kuyper. Did not Kuyper show that in the field of counting, of weighing and measuring, in the somatic aspects of the spiritual sciences, and in the field of formal logic the principle of the antithesis between Christians and non-Christians did not apply? How could I maintain communication with unbelievers if I maintained the idea of an "absolute antithesis" between believers and unbelievers? Did I not with Hoeksema, in effect, if not in words, deny common grace? Was I not a follower of that revolutionary group in the Netherlands, centering around Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd, some of whom even denied the immortality of the soul?

Well, I was a great admirer of this group. I knew that they rejected the Greek notion of man as consisting of an intellect that made it participate in an abstract impersonal principle of thought. I knew that this "revolutionary" group was seeking in the face of

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<sup>33</sup> cf. *Common Grace*.



much false criticism on the part of some Reformed theologians<sup>34</sup> to cleanse Reformed theology from the Greek notion of the “primacy of the intellect.” This notion would, they pointed out, kill the Christian story.

In agreement with this group I sought to work “in Kuyper’s line,” not forgetting that Kuyper had at crucial points failed to carry out his own deepest religious convictions with respect to the all-inclusive view on the sovereignty of God. Calvin was right. We must not, like the Greeks and the scholastics after them, engage in vain speculation about the essence of God. We must not, like Descartes, start from man as a final point of reference in predication. We must listen to what God has told us about himself, and about ourselves, and our relation to him through Christ in Scripture as our Creator-Redeemer.

How I rejoiced when I found that men of great erudition and of deep penetration were pointing out that “logic” and “fact” can have no intelligible relation to one another unless it be upon the presupposition of the truth of the “story” Christ has told us in the Scriptures.

Or am I reading some of my own apologetic views into the writings of this “revolutionary” group? Perhaps I am. I know that they are “doing” Christian philosophy, not apologetics. Even so I thought of their Christian philosophy as supporting my apologetic methodology. Did not their philosophy trace the intricacies of the entire history of “immanentist” thinking of apostate man and show that it was self-frustrative and destructive of intelligent predication?

Is it a wonder then that I gave a number of copies of *The New Critique* to, among others, a Roman Catholic Seminary and to a neo-orthodox theologian? Is it a wonder then that in the minds of many my views on apologetics were “bad” because they were so much like those of Dooyeweerd?

As recently as August 26, 1969, I received a letter from one of my long-standing Butler-Analogy critics in which he said: “I have had the impression that you adhere to the school of the *Wysbegeerte der Wetsidee*. Have you published anything to which I can refer the students on this question? Or does Dooyeweerd’s four volume *New Critique of Theoretical Thought* fairly represent your views?”

Is it a wonder then, Dr. Dooyeweerd, that when I re-read some of your shorter writings since *W.d.W.* (1935), such as your article on “*De Transcendentale Critiek van het Wysgeerig Denken en de Grondslagen van de Wysgeerige Denkgemeenschap van her Avondland*,”<sup>35</sup> “*De Verhouding tussen Wijsbegeerte en Theologie en de Strijd der Faculteiten*,”<sup>36</sup> “*Het Wijsgeerig Tweegesprek tusschen de Thomistische filosofie en de Wysbegeerte der Wetsidee*,”<sup>37</sup> your small book, *Transcendental Problems of Philosophic Thought*,<sup>38</sup> your great four-volume work, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, and

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<sup>34</sup> cf. Steen, *Philosophia Reformata*, and Hepp, *Dreigende Deformatie*.

<sup>35</sup> *Philosophia Reformata*, 6 (1941), pp. 1–20; hereafter “*Trans. Critiek*.”

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 23 (1958), pp. 1–22; 49–84.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 13 (1948), pp. 26–31; 49–58; hereafter “*Thom. Phil.*”

<sup>38</sup> Grand Rapids: Eerdmans (1948); hereafter *Problems*.

your smaller book, *In the Twilight of Western Thought*,<sup>39</sup> that I concentrated my attention on your second way and its possible implication for my work in apologetics?

I asked myself what can Dr. Dooyeweerd mean when he says that a truly transcendental criticism of theoretical thought must look into “the immanent structure of this thought itself,” and that “in this latter restriction lies the difference in principle between transcendent and a transcendental criticism of science and philosophy.”<sup>40</sup>

What will this “restriction” accomplish? It will, you contend, furnish the foundation for a community of thought between truly philosophic minded people. You ask those who in the past have assumed that theoretical thought is self-sufficient now afresh to reconsider the presupposition of their position. Will they not see their assumption of the autonomy of theoretical reason is really dogmatic? You for your part will give up any dogmatic criticism of their position. “Equally dogmatic would be an authoritative dictum from the side of the ‘Philosophy of the Idea of Law,’ that the synthesis cannot start from the theoretic thought itself because this ‘autonomy’ would contradict the revelation concerning the religious root of human existence.”<sup>41</sup>

If there is to be a restoration of a true philosophical community of thinking (*wijsgerige denkgemeenschap*) then every form of dogmatism must be uprooted.<sup>42</sup> This uprooting can be accomplished, you add, only by means of the “restriction” discussed above.

With the community of thought (*denkgemeenschap*) restored we can expect to have intelligent dialogue between those who in their religious convictions may hold to opposing views. “This is due to the fact that this criticism,” i.e., that of the Philosophy of Law, “rests upon what is indeed the universally valid ontic structure of philosophic thought and not on a merely subjective prejudice.”<sup>43</sup>

Even the various schools of immanentistic thought can now afford to give up their mutually exclusive attitudes toward one another. They may cooperate with one another on the same level. Similarly the Philosophy of the Cosmonomic Idea has constantly enriched itself with the philosophical insights attained by immanentistic “thinkers.”<sup>44</sup> Surely then what has often been a monological form of criticism should become dialogical in nature. If Christian philosophers use the truly transcendental method, they will be humbly self-critical first of all.

Finally, philosophers should realize that it is not a merely “subjective, merely epistemological, *a priori*, but an ontic, structural *a priori*” that underlies this community of thought; they will understand why a community of thought has been present between the past and the present.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co. (1960); hereafter *Twilight*.

<sup>40</sup> *New Critique*, p. 37.

<sup>41</sup> *Problems*, p. 7.

<sup>42</sup> “*Trans. Critiek*,” p. 5.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>45</sup> H. Dooyeweerd, “*De Vier Religieuze Grondthema’s in den Ontwikkelingsgang van het Wijsgeerig Denken van het Avondland*,” *Philosophia Reformata*, 6 (1941), p. 172.

You think you can book some gains by the use of your second way. For a long time Roman Catholic writers merely reacted in dogmatic fashion to your devastating criticism of their nature-grace scheme. But in 1948 Dr. H. Robbers, S.J., published a book under the title *Wysbegeerte en Openbaring*. In this book Robbers is still self defensive. But in the April, 1948, issue of *Studia Catholica* he speaks quite differently. Apparently he has sensed the fact that the philosophy of the cosmonomic ideas was not requiring that, as a condition for dialogue, he must give up his basic religious commitment. But now he realizes that your criticism is truly transcendental and not transcendent at all.<sup>46</sup> That is to say, Robbers has apparently understood the significance of your second way.

You express delight at this change on the part of an able protagonist of the nature-grace scheme of Roman Catholic thought. "It may indeed be a source of happy satisfaction to us that our pressing call to critical self-examination has been understood and appreciated at its true value."<sup>47</sup> Again: "In Prof. R.'s treatise Thomism has come to the point of self-criticism and has acknowledged, that its conception of autonomy is in its essence controlled by a religious ground-attitude and a transcendental-ground-idea, which has roots that go deeper than theoretical thought."<sup>48</sup>

You call upon your followers to respond in kind. They must not think that what they have worked out in the philosophy of the cosmonomic idea must appear as obviously true to anyone who is able to think straight. They must rather continually remind themselves "that the real key to this philosophy consists of a transcendental criticism which cuts off every form of philosophical dogmatism and compels a thinker to approach his principal opponents from their own ground-motif."<sup>49</sup>

You express great surprise, Dr. Dooyeweerd, at what you say is my misunderstanding of the difference between your use of a transcendent and a transcendental method of criticism. So you patiently explain the difference between them once more as you did so plainly in *A New Critique*. You want to make a critical inquiry "into the universally valid condition which alone make theoretical thought possible, and which are required by the immanent structure of this thought itself." I thought I had understood, at least the main thrust of this restriction, when I read your explanation of its significance the first time. I at once, however, had difficulty with it. I asked myself, "Can this mean an *Umkehr* in my friend Dooyeweerd's thought? He speaks of a first way that he formerly employed and of a second way that he now employs." "In the 'Introduction' we chose the way from above."<sup>50</sup> That first way, used in the *W.d.W.* (1935) is now, apparently, replaced by the second way with its "restriction" to an analysis of the "immanent structure of this thought itself." "Does Dooyeweerd really want to make such a sharp contrast between his two ways?" I asked. Was he not, even in the *W.d.W.*, again and again speaking of the very structure of theoretical thought itself as requiring a religious starting-point in the human self and then beyond

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<sup>46</sup> "Thom. Phil.," p. 26.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>50</sup> *New Critique*, p. 34.

the human self in an absolute Origin? Is not this the reason why he says in the *New Critique* that he has directed all his attention to “a sharpening of the method of transcendental criticism” whereby the objection to his first way—effect that it was “not at all universally in philosophical circles”—might be met?<sup>51</sup>

It seems then that I must think of the second way as a sharpening of the first way, but not as a radical change. The result of this sharpening is negatively that it definitely excludes every form of transcendent criticism. Transcendent criticism does not make “the theoretical as such a critical problem.” Transcendent criticism therefore cannot show the inner structure of the critical thought nor the inner connection between theoretical thought and experience.

Scholastic thinkers often used the transcendent method in order by means of it to introduce their nature-grace scheme of thought surreptitiously into the minds of men. They often succeeded. As you say in your letter, even the late Professor Valentine Hepp and the theological faculty at the Free University of Amsterdam in his day were of the opinion that to reject the “traditional scholastic view of human nature was a deviation from the Reformed confession.”

Then too, your letter continues, “the task of a transcendental critique, which makes this theoretical attitude as such a critical problem, is quite different from that of a theological apologetics. It does not aim at a ‘defense of the Christian faith’ but at laying bare the central influence of the different religious motives upon the philosophical trends of thought.”

May I, in passing, Dr. Dooyeweerd, express surprise at what you say about “theological apologetics?” Do you really think a Reformed theological apologetics seeks merely to indicate that as a matter of fact there is a difference between Christian faith and unbelief? As indicated above, I think of it quite otherwise.

I do set the Christian faith, most consistently set forth in the Reformed confessions, sharply over against the non-Christian faith. The non-Christian faith may express itself in many forms. No one has traced these various forms better than you have. They are all man-centered. I do not speak, as you sometimes do, of “fundamentally different conceptions” and of “a fundamental difference in presuppositions” between various immanentistic philosophers.<sup>52</sup> It is not the differences between them but that fact that all of them, whatever their differences, have in common the assumption of human autonomy that is basic to an understanding even of their internal differences. I do not speak of the autonomy of theoretical thought but of the pretended autonomy of apostate man. It is this and, as it appears to me, basically only this which all schools of apostate thought have in common. Assuming this autonomy apostate man gives a rebellious covenant-breaking response to the revelational challenge that he meets at every turn. The face of the triune God of Scripture confronts him everywhere and all the time. He spends the entire energy of his whole personality in order to escape seeing this face of God. When Parmenides insisted on the identity of thought and being he was basically, unknown to himself in his surface consciousness, engaged in trying to escape

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Twilight*, p. 2.

the face of his Creator. When Heraclitus said that all is flux he was basically in agreement with Parmenides in their common ethical hostility to their Creator.

When I try to win someone for Christ I therefore first make the difference between the Christian and the non-Christian positions as clear as I can. The two positions are mutually exclusive. Mr. Jones and I have opposing views of man, of fact, and of the function of logic. For me the presupposition of the possibility of theoretical thought and experience is the truth of Christ's words when he said I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. Committed as he is by his virtual confession of faith in human autonomy, apostate man is also committed to the idea of pure contingency. Accordingly he cannot distinguish one "fact" from another "fact." To distinguish one "fact" from another "fact" he must do so by means of his principle of logic or continuity. To distinguish between "facts" is to bring them into intelligent or inner relation to one another. But to do so by the only means he has at his disposal, Jones must, like Parmenides, reduce these "facts" to identity.

It is this that I tell my friend Jones. I tell him that I do not claim to be able to show the inner relationships between "logic" and "fact" any better than he can, but that I have been told by Christ in Scripture what I am as his image-bearer, and that as such I undertake my cultural task in reinterpreting his revelation to me to his praise. Can you not see, Mr. Jones, that you must repent and believe, lest you and your philosophy, your science, your art, in short your culture, go to ruin? You have nothing on which to stand in order to remove the Creator-Redeemer God from your sight. By his light alone you can see light. By his light alone can you distinguish between truth and falsehood. You are trying to remove the sun by taking out your own eyes.

You see, Dr. Dooyeweerd, unless I have again failed to make self clear, why I cannot be happy about your restriction, by sharpening of your transcendental method. If I must take your restriction at face value—as from your repeated insistence on its indispensable character for a truly transcendental method of criticism it seems that I must—then I cannot follow you. I believe that whether we are Christian philosophers or Christian theologians we must tell all fallen covenant-breaking mankind everywhere that what they have in their hostility to the Creator-Redeemer of men sought in vain, is found in him who before Pontius Pilate witnessed the good confession. When any man searches for truth, without searching for it in terms of the answer that everywhere confronts him in the self-authenticating Christ, then he is, in effect, doing what Pilate did when he said, "What is Truth?" and then gave Jesus over to the "Jews" who had already repeatedly charged him with blaspheming because he made himself out to be the Son of God.

You see then, Dr. Dooyeweerd, that I hold two points about Christian apologetics which apparently you do not hold. In the first place I believe that Christian apologetics, and in particular Reformed apologetics, is not really transcendental in its method unless it says at the outset of its dialogue with non-believers that the Christian position must be accepted on the authority of the self-identifying Christ of Scripture as the presupposition of human predication in any field.

Then secondly, I believe that a Christian apologist must place himself for argument's sake upon the position of the non-believer and point out to him that he has to

presuppose the truth of the Christian position even to oppose it. I saw a little girl one day on a train sitting on the lap of her “daddy” slapping him in the face. If the “daddy” had not held her on his lap she would not have been able to slap him. In his day Hitler wanted to shoot across the channel into London; to do so he needed emplacement for his guns. A man swimming next to an iceberg in water may try to push the iceberg because it’s in his way from nowhere to no place but it is he, not the iceberg, that will move. When you are now, with your restriction, insisting on a co-operative analysis of the nature of theoretical thought, you seem to be granting that such an operation can and should be performed first before the question of the claim of Christ comes into the picture.

I know very well, of course, that you constantly speak of creation, fall, and redemption in your book. But what you say on the subjects seems to come into the picture too late and in the way of a *Deus ex machina* into your main argument. You seem to me not to have given them their proper place at the outset of the argument, and you have not presented them as the presupposition of the possibility of analyzing the structure of theoretical thought and experience. You have, it appears, by your restriction, definitely excluded the contents of biblical teaching as having the basically determinative significance for your method of transcendental criticism.

## The Three Steps

However, I find great difficulty in believing that you want to do this. Recently a student argued with me to the effect that you were doing the same sort of thing that I was doing. You were, he said, placing yourself for the sake of the argument upon your “opponent’s” position in order to show him that his view of “men and things” would lead him to the destruction of significant predication. I hoped desperately that this student, Mr. Grey, might be right.

But then I reread what you say about the three steps in your transcendental criticism. These three steps, you say, must be taken one at a time if we are to have a really transcendental criticism. “In order to guarantee from the outset a really critical attitude in philosophy, transcendental criticism of theoretical thought should come at the very beginning of philosophical reflection.”<sup>53</sup> But for this very reason you do not want Christian truth brought into the picture at this point. A truly transcendental critique is, you say, obliged to begin with an inquiry into the inner nature and structure of the theoretical attitude of thought and experience as such and not with a confession of faith. In this first phase of the critical investigation such a confession would be out of place. As you observe in your letter, the question of “the central religious starting point of those who take part in the philosophical dialogue ... has not yet come up for discussion. The confrontation of the biblical and the non-biblical ground-motives of theoretical thought belongs to the third and last phase of the transcendental critique.”

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<sup>53</sup> *New Critique*, p. 38.

How then are we to take our first step? We must show to the proponents of the autonomy of theoretical thought that its structure cannot come into view except it be seen to be operative in relation to naive, pre-theoretical experience. "The real inner structure of theoretical attitude of thought can be discovered only by confronting together the theoretic attitude and the pro-theoretic or pre-scientific attitude of common experience."<sup>54</sup> If we do not, from the outset, set theoretical thought in relation to pre-theoretical experience we absolutize the "*gegenstand* relation." We would then absolutize the logical modality as though it could function in a vacuum. We must then hold that the *gegenstand* relation corresponds to reality. We would then create a great gulf "between the logical aspect of our thought and the non-logical aspect of its *Gegenstand*. There would be no possibility of throwing a bridge across this abyss. The possibility of knowledge would be lost."<sup>55</sup> Theoretical thought can begin and can be seen as beginning only when it sees itself as operating in relation to naive experience.<sup>56</sup>

On the other hand, "as soon as we have realized ... that the theoretical attitude of thought arises only in a theoretical abstraction, we can no longer consider theoretical reason as an unproblematic datum."<sup>57</sup> We can then see that the "first basic problem of our transcendental critique of theoretical thought may be ... formulated as follows: What is the continuous bond between the logical aspect and the non-logical aspects of our experience from which these aspects are abstracted in the theoretical attitude? And, how is the mutual relationship between these aspects to be conceived?"<sup>58</sup>

When I now look at this first of your three steps, Dr. Dooyeweerd, I fear that you are not doing justice to your own biblical convictions with respect to the nature of man, the nature of the logical modality, and the nature of man's experience of himself and his temporal experience.

As a Christian you believe that man and his world are what Christ tells us they are. The nature of theoretical thought is, therefore, what it is, as it appears in the light of the framework of truth given you in Scripture. One who does not see both the "logical" and the non-logical modalities of created reality in the light of this framework misinterprets them in radical fashion.

When the would-be autonomous man seeks to structure the multitude of his temporal experiences he seeks to do so by reducing them to blank identity by means of his legislative logic. The method of Parmenides is typical of all forms of non-Christian thinking. Even Kant's supposedly transcendental method was basically similar to that of Parmenides. In both cases it was the would-be-autonomous man who insisted that the world of change has no structure in it unless man himself, as ultimate, brings this structure to it.

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<sup>54</sup> *Problems*, p. 29.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>56</sup> "Trans. Critiek," p. 8.

<sup>57</sup> *New Critique*, p. 40.

<sup>58</sup> *Twilight*, p. 12.

## Step One: Time

Suppose now you were to ask Parmenides and Kant to realize that if they are to understand the nature and structure of theoretical thought they must see that this structure is what it is as an abstraction from time. You give each one of them a copy of your *New Critique*. You read to each of them one sentence: "The idea of time constitutes the basis of the philosophical theory of reality in this book. By virtue of its integral character it may be called new."<sup>59</sup> Then you explain to them just what you mean by cosmic time, as you have set it forth so fully and ably in your various works. What will they answer you?

Parmenides would, I imagine, tell you that you still have the disfiguring detritus of the seaweeds of ultimate contingency upon you even as you are, in vain, struggling to emerge from it. You will not get even a glimpse of the nature and structure of theoretical thought, he answers you, unless you see that theoretical thought and being are one.

Kant would, I imagine, say that he agrees with you as over against Parmenides. "You have, Mr. Parmenides, to be sure attained to pure structure. But that is your trouble. Your structure is not structure of reality as we know it, i.e., of temporal reality, at all. It is a structure that destroys all temporal reality, by means of absorption of all temporal diversity into an abstract logical principle of identity."

"We must," adds Kant, "therefore assume the ultimacy of time or contingency. When by means of my categories of causality, substance, and modality I seek to structure reality I realize that the result of my effort at this point is like an island of ice somehow produced by and floating upon a shoreless and boiling cauldron of pure contingency."

What would you, Dr. Dooyeweerd, say in reply to Parmenides and Kant? In your major works you have shown at length that the form-matter scheme of the Greeks and the nature-freedom scheme of the moderns are together based upon the assumption of human autonomy. It does not help to supplement Parmenides with Kant. It does not help to set the pure static rationalist determinism of Parmenides in dialectical, mutually determinative, relationship with the pure "dynamic" irrationalist indeterminism of Kant and his followers. You have shown over and over again that the rationalist-irrationalist, and the nominalist-realist contrasts spring from the immanentistic presupposition of man as autonomous. The Christian, you have repeatedly urged, must never state and defend his position in terms of the problematics constructed by immanentistic thinkers.

What then can you now, on the basis of your restriction, say after listening to Parmenides and to Kant? Can you say that you agree more with Kant than with Parmenides because Kant as over against Parmenides agrees that theoretical thought has no knowable structure unless it is related to time? No, you cannot say this because what Kant means by time is something radically different from what you, as a Christian, mean by time. For Kant time involves pure contingency. For you it is what it is in relation

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<sup>59</sup> *New Critique*, p. 28.



to the Christian story of creation-fall and redemption.

The significance of this fact is that on your view as a Christian one cannot understand the nature and structure of theoretical thought unless it is integrally related to the Christian story. The nature of theoretical thought is what it is as a means by which those who are what they are because of their relation to their Creator-Redeemer God can in some measure understand the *magnalia dei*, and challenge all men to repent. You have, it seems to me, virtually told Parmenides and Kant that in much of your work.

Yet you are at the same time insisting that you can analyze the nature and structure of theoretical thought without any reference to that Christian story. You are seeking to show that you can analyze theoretical thought as such and show that it points to the Christian story. On this basis theoretical thought is not itself a part of that story. I cannot follow you at this point. I would say that the structure of theoretical thought cannot be seen for what it is in terms of the scheme of the natural man. In his dialogue with the natural man the Christian must show that theoretical thought as such is a nonentity. Theoretical thought is what it is only as it is seen to be operating as revelatory of the Christian story. The natural man must then be shown that in all his theoretical thinking he is seeking to repress the truth of the Christian story. Even if we are Christian philosophers, rather than theological apologists, our dialogue with our non-Christian friends must still partake of the argument between the city of God and the city of man. You have told us that a Christian, a Calvinist philosopher, must be ready to take upon himself the scandal of the cross of Christ, as the Savior of believers and of their culture. It is because by the grace of God in Christ and by the regeneration of the Holy Spirit our eyes have been opened that we now see the nature and structure of ourselves and our world about us.

## Step Two: The Self

We proceed to watch you as you take the second step of your transcendental method. You speak of it as “a second transcendental problem.” “From what stated point can we reunite synthetically the logical and the non-logical aspects of experience which were set apart in opposition to each other in the theoretical synthesis.”<sup>60</sup>

We can discover the answer to this question only after we have found the answer to our first question. We must stand on the first step in order to see the necessity of taking the second step. The insufficiency of theoretical thought pointed to the need of relating it to cosmic time. Now the insufficiency of the inter-relation of theoretical thought with cosmic time points to the need of the idea of a self which transcends time. After a while, when we stand on the second step, we shall see that there must be a third step. But we cannot see the need of taking a third step so long as we stand on the first step. Whatever may be possible because of our faith we are now reasoning transcendently. We must therefore not bring in Christian Truth at the first and second steps.

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<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

We took the first step because we saw that theoretical reasoning presupposes a cosmic world order. We now take the second step because we see that theoretical thought, even when operating in relation to a world-order, presupposes an Archimedean point beyond time.

The Archimedean point must “transcend the coherence in the diversity of the modal aspects.”<sup>61</sup> An immanent coherence among the modal aspects of meaning of the cosmos is not sufficient. It is only in the self as “elevated above the modal diversity of meaning” that we have the concentration point that we need for philosophic thought as it seeks a totality view of life.<sup>62</sup> We therefore maintain “that no philosophical thought is possible without a transcendent starting point.”<sup>63</sup> This transcendent starting point must needs be supra-temporal.

We took our first step because we say that cosmic time was the presupposition of theoretical thought. To think at all we had to take the first step. Having taken the first step we see that in order to keep thinking we must take the second step. We need a “veritable notion of time. Beings that are entirely lost in time lack that notion.”<sup>64</sup>

Here the shades of Kant and Parmenides again appear to us. For Kant time is ultimate. According to Kant, Parmenides was quite wrong when he made it his ambition to rationalize time. Parmenides thought that if you were to have any awareness of self you must have a veritable concept of yourself as being above time. You must think of yourself as non-temporal. So also to have any awareness of time, you must deny its ultimacy. You must think of reality as supra-temporal. To have veritable self-awareness the self must know itself exhaustively in relation to eternal changeless being as such. The self must penetrate logically to the inner connection between itself and absolute, timeless being. But there is no way for Parmenides c.s. to attain to this inner logical connection between itself and timeless being unless all temporal reality be seen to be not only participant in but identical with one block of eternal being. Thus there is for Parmenides no individual self-awareness unless by means of its total absorption in abstract logical identity. Parmenides thinks that self-awareness and time-awareness presuppose the idea of abstract thought thinking itself. Abstract thought thinking itself is for Parmenides, as exemplar of Greek thinking, the presupposition of the possibility of predication.

“You are right, Dr. Dooyeweerd,” says Parmenides, “in saying that ‘no philosophic thought is possible without a transcendent starting point.’ You are right in saying that this starting point must be supra-temporal. But I do not think that you really have a supratemporal starting point unless you find it with us Greeks in pure form. I know that this pure form must be attained by negation. If your human self in which you seek a supra-temporal starting-point has any dynamic in it, then this starting-point is not really supra-temporal. Every bit of dynamic has its origin in non-being. And of non-being or nothing, nothing can be said. There is at this point, I realize, a ‘difficulty’ in my view. I

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<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

must think of myself as nothing. If I were to think of myself as anything in myself I would have to do so in terms of the dynamics that springs from non-being or contingency, call it time. But I cannot think time. Therefore it is nothing. How can it then even be a principle of individuation for me? Yet I would have to use time as a principle of individuation in order to escape being swallowed up by pure form. I can therefore find no structure of any sort in my individual self. I know that if there is to be any structure in myself as engaged in theoretical thought I must immerse myself and be lost in time. You are quite right, Dr. Dooyeweerd, in saying that to account transcendently for theoretical thought I must, as you say, relate it to cosmic time. But for me to relate theoretical thought to time is to immerse in it and be lost in it. Because of this difference between Kant and me on the meaning of time I was unable to take the first step with you on your transcendental criticism. You slipped in your view of cosmic time as derived from your Scriptures. You brought in dogmatic considerations prematurely.”

“Now you are again doing the same thing as you are asking me to take your second step. I quote your words: ‘If we say, that we transcend cosmic time in the root of our existence, we must guard against metaphysical Greek or Humanistic conceptions of the “supratemporal.” ‘Are you not, in saying this, excluding my view of the supra-temporal in advance? But let me read further from your *New Critique*, p. 32. ‘We shall later on see, that the central sphere of human existence is in the full sense of the word a dynamic one. Out of it the dramatic conflict between the *civitas Dei* (City of God) and the *civitas terrena* (earthly city) takes its issue in the history of the world. We can even call it the central sphere of occurrence, for that which occurs cannot be distinguished too sharply from the historical aspect of cosmic time, which is only one of its temporal modalities of meaning.’ ”

“In saying this you seem to me to be untrue to your second way, the way of showing us the presuppositions of the possibility of genuine philosophic thought without any reference to your dogmatic convictions about God and man. And here at your second step, the step pertaining to the necessity of having a supra-temporal self as an Archimedean point, you bring in your offensive tale about the *civitas Dei* and the *civitas terrena*, and for good measure introduce your temporalities of meaning. But I shall not take offense. I shall only ask you, with Socrates, what the nature of the holy is regardless of what gods or men say about it. I cannot listen to your extraneous descriptions about the structure of thought and experience. Under cover of a purely transcendental method you are seeking to have me submit my rightful claims as a free man to your supposedly divine human Christ.”

“But let all this pass for the moment. I submit that a really transcendental inquiry demands a self which is nothing in itself, nothing in itself because it is only a sign pointing toward the principle of a pure form which is always beyond the possibility of having anything said about it. But I’ve talked too much. Let us hear what friend Kant says.”

“Well, both of you know my position,” said Kant. “Especially you, Dr. Dooyeweerd, know my position very well. You have argued in very great detail at various places, that my transcendental method is not really transcendental or critical at all. But my basic agreement is with Parmenides. Both of us believe in freedom. From your biblical or

Christian point of view you call this our freedom autonomy. You say that this autonomy came into the world when your first man Adam refused to obey his Creator in whose image he had been made. You say that true freedom comes to men only if by the regenerating power of your Holy Spirit they believe in Christ, who said: 'I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.' You have, accordingly, argued that the structure of theoretical thought is what it is in terms of your temporal modalities of meaning and in terms of your self which you think of in terms of creation-fall and redemption through your Christ. I submit that you have therefore determined the structure of theoretical thought and experience in subordination to the assumed truthfulness of your Christian story. You cannot rightly call such a method transcendental. How could any of us on the presupposition of our freedom have any knowledge of your Creator-Redeemer God? How could any of us experience real thinking, thinking that is our thinking, if thinking is first defined in terms that are beyond all thinking?

"To be sure, I have my differences with Parmenides. We have opposite priorities; he stresses the priority of thought and I stress the priority of time. But we agree on the nature of the self, of thought, and of time as over against your view on these three points."

"Holding to human freedom we naturally hold, with Socrates, that we must, by concepts, by thought, determine what can or cannot exist. Because of my stress on time as ultimate I no longer think that thought can, in any given period of time, actually legislate with respect to the nature of what can or cannot happen. But I retain the ideal of exhaustive penetration of all being by thought. In practice this means for me, as well as for Parmenides, your story cannot be true. In this point I am as adamant as is Parmenides, witness my book on *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*." At this climax Kant stopped speaking.

Now I am of the opinion that what Parmenides and Kant said to you, Dr. Dooyeweerd, is true. Of course there are many other views put forth by immanentistic philosophers besides those of Parmenides and Kant. Yet, as you have proved to us so well, the nature-freedom scheme of modern thinkers is composed of the same elements as is the form-matter scheme of the Greeks.

It is their deepest conviction of all non-Christian thinkers that no man can think, i.e., use the process of rationalization properly in relation to himself and his environment except in terms of the framework of man as the final point of reference. Every immanentist philosopher assumes that it makes no sense even to ask any questions, let alone to expect to get intelligible answers, except on the presupposition of human autonomy and its implicates with respect to logic and time.

In direct opposition to this we as Christians believe that it makes no sense to ask questions, let alone expect to get answers to questions, except on the presupposition of the self-identifying Christ of Scripture. This conviction underlies, as it seems to me, all properly developed Christian theology, all properly developed Christian philosophy and science. I hold that your Christian philosophy and my Christian apologetics are valid to the extent that they are true to this principle.

However, it is not clear to me that, with your second way, i.e., with your sharpening of the purely transcendental method, with your stricture by which you want to analyze

the structure of theoretical thought as such, and with your insistence that it is not till the third step in your transcendental analysis that Christian truth may be brought into the picture, that you are fully true to your own Christian convictions.

### Step Three: The Archy

In the third step of a truly transcendental knowledge we must point out that the self is empty in itself except in relation to its Origin. The Archimedean point points toward the Archy. To quote: "The self seeks, by an original innate tendency—that is, the law of religious concentration—its divine origin, and cannot know itself except in this original relation."<sup>65</sup> As the inter-relations between the various modalities point beyond themselves to the supra-temporal self, so this self in turn points beyond itself to its Origin. "The mystery of the central human ego is that it is nothing in itself, i.e., viewed apart from the central relations wherein alone it presents itself." But the "first of these relations, namely that of the selfhood to the temporal horizon of our experience cannot determine the inner character of the ego, except in a negative sense." In other words, the self cannot discover its inner character in the relation to "modal diversity of the temporal order."<sup>66</sup> But neither can the self find its inner character even in relation to other human selves. "The reason is that the ego of our fellow-men confronts us with the same mystery as our own selfhood."<sup>67</sup> Well, "it may be that there exists a central love-relation which is capable of determining the inner meaning of my ego in its essential communal relation to that of my fellowmen. But as long as this love-relation is only viewed as a temporal relation between me and my fellowmen, we must posit that we do not know what is really meant by it." "Both the central relations which we have considered up to this point, are empty in themselves, just like the human ego that functions in them."<sup>68</sup>

Still further, "For it is only in its central religious relation to its divine origin that the thinking ego can direct itself and the modal diversity of its temporal world upon the absolute. The inner tendency to do so is an innate religious impulsion of the ego. For as the concentration point of all meaning, which it finds dispersed in the modal diversity of its temporal horizon of experience, the human ego points above itself to the Origin of all meaning, whose absoluteness reflects itself in the human ego as the central seat of the image of God. This ego, which is empty in itself, is only determined in a positive sense by its concentric relation to its divine origin. And it is also from this central relation that the relation of our ego to its temporal horizon and its central communal relation to the ego of our fellow-man can take a positive content."<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> *Problems*, p. 54.

<sup>66</sup> *Twilight*, pp. 27–28.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

The “real starting-point of philosophical thought cannot be the ego in itself, which is an empty notion. It can only be the religious basic motive in the ego as the center of our temporal horizon of experience. This alone gives the ego its positive dynamic character also in its central interpersonal relation to the other egos and to its temporal world.”<sup>70</sup>

In all this you are, Dr. Dooyeweerd, carrying forth your second way of transcendental method of criticism. We have now taken the third step of which this method is composed. Standing on the first step we saw that theoretical thought can operate only in relation to the temporal world order. Standing on the second step we saw that theoretical thought operating in relation to the temporal world order needs a supra-temporal self as an Archimedean point. Now, standing on the third step we see that having taken two steps we are compelled to take the third step if we are to attain the totality vision we crave. We have to go upward to “an idea of the Origin, whether or not it is called God, relating all that is relative to the absolute.”<sup>71</sup>

We have herewith reached the “third and last phase of the transcendental critique.” The “confrontation of the biblical and the nonbiblical ground-motives” must now be taken up. Such a confrontation would be out of place during the first two steps or phases of the argument. My contention over against this is, Dr. Dooyeweerd, that this confrontation must be brought in at the first step, and that if it is not brought in at the first step it cannot be brought in properly at the third step. But to say this amounts to saying that there is only one step or rather that there are no steps at all.

I am of the opinion that your procedure corroborates my view on this point. I have pointed out that you did bring the Christian view of the created order at the level of the first step and the Christian view of man at the level of the second step, as you now bring in the Christian view of God in the third step. How could you escape doing so? You are convinced as a Christian that the Christian framework of truth as revealed by the triune God in Scripture is the transcendental presupposition of the possibility of intelligent predication in any field. If there is not to be a basic dualism between your religious convictions on this point and your process of rationalization you should proceed differently than you do in your *Critique*. To avoid dualism you should not start from the structure of theoretical thought as such. There is no such thing. There is no autonomy of theoretical thought as such. There is a would-be-autonomous man, who thinks about his entire environment in terms of his thought as legislative and as determinative of the structure of the temporal world. With all due respect for your very great learning and penetration I cannot help but say that to me it is ambiguous to speak of theoretical thought as needing to be placed in relation to the temporal cosmic order or to naive experience as a primary datum. There is no naive experience as a primary datum any more than there is anything like theoretical thought as such. Every item that man meets in his temporal horizon is already interpreted by God. It is the interpretation of the triune Creator-Redeemer God that every man meets in his every experience of anything. This is the “state of affairs” as it actually exists. The universe in which man lives is God’s estate. The ownership of God is indelibly imprinted on every “thing” man meets. He

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<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 32–33.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

cannot think of theoretic thought as such. I know not what else Calvin means by saying that at every turn man, the creature, faces his Creator. Man cannot have any "naive experience" in which he is not either a covenant-breaker or a covenant-keeper.

Of course, I know, Dr. Dooyeweerd, that by theoretical thought, by the temporal world-order, and by naive experience you mean what these mean in the Christian framework. But in your transcendental method you insist not only that they may but that they must be used without reference to the Christian framework.

Similarly, now that you take the third step in your argument, you, as a Christian, mean that man as created in the image of God must be the organizing center of his temporal experience. However, your argument for the need of a supra-temporal self not only may but must exclude such a view of man. To maintain the "community of thought" you are willing to go so far as to say that the supra-temporal self needs an Origin "whether or not this is called God."

It is such a featureless "God" that is the ultimate presupposition in terms of which you are now seeking to maintain a community of thought between covenant-keepers and covenant-breakers. But the idea of thought as such and the idea of time as such added to thought as such are inventions of the would-be-autonomous man in order by them to repress the truth. Modern autonomous man constructs his concrete universal as a replacement for the abstract universal of ancient thought. To add the idea of an Origin, an Absolute, is an invention of autonomous man. By means of it he thinks he does justice to the religious impulses that he finds operative within himself. By means of these "impulses" he represses the sense of deity created within him.

In the form-matter scheme of the Greeks the would-be-autonomous man said that naive time-experience was nothing in itself. It needed to be interpreted by man as supra-temporal. This supra-temporal man, still clinging sluggishly to temporal reality because of his body, is nothing in itself. It has no *dunamis* in itself. It is only a personified and reified abstraction. This abstraction needs to be "interpreted" by an all-comprehensive abstraction, again personified and reified. But how could this reified logical abstraction be said to be the absolute Origin of man, as a logically subordinate abstraction? If there was to be any *dunamis* in man it must spring from a source above and beyond all that can be logically said about anything. It was Diotema the inspired, who pointed to the vision of a unity beyond all logical distinctions made by man.

Surely this being beyond all knowable being, so the argument goes, must be good. Let us call it Good. Then let us add that all Good is diffusive; are we not all the offspring of God as the Good? Plotinus brought it all together in his idea of the scale of being. Dionysius the Areopagite and John Scotus Erigena "interpreted" the Christian story in terms of this scale of being.

It is thus that would-be-autonomous man, starting from himself as the final reference point of predication, followed upward and upward by the way of pure negation, dropping all content in the process, until pure form was attained. Man, with all his temporal experience became, as Plato says, incorporate with being. The freedom-nature scheme of modern thought follows essentially the same method as did the Greeks. Kant's transcendental method obviously rests on man as autonomous. It is not that Kant merely absolutizes one function of human experience, the moral modality,

and not the others. To believe in man as autonomous is virtually to have him take the place of his Creator. This is to absolutize man in all his functions. The differences between the various schools of immanentistic philosophy are not that one of them absolutizes one modality and another of them absolutizes another modality. In absolutizing man himself they are all of them absolutizing man's operation in every modality. Kant would quite agree with me if I said that theoretical thought operating apart from time is like a meat-grinder without any meat in it. But the meat Kant offers his meat-grinder is that of pure contingency. How else could he maintain his position of human autonomy? How else can he repress the revelation of God within himself and his world? Kant would, finally, quite agree if I said that the whole of human experience points beyond itself to a God. Modern dimensionalist philosophers of various schools show that man cannot interpret himself and his world adequately in terms of the I-it dimension. One needs the I-thou dimension really to interpret even the I-it dimension properly. Then, beyond that we need an I-Thou dimension in order to properly interpret the I-it and the I-thou dimension. Such is the argument of modern post-Kantian dimension philosophy.

A truly reformational philosophy should therefore, as it seems to me, Dr. Dooyeweerd, challenge this ancient-modern-dimensionalism based on the idea of human autonomy from the beginning. It should show to these various immanentistic philosophers of dimensionalism that on their view they cannot get started on the process of knowing and that adding their type of religious dimension to their intellectual dimension is of no avail to them. Their God is unknowable because made in the image of man who is in the first place unknowable.

Beyond this a reformational philosophy should, it seems to me, following Calvin, insist that God's face is clearly present in the facts of the world and in man as the image-bearer of God. Following the Apostle Paul Calvin portrayed the true state of affairs about man and his environment in his *Institutes*. Men have the requirements of their covenant-God clearly before them. It is not their "temporality" that should lead them to conclude by a process of reasoning that they need themselves to be supra-temporal and that they need an eternal God as an Origin beyond their supra-temporal selves. It was not Adam's temporality that made it imperative for him to reason toward an eternal God. It was the eternal triune Creator-God who was clearly present to him in every item of the universe about him as well as in himself. This Creator-God spoke to Adam and by speaking to him set the whole of every bit of contact between himself and his creature in a covenantal configuration. Even fallen man is responsible for this original speech of God to Adam the covenant-head of mankind. Calvin says that when men do not see wickedness being punished as soon as it is perpetrated, they should conclude that God is merely postponing punishment, to the judgment day. They must not think that no punishment will be administered. Paul tells the Athenians that the resurrection of Christ in the temporal world is evidence of the coming judgment day. If men do not regard it as such they are seeking in vain to escape the wrath of the Lamb.

Now Dr. Dooyeweerd, I know that you believe all this. But you do not present it as the presupposition of that which makes all human experience intelligible. You believe that "history" is the struggle between the *civitas dei* and the *civitas terrena*. When



Pontius Pilate asked, "What is Truth?" he was insulting him who said he was the Way, the Truth, and the Life. All men are in a similar position. They are all "without excuse" when they do not worship the triune God whose face appears to them in every fact of the world.

I feel constrained to say, Dr. Dooyeweerd, that your transcendental method, based on your restriction, is not reformational either in its conception or in its consequences.

That such is actually the case becomes particularly apparent from the way you seek to relate your own religious convictions to your transcendental method when in your third step you undertake to connect them.

Right after you say that your transcendental method leads man to "an idea of the Origin, whether or not it is called God, relating all that is relative to the absolute" you add that "Though such a transcendental basic idea is a general and necessary condition of philosophical thought the positive content given to it is dependent upon the central basic motive which rules the thinking ego."<sup>72</sup>

To discover the "general and necessary condition of philosophical thought" it appears from what you say we need a truly transcendental argument. This truly transcendental argument shows that to understand the nature and structure of theoretical thought we need to see that such thought has a religious basis and that this religious basis finds its central point of reference in the idea of an absolute origin whether or not we call the Origin God.

Up to this point all is clear. Our transcendental basic idea must not have positive content. If it had positive content it would not be the universally acceptable presupposition of philosophical thought.

But now it also appears that such a contentless transcendental basic idea is not adequate for its task. Our transcendental basic idea needs content. It must have content in order to be the source of the *dunamis* that the human ego needs in order to perform its unifying function. Here then at this third step is where at last you bring Christianity into the picture. You say to those who have followed you to the point where they may well agree that theoretical thought needs an absolute origin, that this Origin must be the God of the Christian framework.

You seem to sense that those who, among the immanentistic philosophers, have followed you to this point will refuse to take this lump with you. They will gladly accept the idea of the indispensability of belief in an origin, but they will not believe that this Origin must be the Creator-Redeemer-God of the Bible. To them the absolute origin must be an *apeiron*, an indefinite, a featureless source of power. It must not, they are sure, it cannot be the God of Paul, of Luther, of Calvin. Out of pure contingency any sort of God may spring forth except the God of Christianity. If the God of the Bible were to be thought of as the presupposition of the intelligibility of human experience then the idea of pure contingency and human autonomy would first have to be abandoned. What Christian thinker has more carefully traced the development of immanentistic thought in all its nuances than have you?

Yet at this juncture you seem to expect your immanentistic friends to follow you as

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<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

you add the positive content of your Christian faith to their admittedly contentless transcendental basic idea of a featureless unknowable deity. You seem to be suspicious as to whether these immanentist thinkers will follow you. When you ask them to accept the new transcendental basic idea that is controlled by the positive content given it on the authority of the self-attesting Christ to the contentless absolute so far attained you say: "This gives rise to two critical questions which you will doubtless ask me at the conclusion of my explanation. First: How can this criticism have any conclusive force for those who do not accept your religious starting-point? And second: What may be the common basis for a philosophical discussion between those who lack a common starting-point?"<sup>73</sup>

## Apologetics

You will realize, Dr. Dooyeweerd, that because of my interest in a reformational apologetics I am much interested in your answers to these two questions.

In replying to the first question you say that you "had no other aim primarily, than to lay bare the structural data of our temporal horizon of experience and of the theoretical attitude of thinking, both of which are of a general validity."<sup>74</sup> Who could object to that? But suppose you now start your dialogue with immanentistic philosophers. You say: "When I told you that theoretical thought is based on a religious foundation, you had no occasion to look askance at me. I made plain that my description of religion was done in a 'formal-transcendental' way. In such a formal-way, I pointed out, we seek a 'theoretical approximation' of the general notion of religion and this can be done only by means of a 'transcendental idea,' a limiting concept, the content of which must remain abstract, as long as it is to comprehend all possible forms in which religion is manifested (even the apostate ones). Such an idea invariably has the function of relating the theoretical diversity of the modal aspects to a central and radical unity and to an Origin."<sup>75</sup>

"I also pointed out that I adopted my second way, my 'sharpening of the method of transcendental criticism' for the very purpose of embracing 'every possible conception of the philosophic task.' I said in my book that no veritable philosophy whatever can refuse to listen to me if I do not speak 'from above' and thereby bring content into the heart of my critique."<sup>76</sup>

Well then, your immanentistic critics will say, why do you now bring your "biblical basic motive" into the argument? You are, we accept it, in all seriousness, introducing this biblical motive as an aspect of your sharpened transcendental method. Does this sharpening of your transcendental method now require the addition of content to your

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<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 52–53.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>75</sup> *New Critique*, p. 57.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 34–35.

formal argument? We thought that you sharpened your transcendental argument for the very purpose of excluding every form of dogmatic content.

In answer to such objections on the part of immanentist philosophers you reply that in your third step you introduce your “radical biblical motive” because it “unmasks any absolutization of the relative, and may free philosophical thought from dogmatic prejudices, which impede an integral view of the real structures of human experience. This effect is verifiable since it manifests itself within the temporal experiential horizon, whose structural data have a general validity for every thinker.”<sup>77</sup> If you are worried that my introduction of the biblical motive prejudices the truly transcendental character of my analysis of philosophic thought, let me say again that “Structural data, founded in the temporal order of human experience ... are facts of a transcendental significance, which should be acknowledged, irrespective of their philosophical interpretation.”<sup>78</sup>

You need not worry then, my friends, that I am forsaking the path of truly transcendental criticism. On the contrary, by my introduction of the biblical motive I am seeking to unmask still remaining pockets of dogmatism, and thereby enabling all of you to join me in testing our various dogmatisms by the standard of the “structural data, founded in the temporal order of human experience.”<sup>79</sup>

I may now tell you, Dr. Dooyeweerd, about what I overheard recently when another couple of imaginary immanentistic philosopher friends were speaking together about your philosophy.

Said Mr. Godot: “I was happy when I read in Dooyeweerd’s *New Critique* that he was no longer going to ‘start from a supposition of the character of philosophy, which is not at all universally accepted in philosophical circles.’<sup>80</sup> But now he is introducing his ‘radical biblical motive’ again. The fact that he does not introduce it till he comes to his third step does not change things for me.”

“Does Dooyeweerd now mean to say that, after all, we need his true, his biblical view of the Origin and Absolute, his Creator-Redeemer God received on authority, in order to discover the really transcendental presuppositions of the intelligibility of the temporal horizon of our experience? Did he not, especially since 1941, insist that his transcendental religious root consists of an Origin, of an Absolute which has no content? Does he now want us to follow him when he says the ultimate Origin must be the Creator-Redeemer God of the Bible?”

“I can understand those who say that the whole of their biblical teaching with the self-attesting Christ at its center must be taken as the presupposition of the intelligibility of human predication. They would say that the structural data founded in the temporal horizon of our experience, are ultimately what they are because of the spot they occupy in the plan their God has for them in relation to the whole course of history from Adam to the day of judgment. Recently I dipped into John Calvin’s *Institutes* again. It’s all there. It’s all there too in the Reformed confessions. I also read Abraham Kuyper’s

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<sup>77</sup> *Twilight*, p. 53.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> *New Critique*, p. 34.

*Encyclopedia*. Only the elect, only the redeemed by the blood of Jesus, only the born-again by the Holy Spirit can see these 'structural data' for what they are. How then could we, poor blind reprobates, use these structural data as tests for the truth about statements made by elect men about them? In their view we are reprobate, we are covenant-breakers, we are non-regenerate and therefore cannot see these 'structural data' for what they are. Oh yes, because the world is what it is, and only because we and all men were created in the image of God, and because of their 'common grace,' we can 'adventitiously,' i.e., in spite of our false principles, discover certain 'true states of affairs.' We can even contribute to the one goal, to the fulfilment of the 'common philosophical task,' the 'cultural mandate' assigned to their Adam, the first man for all mankind, but all this, mind you, in spite of our principles. Our principles as immanentistic thinkers are based on man as 'falsely' (according to these Calvinists) thinking of himself as ultimate. We hold that creation out of nothing cannot be the ultimate source of temporal reality. We hold that our categories of logic are legislative for what can and what cannot exist. Our whole interpretation of ourselves and of the temporal horizon of our experience involves the dialectical relationship of an abstract all-absorbing impersonal being and an equally abstract all-absorbing womb of chance. These extreme Calvinists do not think of telling us that we can, on an equal footing with themselves, judge of the truth of their faith about man and his environment. They tell us, rather, that the sun is plainly visible in the heavens. Christ is, for these people, the Sun in whose light all things are seen for what they really are. Blind men do not see the sun. They do not see the facts of the world lit up by the sun. Only if we as blind men are given spiritual sight can we even judge of material things truly. And, these extreme Calvinists won't give us any hand in regenerating ourselves so that we may believe. They tell us that we are responsible for not being thankful to the Creator, the true Origin of all things, even as they assert that without regeneration we cannot relate things to this true Origin."

"Now I know that Dooyeweerd comes from a line of sturdy Dutch Calvinists. When his first major work, *De Wysbegeerte der Wetsidee*, appeared, I was stupified. Here was a man still very young, producing a comprehensive work on philosophy, a philosophy which, he said, 'seeks its resting point in Christ, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.' Those who would follow him in this new philosophy must be prepared, he said in his foreword, to forsake the 'traditional view of reality and of knowledge.' Here was to be a Christian, a biblical, a Calvinistic philosophy. I was interested. I was impressed by the enormous erudition and philosophical penetration of the man. But, of course, I thought of his whole enterprise as fantastic and self-delusive. So I 'forgot about it.' I forgot about it till an enthusiastic admirer of Dooyeweerd presented me with a copy of his *New Critique*. He told me it was different from the *W.d.W.* From this point he went on for an hour about the purely transcendental method that Dooyeweerd was now developing, and how it differed from the method of those extremist Calvinists who claimed that a man cannot account for counting except on Christian presuppositions."

"I promised my friend I would read about the new approach. I was encouraged when I saw that Dooyeweerd did not bring his Christian position into the picture at all at what he calls his first and second stages of transcendental criticism. But now at his third step

he does bring it in and bring it in openly. I thought we had gotten past that stage. Oh yes, he tones down the significance of his 'radical biblical motive.' He does not say that it, and it alone must be taken as the presupposition of human predication. But how else can any Christian, particularly, how can any Calvinist bring in his radical biblical motive in any other way than as the foundation for the meaning of human life and history? And how can any Christian, particularly any Calvinist, do other than ask, even require of us apostate men in the name of their Christ to forsake our own view of reality and knowledge and accept theirs in its place lest we lose ourselves and our thinking fall into a dialectical pendulum swing of antinomies? I think that Dooyeweerd is not true to his own basic position when he now tries to incorporate his true Origin in Christ into a transcendental method that must lead to, himself being witness, an Origin such as we immanentistic thinkers can on our principles, not in spite of them, accept. Besides, I am sure it is his loyalty to his Christ that is of first importance to him. He says that in the third problem of the transcendental critique self-knowledge is at issue. He adds that self-knowledge is a religious, not a theoretical matter. 'In his high priestly prayer Jesus says that this knowledge is eternal life in the love-communion with the Father and the Son.' Self-knowledge 'presupposes the opening up of his "heart," i.e., the religious center of his existence, by the Holy Ghost to the moving power of Word-revelation.' You see this leaves us out. All three persons of the triune God must act for us and within us or we cannot exist or act at all. This is, I feel certain, Dooyeweerd's chief interest."

"Dooyeweerd no doubt thinks that it is his Christian religious beliefs which must be accepted if we are to understand the structural data of this world. But I wish he had said this plainly instead of seeking to weave his private convictions into his transcendental method which is supposed to be acceptable to us as well as to himself."

It was Mr. Heim who listened to this speech of Mr. Godot. In reply to Godot, Heim said: "You know I am a modern dimensionalist philosopher. You know that my dimensionalist philosophy has been very influential in the circles of the Interservice Christian Fellowship, especially in Great Britain. This was no doubt because of the fact that I worked out the idea that the realm of science, the I-it dimension, is not sufficient to itself and that it needs to be supplemented by religion. I have shown that the I-it dimension points beyond itself to the dimension of person-to-person confrontation, to the I-thou dimension. Then finally, I have shown that this I-thou dimension is empty in itself unless it is seen as pointing to the I-Thou dimension."

"I found that this I-it-I-thou—I-Thou dimensionalism shows the inner relation between religion and modern philosophy. Of course this would not be the case if you meant by religion the traditional type of thing."

"Now when I noted that Dooyeweerd was also talking about the insufficiency of theoretical thought, the need for a supra-temporal self, and that this was the kind of self that points beyond itself to an Origin, then I thought the lines of communication between old style Calvinists and post-Kantian dimensionalists had actually been reopened. I was particularly happy when, in employing his sharpened transcendental method, Dooyeweerd argued as though the insufficiency of the I-it dimension was a result of its temporal character as such. Such men as Luther and Calvin did not seem to think that man's temporality as such indicated any insufficiency. What they stressed was

the idea that when man was first created as a temporal being he was perfect. Man's heart was not restless because he was temporal. It was not till he became a sinner by breaking the ordinance or law of God that he, in consequence, became restless. Someone told me that a Dutch theologian named Herman Bavinck kept repeating that the Reformation, in stressing the ideas of sin and grace, was therewith, over against Romanism, stressing the heart of the Christian religion. I was so glad when Dooyeweerd seemed to soft-pedal this 'ethical' question and spoke instead of the inherent insufficiency of man's time experience as such. I thought that this would make him open to the idea of the I-it dimension as pointing to the I-thou dimension and the I-thou dimension as pointing to the I-Thou dimension. I was even happier when Dooyeweerd offered the idea that human self-consciousness comes to rest when it relates itself to consciousness of an Origin 'however conceived.' 'It is only when it relates itself to a Source that theoretical thinking finds rest for itself, because there is no meaning to the idea of asking questions theoretical beyond the Source.'<sup>81</sup> If then to presuppose a Source, a Source indefinite in character as the final and sufficient point of reference for predication, why then are we now asked to make the triune God of the Bible our final point of reference after all?"

"Dooyeweerd no doubt seeks communication with us 'immanentistic' philosophers. This communication is welcome to us in terms of an I-it-I-thou—I-Thou dimensionalism. We ourselves want to add religion to theoretical thought as much as he does. We know that we cannot speak conceptually of the God we worship. We as well as he therefore speak of approaching this God with limiting concepts. It seemed to me that on the basis of his sharpened transcendental method we had reached the place where we could communicate on equal terms. But now, that he is introducing his traditional views derived from Calvin, Kuyper, and such men we must go our separate ways again. He is apparently now trying to splice his radical Christian motive consisting of a God whose presence in the person and work of Christ is supposed to give us an absolute criterion of truth and life in the I-it dimension, into our view of the I-it-I-thou—I-Thou relation as based on the total absence of any absolute truth criterion in the phenomenal world."

"I had hoped that as the result of the application of his transcendental method we might together, in one ecumenical church, confine religion to a realm above the I-it dimension. But now my hopes are shattered. Dooyeweerd will continue, it appears after all, to absolutize the phenomenal and therewith cut himself and his followers off from communication with those who worship a really transcendent God, a God beyond all conceptual expression."

It appears, Dr. Dooyeweerd, that Mr. Godot and Mr. Heim have touched upon the same three points that I took up in the syllabus you discuss in your letter to me. There is the question of your transcendental method; it leads, say these gentlemen, if carried through, in the end to the idea of human self that is nothing but a transition point between abstract logic and abstract contingency and to the idea of man's temporal horizon as nothing but a point of intersection between abstract form imposed upon abstract contingent, "stuff," and at last, back of everything as the presupposition of

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<sup>81</sup> "Trans. Critiek," p. 15.

human predication to the idea of a featureless God.

There is, secondly, the idea of “states of affairs” which, when interpreted by the transcendental method, enable the immanentistic thinker to verify the truth of the transcendental method as leading to an Origin, again to a featureless God.

There is, thirdly, the idea of a sharp distinction between the realm of man’s conceptual activity in the world of his temporal horizon and the realm of man’s religious activity in the world of his supra-temporal existence. These three points imply one another.

A further word needs to be said about the third point. When using your transcendental method you no longer work from above. Working from the bottom up you cannot adequately distinguish your Christian view of man, of the world, and of God from the non-Christian view of these subjects. Working from the bottom up you attain a view of man as having no content. Your view of man is that of a supra-temporal self consisting as a pure form. Though nothing but an empty form this “self” must, of itself, recognize its emptiness and point toward an absolute Origin. This absolute Origin, attained by further negation, and therefore also empty of content, must, by “a strange inversion of logic,” be postulated as the Source of supratemporal man’s *dunamis*. This supra-temporal man, in turn, conveys this *dunamis* to his temporal horizon.

It is thus that you join the would-be-autonomous man on his way upward from himself as the ultimate starting point toward a God of pure negation and indetermination and on his way downward from the God nobody knows back to the man nobody knows.

When you work with this method then you are carried back and forth in the dialectical pendulum swing between pure rationalism and pure irrationalism, between pure nominalism and pure realism.

Of course, your religious convictions go counter to all this. No one has shown more fully than you have that the assumption of human autonomy leads to the destruction of predication. But you do not furnish us with an adequate basis for this. In fact, your second way leads toward the opposite conclusion. The only adequate basis for this is to insist that as Christians we start from above. This is no doubt what you believe. But in your reasoning about Scripture and its teaching you do not succeed in showing how starting from above implies a reversal of approach at every point of the method of immanentistic philosophers who start from below. Both Mr. Godot and Mr. Heim complained that you were seeking to inject your own religious convictions as a foreign element into your transcendental method, and that in doing so these religious convictions do not come to their own and are artificially connected with your transcendental method.

## **Biblical Teaching**

We now look at what you say about the Bible and its teachings. Of course you believe the Christian story. You believe that man and his world clearly reveal the

presence and activity of the triune God of Scripture. You have told us that often enough.

Yet even while telling us this you try to weave these religious convictions into a dimensionalistic scheme that would destroy what you believe.

Your sharpened transcendental method is destructive of the Christian story. This method has its focal point in the human self which as supra-temporal points beyond itself to an Origin as the source of its *dunamis*.

It is this man, a contentless intersection between pure irrationalistic indeterminism and pure rationalistic determinism, that you speak of as the "central sphere of occurrence." The entire struggle between the *civitas dei* and the *civitas terrena* takes place in this supra-temporal sphere of occurrence. We must even say that "that which occurs cannot be distinguished too sharply from the historical aspect of cosmic time, which is only one of its temporal modalities of meaning."<sup>82</sup> If we may speak of any occurrence as taking place in man's temporal horizon it is only as a pointer toward the supra-temporal self. And the "mystery" of this "central human ego is that it is nothing in itself..." This self as nothing in itself in turn points beyond itself. All *dunamis* must therefore come from God. But then this God must not be, according to your transcendental argument, the Creator-Redeemer God of Scripture. If this God were the Creator-Redeemer God of Scripture then man would *ab initio* be placed in covenantal relation with God. Then the "religious" relation would not be expressed in some supra-temporal realm contrasted with man's temporal horizon. God's face would be directly present to man in every spot of the temporal world. Then man would be acting either as a covenant-keeper or as a covenant-breaker in the I-it dimension as well as in the I-thou dimension. Except upon the presupposition of the truth of the Christian story the human self would have to act in a vacuum.

I fear, Dr. Dooyeweerd, that the view of man as a supra-temporal sphere of occurrence undercuts the entire Christian view as to the struggle between the *civitas dei* and the *civitas terrena*. There is no occurrence of any sort in this contentless self, except *dunamis* be poured into it from a featureless God. This *dunamis* then filters down into the temporal world.

It is on some such purely nominalist view that Karl Barth founded his idea of the sovereignty of God's election. Grace is sovereign; there need not be and there cannot be, on this view, any transition from wrath to grace accomplished through the death and resurrection of Christ as the electing God. Election would not be sovereign over "history" if any such thing as the death and resurrection were needed for man's salvation.

But then, correlative to Barth's nominalist view of the sovereignty of God's grace is his realist view of the universality of this grace. The recipients of God's grace need not in any sense have any cognition of what happened through the death or resurrection of Christ in history.

In short, the realm of ordinary temporal occurrence is not the sphere of the drama of creation, fall, and redemption. The real occurrence takes place in the sphere of the supra-temporal. The temporal is only a pointer toward this supra-temporal sphere of

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<sup>82</sup> *New Critique*, p. 32.



occurrence.

Now I am not in the least bringing in this matter of modern dimensionalism and of Barth's sovereign-universal grace, Dr. Dooyeweerd, if I did not seriously fear that your sharpened transcendental method with its supra-temporal self as the central sphere of occurrence really opens the door for an entrance into historic Reformed thinking for a form of the nominalist-realist dialecticism which is surrounding Christian believers at every turn.

It remains for me to make a few remarks on the second part of your paper. In it you conclude that I have misconstrued the nature of your transcendental method because I, myself, am of a metaphysical and rationalistic turn of mind. This being the case I do not even realize that "a theological reduction of the truths of fact to Leibniz's truths of reason would make even the central facts of creation, fall into sin and redemption a consequence of logical necessity in virtue of the principle of contradiction."

Such must be true because I have used the expression "truths of reason." The Apostle Paul says that he has become all things to all men so that he might save some. Does this prove that Paul thought that he, not Christ, was saving man? But that I mean by that expression nothing like what Leibniz means by it is evident from the fact that on the very page from which you quote (p. 134, *The Defense of the Faith*) I am rejecting the entire position of Leibniz. "Leibniz was not less a rationalist in his hopes and ambitions than was Parmenides." The metaphysics and epistemology of the rationalist would kill the Christian story. The same would be true of the irrationalist. Therefore "in contradistinction from the rationalist and the irrationalist, and in contradistinction from the forms of thought that seek some sort of combination between these two, the Reformed apologist must hold to the idea of absolute system and to that of genuine historic fact and individuality."

This "absolute system" is not the sort that idealist philosophers have in mind. In direct opposition to such a "system" the Christian maintains that the truths of fact presented in Scripture must be what Scripture says they are or else they are irrational and meaningless altogether. The Christian apologist has his principle of discontinuity; it is expressed in his appeal to the mind of God as all-comprehensive in knowledge because all-controlling in power. He holds his principle of discontinuity then, not at the expense of all logical relationship between facts, but because of the recognition of his creaturehood. His principle of discontinuity is therefore the opposite of that of irrationalism without being that of rationalism. The Christian also has his principle of continuity. It is that of the self-contained God and his plan for history. His principle of continuity is therefore the opposite of rationalism without being that of irrationalism. Conjoining the Christian principle of continuity and the Christian principle of discontinuity we obtain the Christian principle of reasoning by presupposition. It is the actual existence of the God of Christian theism and the infallible authority of Scripture—which speaks to sinners—of this God that must be taken as the presupposition of the intelligibility of any fact in the world. The Christian "must maintain that the 'fact' under discussion with his opponent must be what Scripture says it is, if it is to be intelligible as a fact at all. He must maintain that there can be no facts in any realm but such as actually do exhibit the truth of the system of which they are a part. It is only as

manifestations of that system that they are what they are.”<sup>83</sup>

At a later point in this same volume I have contrasted the Christian and the non-Christian positions schematically.<sup>84</sup> It amounts to saying that the Christian accepts the Christian story on the authority of the self-attesting Christ, on the authority of the triune God of Scripture. His philosophy of “logic” and of “fact” is what is in terms of this Christian story. On the other hand the non-Christian accepts his story on the authority of the “autonomous” man. His philosophy of “logic” and of “fact” is what it is in terms of his own story.

How then can there be communication between the Christian and the non-Christian? Because the Christian story is true and the non-Christian story is false. The Christian knows the “true state of affairs” from what he learned of Scripture teaching.

According to the Christian story man is made in the image of God. His own consciousness is revelatory of God. Consciousness of God, the true God, is given, with the consciousness of self. Consciousness of all the facts of the universe as revealing God is given together with consciousness of self and of God.

However, it is only because of the redeeming activity of the triune God of Scripture with respect to myself as a member of the people of God that I accept such to be true. With the dawning of daylight in my heart I run to tell others of it. I seek by the power of the Holy Spirit to be steadfast and unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord. I know that my labor will not be in vain in the Lord.

How could it be? I have no worry about a point of contact for the truth as it is in Jesus in the heart and mind of the natural man. I know that he is not what he thinks he is, and that the universe is not what he thinks it is. If he were anything like what he assumes he is and if the world were anything like what he assumes it is, I could find no point of contact with him. In that case man would be an intersecting-point between an abstract formal principle of thought or being, and an abstract formal principle of irrationality or contingency. Still further, if the world were anything like the non-Christian assumes it to be then no one would have, because no one could have, approached me or any other human being with the gospel; I too would be a meaningless intersection point between pure logic and pure contingency. Finally, if the world were anything like the non-Christian assumes it to be there would have been no gospel to bring unto men. There would not have been, because there could not have been, a Jewish rabbi, named Jesus of Nazareth, who was the Son of God and son of man, who died on the cross to bear the wrath of God for the sins of other men and who was raised from the dead for their justification.

Yet, my non-Reformed evangelical friends seek for a point of contact with unbelieving men in terms of principles of interpretation which would destroy the meaning of human experience altogether. Seeking for a point of contact in terms of man as autonomous, my evangelical friends naturally also seek for a method of reasoning in terms of principles that would destroy the very meaning of reasoning. They would have to add purely contingent newness to stark changeless identity.

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<sup>83</sup> Van Til, *DF*, 1st ed., p. 135.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 310–312.

It is, of course, because of the nature of their theology that non-Reformed evangelical apologists can and must use such an unbiblical type of apologetical methodology. Roman Catholics and Arminians attribute some measure of autonomy to man. They start from their naive experience of freedom as an ultimate. Doing this they at the same time conclude that it is logically impossible to hold that man is both free and determined by the plan of God.

Thus they exegete away the teachings of Scripture with respect to God's relation to man by means of a "system" of "reality" and "knowledge" based on human autonomy. They add the Scripture teachings to their already constructed interpretation of man and the world.

Of course Roman Catholics and Arminians are often much better than their systems indicate, but we are speaking of theologies, not of men.

However, it is the responsibility of Reformed apologists to be first of all loyal to the self-attesting Christ of Scripture. To the extent that they are loyal to Christ and Scripture they will come to men and urge them to forsake the path of futility and judgment and take refuge in Christ. If they come to Christ, and only if they do, their philosophy, their science, and their theology will be saved with them. Then too they will no longer be galley slaves who must, even in their frequent discoveries of the true states of affairs in the universe, contribute willy nilly to their own and Satan's defeat and thus indirectly to the victory of Christ.

From the beginning of my work as a teacher in 1928, Dr. Dooyeweerd, I told my students essentially the same thing that I have said just now. The first paragraph of chapter 1 of a syllabus I wrote when I had not yet read any of the major works of the *Wysbegeerte der Wetsidee* reads: "According to Scripture, God has created the 'universe,' God has created time and space. God has created all the 'facts' of science. God has created the human mind. In this human mind God has laid the laws of thought according to which it is to operate. In the facts of science God has laid the laws of being according to which they function. In other words, the impress of God's plan is upon the whole creation."<sup>85</sup>

In the University at Princeton I had familiarized myself with the terminology and thinking of the history of philosophy, ancient and modern. What was I to do in order to set the biblical and more especially the Reformed points of view of reality, of knowledge, and of ethics as a challenge over against the man-centered view of men like Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Locke, Leibniz, Kant, etc.? Should I devise a new terminology in order by means of it to express biblical truth, and thus make clear the differences between it and the thinking of man-centered philosophies? I could not if I had wanted to do such a thing. I had not the genius that you have. I decided to approach my non-Christian friends with the content of Scripture teaching by means of an *Umdeutung*. I put Christian meanings into their words. I would tell them that my view of reality and knowledge—call it metaphysics and epistemology if you wish—is taken from Scripture. To do otherwise would be for me to engage in vain speculation with the result that I would have an otiose deity dangling before my mind as my own projection into the void.

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<sup>85</sup> Van Til, *SCE*, p. 1.

Moreover, this is the terminology current in the English-speaking world in which I labor. I say, therefore, to those who ask about the Christian system somewhat as follows: "You, my friends, state and defend or reject what you call systems of reality and knowledge. Well, I too have a 'system,' but it is a different kind of system. It is neither a deductive nor an inductive system, in your sense of the term. Nor is it a combination of these two. My 'system' is not that of empiricism, of rationalism, of criticism, or of any of the other 'systems' you may read about in the ordinary texts on philosophy. Nor is my 'system' a synthesis between one of your systems with that of the Bible. My 'system' is attained by thinking upon all the aspects of reality in the light of the Christ of Scripture. I try to think God's thoughts after him. That is to say, I try as a redeemed covenant-creature of the triune God to attain as much coherence as I, being finite and sinful, can between the facts of the universe. God's revelation is clear, but it is clear just because it is God's revelation and God is self-contained light. My 'system' is therefore an analogical reinterpretation of the truth that God has revealed about himself and his relation to man through Christ in Scripture. I construct my 'system' by means of a variety of gifts that God has created within me. Among these gifts is that of concept-formation. But my 'concepts' are not, as they are in your case, instruments by which man destroys the Christian story even as he explains it. My concepts work subject to the truth of the story. My concepts with respect to the story limit and supplement one another. Since my concepts are *ab initio* limiting concepts in the Christian, not the Kantian, sense of the term, they enable me to 'understand' and by understanding appropriate for myself, for my fellow-believers, and for all men the significance of the story."

But I must stop. I hope that by what I have said in this article, Dr. Dooyeweerd, I am enabling you to have a somewhat more satisfactory insight into my view; as I have, I think, by reading your letter and by rereading a good deal of your writing elsewhere, attained to a more satisfactory insight into your view. I hope too that this interchange of ideas between us may help others, after us, to listen more humbly to the words of the self-attesting Christ of Scripture in order that they may better bring the word of truth to all men everywhere—all to the praise of our triune God. Soon we shall meet at Jesus' feet.

—C.V.T.