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INTRODUCTION TO A TRANSCENDENTAL CRITICISM OF PHILOSOPHIC THOUGHT[1]

THE subject which I have chosen for my lecture gives me the opportunity of informing you of some of the fundamental characteristics of the new philosophy which has been developed during the last twenty years at the Free University of Amsterdam, and which has come to be known as "The Philosophy of the Idea of Law". [2]

What is the meaning of this Philosophy?

It is a fact generally known that the student who sets himself to study the history of Philosophy finds himself much embarrassed and even disappointed because he must observe profound disagreement between the different schools even with regard to the most fundamental principles of philosophy. In this situation the most embarrassing point is that the different schools, so far at least as they maintain the scientific character of philosophy, profess all alike to be founded solely on purely theoretical and scientific principles; in other words, that they are all adherents of the so-called autonomy of reason. Now if that were true it seems a little astonishing that they cannot succeed in convincing one another by purely scientific arguments. When for example a philosopher of the Thomist school alleges that he can prove by purely scientific arguments the existence of a supreme God, First Cause and Final End of the universe, and the existence of a rational immortal soul, a substance immaterial, indissoluble and simple, he meets a philosopher of the Kantian "critical" school who alleges on the contrary that all these arguments issue from a vain and sterile metaphysic, based on the misuse of the categories of the understanding and the theoretical ideas of pure reason. The Thomist for his part does not believe his position to be affected by the "critical" arguments. The result is that these schools continue to follow each its own way after a simulated

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[1] A lecture delivered to French students in Amsterdam.

[2] " The Philosophy of the Idea of Law " received its name from Professor Dooyeweerd's large work bearing that title which appeared in three volumes published by Panis at Amsterdam, 1935-6. The publication of this work, now out of print, occasioned the founding of the Union for Calvinist Philosophy (President, Professor Vollenhoven) which has now about 500 members in Holland and beyond, in addition to a large number of subscribers. It has a quarterly Review, *Philosophia Reformata* (Editor, J. H. Kok, Kampen, Holland). The Philosophy of the Idea of Law has many adherents in South Africa, the U.S.A., Switzerland, Germany and the Netherlands East Indies.

combat. Have they had real intellectual contact? I believe the answer must be: No.

That prompts us to raise the question whether theoretical principles are the true starting point of these schools. Would it not be possible that their true starting point is hidden beneath supposedly scientific theses, and that scientific thought has deeper roots which must be discovered in order to establish contact between different schools of philosophic thought? The Philosophy of the Idea of Law has raised that question, which is closely related to the question of the relation between faith and scientific thought.

It begins with a criticism, thus called transcendental, of philosophic thought, and demands a profound study of its universal and necessary structure. It opens this criticism by raising the problem: how is a scientific philosophy possible? that is to say under what universal and necessary conditions?

At first sight it might appear that this problem is not at all new. Did not Kant, the founder of the "critical" school, already ask: How is an objective experience, i.e. a truly scientific experience, possible? But this latter problem is not identical with that raised by the Philosophy of the Idea of Law. Kant wanted to investigate only the objective basis of the mathematical sciences and the Newtonian Physics, and the true limits of scientific thought with regard to metaphysics. But he did not examine the possibility of a critical theory of human knowledge as a purely scientific theory. He invites his readers in the introduction to his celebrated work, The Critique of Pure Reason, to accept no other datum than Pure Reason. Consequently the theoretical attitude of thought has for him nothing problematical. He considers it as an unshakable datum. Now it is precisely here that the Philosophy of the Idea of Law sets its mark of interrogation. It demands a truly critical study of the structure of theoretical thought as such.

(1) By what characteristics is scientific thought distinguished from pre-scientific thought and common experience?

Without doubt it is characterised by a specific attitude in which we create a theoretic distance between the logical aspect of our thought and the non-logical aspect of our field of study. This attitude produces an antithetical relation in which the logical aspect of our thought is opposed to the non-logical aspect

of the reality investigated. In this antithetic relation the non-logical aspect opposes a resistance to every effort of our understanding to comprehend it in a logical concept. From this theoretic antithesis arises the scientific problem. The Germans have expressed this resistance of the object of knowledge by the strong word Gegenstand.

Does this antithetic relation correspond to reality? Not at all. If it were true there would be in effect a deep gulf fixed between the logical aspect of our thought and the non-logical aspect which is its *Gegenstand*, its opposite. There would be no possibility of throwing a bridge across this abyss. The possibility of knowledge would be lost. In fact the antithetic relation is based upon a purely theoretic abstraction. The different aspects of reality are indissolubly linked by time, which is the deepest ground of temporal reality. This allows us to raise a second problem which we may formulate thus:

(2) From what is abstraction made in scientific thought and how is this abstraction possible?

In setting this problem we may not start from the antithetic relation as from a datum involving no problem in itself. It is far from being a datum, for it contains precisely a fundamental problem. Let us now compare the theoretic attitude with the pre-theoretic attitude of common experience. The latter is characterised by an absolute lack of all antithetic relation. In the attitude of common experience we find ourselves completely *within* empirical reality *with all the functions of our consciousness*. There is no distance, no opposition between the logical aspect of our thought and the non-logical aspects of reality. But if there is an absolute lack of the antithetic relation, naïve experience is none the less characterised by another relation, namely the relation of the subject to the object of our experience. Current philosophy has very erroneously confounded this relation with the antithetic relation of theoretical thought. It is precisely the opposite.

In naïve experience we attribute without hesitation objective qualities – sensual, logical, cultural, social, aesthetic, even moral – to the objects of our common life. We know very well that they cannot function as subjects which feel, distinguish logically, live together in a society, or make value-judgments. We know perfectly that these objective qualities belong to them only with

reference to the subjective functions of some possible consciousness. We experience this relation of subject and object as a *structural relation of reality itself*. That is to say, sensual colour belongs to the rose only with reference to a possible sensual perception, not to my individual perception or yours. To sum up: the subject-object relation leaves reality intact, together. The antithetic relation on the contrary is the product of an analysis, an abstraction.

The view of naïve experience which I have here given you is not generally accepted. Current opinion considers naïve experience from the theoretical point of view. It is conceived as specific theory of reality, the so-called "*naïve realist*" theory, or the "image theory". According to this view, naïve experience would imagine that human consciousness was placed like a photographic apparatus opposite a reality, as it were, independent of that consciousness. This " reality in itself " would be reproduced faithfully and completely in consciousness. That is a very erroneous conception of naïve experience. Naïve experience is not a theory of reality. Rather it takes reality as it is given. It is itself a datum, or rather the supreme datum for every theory of reality and of knowledge.

Let us return now to the antithetic relation of scientific thought. We have seen that from this relation arises the scientific problem. Theoretical thought cannot stop before the problem. It must advance from theoretical antithesis to synthesis. It must arrive at a logical concept of the non-logical aspect of reality. Here emerges a new problem, which we may formulate thus:

(3) From what starting point is it possible to apprehend integrally in a synthetic view the diverse aspects of reality which are analysed and opposed to one another in the antithetic relation?

In raising this problem the Philosophy of the Idea of Law submits every possible starting point of philosophic thought to a fundamental criticism.

Now it is indubitable that a truly critical attitude of thought does not permit us to choose the starting point in one of the opposed terms of the antithetic relation, that is, neither in the logical aspect of our thought, nor in the non-logical aspect of the object of our thought. Yet the current philosophy seems obliged by its dogma of the autonomy of reason to seek a point of departure in theoretical thought itself. Now here arises an

inescapable embarrassment. For by its intrinsic structure the logical aspect of our thought in its scientific function is obliged to proceed by a theoretical synthesis. And there are as many possible theoretical syntheses as reality has aspects. There is a synthesis of a mathematical nature, another of a physical nature, another biological, psychological, historical, sociological, etc., etc. In which of these possible syntheses will philosophical thought seek its point of departure? It matters not which it chooses, for it will always exaggerate one of these aspects, and this will lead to the proclamation of *the absolutism of one of the special synthetic points of view*. There is the true source of all the "isms" in philosophy, which haunt scientific thought and furiously give one another battle.

Now it is curious that apparently all these "isms" can be pursued in theory. How is that possible? The Philosophy of the Idea of Law has unveiled this mystery by a serious analysis of the structure of the aspects of reality.

What is a structure? It is an architectonic plan according to which a diversity of " moments " is united in a totality. And that is only possible so long as the different " moments " do not occupy the same place in the totality but are rather knit together by a *directive and central "moment"*. This is precisely the situation with regard to the structure of the different aspects of reality. They have an enduring structure in time which is the necessary condition for the functioning of variable phenomena in the framework of these aspects.

In this structure we find, necessarily, a central and directive “moment” which cannot be logically defined because by it an aspect maintains its individuality with regard to all the other aspects of reality, even with regard to the logical aspect of our thought. We call this directive "moment" the "*nuclear moment*". The "nuclear moment”, however, cannot display its individuality except in close liaison with a series of other “moments”. These latter are by nature partially *analogical*, i.e. they recall the "nuclear moments" of all the aspects which have an anterior place in the order of aspects. Partially also they are of the nature of anticipations, which recall the "nuclear moments" of all the aspects which have a later place in that order.

Let us take for example the sensation-aspect of reality. In its structure we find a nuclear element which cannot be further

reduced and which guarantees the individuality of the aspect in its proper sense. This is the "*sensation-moment as such*". "*Was man nicht definieren kann, das sieht man als ein Fuehlen an*." Only it would be quite wrong to suppose that this is a trait characteristic of the sensation-aspect of reality and of it alone. In fact we encounter the same situation in all the other aspects.

Round this central or nuclear "moment" are grouped analogical "moments". We find in the first place an analogical “moment" which recalls the nuclear "moment" of the biological aspect of reality. There is a living sensation and in this "vital moment" the sensation-aspect discovers its indissoluble liaison with the aspect of organic life. The living sensation is not identical with the organic life of our body. It obeys its own laws, which are of a psychological nature. It remains characterised by its own nuclear "moment” the "sensation moment". Nevertheless there is no living sensation possible without the solid foundation of an organic life in the biological sense.

Then in the structure of the sensation-aspect we find an analogical "moment" which recalls the nuclear moment of the physical aspect, i.e., movement. No sensation-life is possible which does not reveal itself in emotions. Emotion is a movement of feeling. But a movement of feeling cannot be reduced to a physical or chemical movement. It remains characterised by its nuclear " moment " and submissive to its own psychological laws. Only, every emotion takes place on the solid foundation of the physical and chemical movements of our body.

Next we find in the structure of the sensation aspect an analogical " moment " which recalls the nuclear moment of the spatial aspect of reality. In the life of sensation there is necessarily a feeling of space which corresponds to perceived space, and is differentiated as optical, auditive and tactile space. This perceived space is not at all identical with mathematical space but it is not possible without the foundation of the latter.

Finally, we find in the structure of the sensation-aspect an analogical " moment " which recalls the nuclear moment of the arithmetical aspect, i.e., quantity or number. There is no emotional life possible without a multiplicity and diversity of sensations. This multiplicity is not at all identical with multiplicity in the arithmetical sense. It is qualitative and psychological. It allows no quantitative isolation like the different parts of a straight line. The different sensations penetrate one

another. Only, this multiplicity is impossible without the foundation of an arithmetical multiplicity.

So far we have analysed the structure of the sensation-aspect only in the analogical direction. That is the "primitive or closed situation" in which we find the sensation-life in the animals. But when you study the sensation-life of man you discover “moments” of anticipation by which the life of feeling relates itself to the nuclear " moments " of all the later aspects of reality. We meet successively a logical feeling, an historical feeling, a linguistic feeling, a social feeling for propriety and tact, an economic feeling, an aesthetic feeling, a feeling for right, a moral feeling and a feeling of unshakable certitude which is akin to faith.

Here is revealed a structural phenomenon which we call *the universality in its proper orbit* of every aspect of reality. Every aspect is a true mirror of the entire order of aspects. It reflects in its own way the totality of aspects. And here at the same time is the clue to all the philosophical "isms". We now understand how it is possible for them all to be pursued equally with the appearance of conviction. And it is also evident that they cannot result from a truly critical attitude of thought. For we must choose between these alternatives: either all the "isms" are equally right, in which case they destroy one another: or they are equally wrong, and that is more likely. Thus it appears that the current opinion which maintains the autonomy of scientific thought is self-refuted.

It is just at this point that Immanuel Kant, the founder of the "critical" school, believed he could show another way. He saw very clearly that the various philosophical "isms" lack a critical attitude. He seeks a starting point for his theoretical philosophy which would be raised above the special synthetic points of view. And he is of opinion that this transcendent point of our consciousness can only be discovered by the way of *knowledge of ourselves*. This way contains a great promise. For it is indubitable that our theoretical thought, so long as it is fixed on the different aspects of reality, is dissipated in a theoretical diversity. Only in the way of knowledge of itself can human consciousness concentrate on a central point where all the aspects of our consciousness converge in a radical unity. The ancient Greek philosophers knew this very well. Socrates already laid it down that self-knowledge is the key to all philosophy. But here arises a new problem, which we may formulate thus:

(4) How is self-knowledge possible, and of what nature is this knowledge?

Kant did not wish to abandon the theoretical point of departure. Owing to the dogma of the autonomy of scientific thought he is obliged to seek a starting point in pure reason itself. But he supposes it will be possible to demonstrate in scientific' thought itself a transcendent point of consciousness which will be raised above the different special synthetic viewpoints. This is how he thinks to resolve the problem. He believes that in the logical aspect of our thought there is a subjective pole – "*I think*" – which has an opposite pole in every concrete empirical reality, and which guarantees the radical unity of all our synthetic acts. This "*I think*" is, according to him, the ultimate logical subject, which can never become the object of our knowledge, because every act of theoretical knowing must start from "*I think*". This "I think" is not at all identical with our concrete acts of thinking. These latter can themselves become the object of "*I think*"; while "I think" is the universal and necessary condition of every theoretic and synthetic act of our consciousness. It has no individuality. It is not of an empirical nature. It is a condition, logical and general by nature, of every scientific act.

The question now is whether Kant has succeeded in demonstrating a true point of departure in theoretical thought~ and the answer must be: No. As we have just seen, the point of departure of theoretical thought must transcend the opposed terms of the antithetic relation. But Kant seeks for one in the logical aspect of thought. "*I think*" remains within the antithetic relation, opposed to the object. In the logical aspect there cannot be a radical unity given in "*I think*". For we have seen that the structure of a specific aspect is always a unity *in* diversity of "moments" and never a unity above the "moments". Besides it is a profound error to suppose that empirical reality itself could become the object of the logical aspect of our thought. The object is always the product of a theoretical abstraction by which a non-logical aspect of reality is opposed to the logical aspect of our thought.

Thus there arises anew the problem which we have already formulated. How is self-knowledge possible? For indubitably the way of self-knowledge will be the sole way to discover the

true starting point of our scientific thought. Now it is generally admitted that *self-knowledge is always correlative to knowledge of God*. When for example Aristotle seeks the characteristic and central point of human nature in the theoretical understanding, this self-knowledge is indissolubly knit with his conception of God. God is for Aristotle Absolute Theoretical Thought, *noesis noeseos* which has only itself for object, and which is pure form opposed to all *matter*. When in modern philosophy the great German thinker Leibniz seeks the central point of human nature in mathematical thought with its clear and distinct concepts, this self-knowledge is quite dependent on his conception of God. God is for Leibiniz the archetypal Intellect, the great Geometrician, Creative Thought. And when Kant, in his *Critique of Practical Reason*, seeks the true core of human nature in its moral function, in its liberty to give itself its own laws, this self-knowledge is correlative to his idea of God, which is moralistic.

In fact self-knowledge is by nature religious. Man's "Self is the concentration point of all his existence, of all his functions within the different aspects of temporal reality. The Self is the religious centre, the heart, as Holy Scripture says, of all existence. The Self seeks, by an original innate tendency, its divine origin, and cannot know itself except in this original relation.

The true starting point of any possible philosophy is always *a fundamentally religious motive*. That is guaranteed by the very structure of theoretical thought which we have investigated above. These religious motives are the true motive forces which have dominated the evolution of western scientific thought. Each motive establishes a community among those who start from it. It dominates the thinker all the more if he is unconscious of his hidden religious motive.

There have been four great religious motives which have dominated the evolution of western scientific thought. I can but briefly mention them.

In the first place there is the great motive of Matter and Form, which was the fundamental motive of Greek thought. It originates in an endless conflict in the religious consciousness of the Greeks between the natural religion of antiquity and the cultural religion of the Olympic gods. Matter corresponds to the faith of the ancient natural religion, according to which divinity was the great vital current without stable or personal

form, out of which emerge all beings of individual form, which are subject to the great law of birth and death by a blind necessity, *Anangke*. The motive of form corresponds to the faith of the later religion of the Olympic gods who are only deified cultural forces who have left their mother earth with its vital current to receive an immortal, personal and invisible form. But the Olympic gods have no power over against. *Anangke*, which dominates the stream of life and death. *Anangke* is their great antagonist.

The second fundamental motive was introduced into western thought by the Christian religion. It is the motive of *the Creation, the radical Fall due to sin, and Redemption in Jesus Christ*. The third is that of *Nature and Grace*, introduced by Catholicism, which originates in an attempt to reconcile the opposed religious motives of Greek and Christian thought. The fourth is that of *Nature and Liberty*, introduced by modern Humanism, which originates in an insoluble conflict between the religious cult of human personality in its liberty and autonomy and the desire to dominate reality by modern natural science, which seeks to construe it as a rational and uninterrupted chain of causes and effects. This humanist motive has absorbed into itself the three earlier fundamental motives, secularising the Christian motive and the Catholic motive.

It is evident that a critical study of the influence of these great religious motives on scientific thought should open the door to a profounder view of the history of philosophy. Here in fact are to be discovered the profound roots of scientific thought which were hidden by theoretical masks under the reign of the dogma of the autonomy of reason. Here also appears the only way to establish real contact or discussion between the different schools, which at present seems impossible for lack of any notion of the true starting points of philosophy.

I regret that I cannot now pursue this transcendental criticism of philosophic thought in its application to the different schools. I hope however that I have succeeded in inspiring in you some interest in the critical view of the Philosophy of the Idea of Law.

H. DOOYEWEERD.

Free University of Amsterdam