

THE EPISTEMO-LOGICAL GEGENSTAND-RELATION AND THE LOGICAL SUBJECT-OBJECT-RELATION

by

HERMAN DOOYEWEERD

① Since the sixties the three basic questions formulated in the Prolegomena of my *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* have increasingly been brought up for discussion. P. de B. Kock, professor at the University of the Orange Free State in South Africa has given an extensive survey of this discussion in his book *Christian Philosophy, Standpoints and Problems* (Bloemfontein 1973) in which he examines the merits of the arguments adduced by different critics (among them H. G. Stoker, F. Kuyper, H. van Riessen, A. L. Conradie, A. M. F. Meyer, V. Brümmer and C. A. van Peursen).

The above discussion is of fundamental importance since at issue here is the philosophical view of the theoretical attitude of thought and experience lying at the foundation of the whole transcendental critique of it as exposed in my above mentioned work. Up to now I have not interfered in the debate because it was still in full movement and I wanted to wait and see if it perhaps could open new aspects. Meanwhile the discussion has come to a certain provisional close with the appearance in 1973 of the important dissertation *Begrip en Idee (Concept and Idea)* of the S. African philosopher D. F. M. Strauss, with which he gained the doctor degree in philosophy at the Free University of Amsterdam. In this thesis the author has subjected my sharp distinction between the inter-modal epistemological gegenstand-relation and the intra-modal logical subject-objectrelation to an acute critique, provided with an extensive argumentation. This argumentation distinguished his criticism from that of Prof. H. van Riessen who in his book *Wijsbegeerte* simply asserted that apart from myself nobody could have ever understood what I mean by the gegenstand relation. This bold assertion requires, above all, a critical refutation by way of a brief summary of the historical origin of this epistemological relation in ancient greek philosophy. In pre-Socratic philosophy, in which the scientific mode of concept formation had not yet become a critical problem, the general opinion was that knowledge is identical with its object. This was meant by the adage "the equal is known by the equal." This idea was found both in the Ionian philosophy of nature up to Anaxagoras and in the metaphysical doctrine of being founded by Parmenides. In the former, which was already undermined by Anaxagoras' sharp opposition of the thinking mind (*nous*) and matter, which is ruled by it, this led to the conception that the "elements" from which according to the ancient view the cosmos has originated (water, earth, air and fire) is only to be known by these same elements from which nor himself is built up. In Parmenides' metaphysical doctrine of being it

led to the identification of being and thinking. As soon, however, as the Socratic insight was obtained that theoretical knowledge is only to be acquired by means of the theoretic concept of the knowable, the identification of knowledge with its object could no longer be maintained. Thus we find, with Socrates' greatest disciple, Plato, an explicit rejection of the adage that the equal is knowable only by the equal (*Politeia* 438 e) and the characterization of the theoretically knowable as the ἀντικείμενον, that which is *opposed to theoretical thought*. The antithetical *gegenstand*-relation was thus already known in classical greek thought. That it was not here conceived along the lines of a framework of the modal aspects of the human horizon of experience as in the Prolegomena of my work *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, was due to the dualistic religious basic motive of ancient Greek thought which, since Aristotle, was designated by the terms *form and matter*, and in the pre-Aristotelian philosophy by the Pythagorean terms *peras* and *apeiron*. For, the insight into the irreducibility and the unbreakable mutual meaning-coherence between the modal aspects of the human experiential world which is necessary for the knowledge of their inner nature and modal structure was here fundamentally precluded by the dualistic form-matter motive.

2 Strauss, who in his earlier extensive work on the relation of philosophy and the different special sciences had completely accepted my view of the inter-modal *gegenstand*-relation and the inter-modal epistemological synthesis as characteristics of the theoretical attitude of thought and experience, has, in his thesis *Begrip en Idee*, raised serious objections against it. He now tries to show that the inter-modal character of the *gegenstand*-relation is already refuted by my own admission that the logical aspect itself can be made the *gegenstand* of our subjective logical analysis in order to gain theoretical knowledge of its modal structure. In addition he tries to prove that my view according to which the distinction between the modal meaning-kernel and the analogical moments of a modal aspect requires an inter-modal synthesis with all the other aspects, entangles itself in a vicious circle and logical contradictions.

The author is of the opinion that all these supposed difficulties are to be overcome by placing the *gegenstand*-relation within the frame-work of the logical subject-object-relation and by consequently abandoning my sharp distinction of these two. In reply to his argument I must first remark that my transcendental critique of theoretical thought begins with a critical inquiry into the inner nature and structure of the theoretic attitude of thought and experience in confrontation with the pre-theoretical, so-called naïve attitude. This was necessary in order to subject the current dogma concerning the autonomy of theoretical thought as a pretended self-evident result of its inner nature to a radical criticism, and in order to refute the current misunderstanding of naïve experience as a *false theory* of reality, namely that of "naïve realism", a misunderstanding particularly found in Kant, the neo-Kantians and Husserl.

3 This investigation led to the conclusion that theoretical thought is characterized by an antithetical inter-modal groundrelation, the *gegenstand*-relation, in which we oppose our logical or analytical act of thinking to the different modal aspects of empirical reality in order to get them in the grip of an epistemological systematic concept. These aspects offer resistance to

kind of 'naive' reductionism,
by which the modal aspect is
distinguished as 'reduced' to
laws and order for all

THE EPISTEMO-LOGICAL GEGENSTAND-RELATION

laws and order for all

our attempt to form a concept of them and from this resistance the epistemological problem originates.

This theoretical attitude of thought and experience does not correspond to reality as it gives itself to our non-theoretic experience of every day. It is the result of theoretical abstraction by means of which we lift the modal aspects out of the ontic systasis of reality in order to get them in our analytical look.

Pre-theoretical, so-called naive experience lacks the antithetical gegenstand-relation. It conceives empirical reality in the typical totality structure of concrete individual things, events, societal unities and their inter-relations in the integral systatic coherence of all their modal aspects. They function within these aspects in *ontical* subject-objectrelations, e.g. a bird's nest, a church building, a work of fine art, a living room etc.

The first result of Strauss' attempt to reduce the inter-modal gegenstand-relation to the intra-modal logical subject-objectrelation is the blurring of the fundamental difference between the theoretical and the non-theoretical attitude of thought and experience. This is a great pity because by so doing he has no longer sufficient defence against the theoretization of naive experience.

According to him we have already in non-theoretical thought and experience and implicit *conceptual* knowledge of the modal aspects in their individualization in concrete things and events. Theoretical thought in his opinion only makes these *implicit* concepts *explicit*. But this is a serious misunderstanding based on the erroneous opinion that the modal aspects themselves are individualized within the individuality-structures of concrete reality. For, the modal aspects belong to another dimension of the human horizon of experience. Not these aspects, only the functions of concrete entities within them are individualized within their typical individuality-structures.

If already in non-theoretical everyday thought and experience we would have an implicit *concept* of the modal aspects, we should at least have a certain insight into their modal structure resulting in a distinction between their modal meaning-kernel and their analogical meaning-moments which are qualified by it.

Strauss thinks that this distinction can indeed be shown in pre-theoretical experience and he adduces some examples to corroborate this opinion.

But these examples do not prove anything to favour his opinion. In naive experience, so he says, we are thoroughly aware of the (concrete) difference between *social intercourse* as a modal aspect of societal life, ruled by social conventional norms of politeness, good manners, decency, fashion etc., and *juridical intercourse*. A visit of friends is something quite different from an official visit of the police. Quite so! But it is not the modal difference between social intercourse in the above intended sense and juridical intercourse which is at issue here. The point is much rather that there is a concrete difference between the individuality structure of a visit of friends and that of police in its official character. An official police visit functions as well in the modal aspect of social intercourse as a visit of friends. For, a police official during his official visit, too, is subjected to some conventional norms of politeness, good manners and decency. The fact that in his official function he represents the governmental authority whereas friends during

1

2

7

8

9

10

11

12

visits associate with each other on equal terms, in a relation of sympathy, is quite indifferent with respect to the *modal structure* of their social intercourse. This difference derives exclusively from the *individuality-structures* of these concrete events.

It is therefore out of the question that in the pre-theoretical attitude of thought and experience we should already have an implicit concept of the modal structures of the different experiential aspects with their original meaning-kernels and analogical meaning-moments. Only by means of a complete theoretic elimination of the individuality-structures of concrete reality can the general structures of the different modal aspects appear to view. This is also evident from the two other examples of a supposed pre-theoretical conceptual knowledge of the modal structures which the author adduces, namely that of (numerical) quantity and spatiality. In his comment on them the distinction between meaning-kernel and analogical meaning-moments is no longer mentioned and that is quite understandable! For it is really impossible to maintain that in the pre-theoretic attitude of thought and experience one should already know the difference between the modal meaning-kernel of the spatial aspect and the different spatial analogies within the other aspects which are qualified by the meaning-kernels of these latter, such as physical space, biotic space, sensory perceptual space, logical (thought) space, cultural historical space, juridical space, economic space etc. Nor can we there find an implicit conceptional insight into the difference between number in its original quantitative sense and the numerical analogies in the non-arithmetical aspects (f.i. the logical unity of a concept in the multiplicity of its characteristics), the juridical unity and multiplicity of legal facts, dependent on legal norms, the moral two-unity of marriage partners, the Tri-Unity of God as oecumenical article of faith of the Christian Churches, which, if conceived in an arithmetical sense, would lead to the antinomy $1 + 1 + 1 = 3 = 1$, to the effect that the article of faith would contradict the arithmetical rule of addition.

The ontical systasis of the modal functions of an individual entity does not at all guarantee a pre-theoretic conceptual insight into the modal structures of the different aspects, as the author thinks. To the contrary, it hides them to the analytical view that is still enstatically bound to concrete entities. Strauss' remark that the transcendental critique ought to begin by asking how a pre-theoretic implicit concept of the modal aspects is possible consequently makes no sense.

The blurring of the fundamental difference between the theoretical and pre-theoretical attitude of thought and experience also appears clearly from Strauss' critique of the function which I have ascribed to theoretical intuition in the process of epistemological concept formation. The author neglects my explicit distinction between theoretical and pre-theoretical intuition, though it is of fundamental importance. For, it goes without saying that theoretic intuition, in contradistinction to the pre-theoretic one, is bound to the theoretical attitude of knowledge. It is indispensable for the acquisition of *insight* into the modal structures, which we view analytically in the *gegenstand*-relation. Strauss, however, is of the opinion that my appeal to intuition cannot serve to explain the possibility of an inter-modal theoretical synthesis. For, so he says, according to my own conception, intuition cannot function within theoretically abstracted aspects, which, in this abstraction have lost

their actuality. An actual intuitive contact is, according to Strauss, only possible between the *actual* logical thought function and the *actual* non-logical functions of our experience. As long as the latter are actually individualized, they are only given in an unsoluble *systatic* meaning — coherence, which according to Strauss would make their inter-modal theoretical synthesis impossible. But evidently the author here too has been caught in the pitfall of a false identification of the ontic and the epistemological states of affairs. It is not the given ontical systasis of the modal aspects of our experiential world, but much rather the *enstatial attitude of thought and experience*, still completely attached to concrete reality which makes the theoretic antithesis and synthesis impossible in our conceptual knowledge. I have always stressed the fact that theoretical analysis and synthesis is only possible of what is *given in ontical systasis*. This is why a reduction of theoretical gegenstandrelations to given ontological subject-objectrelations can never succeed.

It is unquestionable that the theoretical gegenstandrelation *presupposes* the logical subject-objectrelation. For, the modal aspects are neither given in theoretical abstraction nor in analysis of their modal structure. They can only be *object* of our subjective analysis. This is to say they have objective characteristics which can be brought to light by subjective analysis and may be synthesized in a concept. But are these characteristics of an *only logical* nature? That in their *logical object-function* they must have this modal character is beyond doubt. But it by no means follows that they themselves in their *ontical* sense must be of a logical character, and that by a mere logical objectivation of the non-logical modal aspects we could arrive at theoretical knowledge of their characteristic structural moments. Strauss implicitly admits this, when he observes (p. 127 of his thesis) that *modal-logical* does not mean *merely logical*, and when he speaks e.g. of the *sensory characteristics* of a chair. In consequence, however, of his continuous confusion of ontical and epistemological states of affairs, he has prevented himself from drawing the right conclusion from this insight, namely that *the intra-modal theoretical logical subject-objectrelation is dependent on the inter-modal epistemological gegenstand-relation*. Nevertheless Strauss deserves particular credit for having made the relation between the theoretical logical subject-objectrelation and the epistemological gegenstand-relation into a critical problem of the first order. For in my *New Critique* this problem has perhaps remained a little too much in the background.

Strauss has dealt with this problem in close connection with the controversy between Kant and the neo-Kantians of the Marburg school concerning the question whether conceptual knowledge requires a synthesis of logical categories with sensory perception, or whether, instead it should originate from logical thought alone. This is defensible in so far as some affinity can indeed be found between this controversy in the Kantian and neo-Kantian trends of thought and the dilemma in which, according to Strauss, the adherents of the philosophy of the cosmomic Idea find themselves in facing the question whether the theoretic conceptual knowledge requires an inter-modal synthesis or should be reduced to the logical subject-object-relation.

For the South African philosopher H. G. Stoker this was sufficient

reason to ascribe the whole transcendental critique as developed by the philosophy of the cosmonomic Idea to Kantian influence, a misunderstanding sufficiently refuted by Strauss in his work *The Relation between Philosophy and the Special Sciences*. It is therefore the more surprising that this author in his thesis on *Concept and Idea* after a rather extensive exposition of the radical difference between the Kantian conception of the transcendental logical thought-function as the formal legislator of nature and my own conception of the correlation between the logical subject-function and the normative logical laws to which this subject-function is *subjected*, nevertheless reproaches me for Kantian subjectivism. He does so in an evidently self-contradictory statement, namely: "Dooyeweerd's sharp criticism of Kant's rationalistic view of the understanding (i.e. intellect) as the universally valid logical legislator of nature ... must consequently in a modified sense be levelled against himself with due observance of the fact that Dooyeweerd certainly does not elevate actual human thought to the rank of universally valid legislator ... of nature (or the kosmos resp.)." This means in other words that my sharp criticism of Kant's conception of the subjective logical thought-function as formal legislator of nature is applicable to myself with this modification that it is not applicable to me! This should warn the author against the formal-logical method which he is so fond of using in order to show the untenability of a philosophical conception which he rejects, by moulding it in the form of a logical contradiction. For, this method is completely unserviceable to this end, and is fundamentally different from the method, developed in my *New Critique*, of laying bare the antinomies in which every attempt at absolutizing a modal aspect at the cost of other ones must be involved. There is a clear connection between Strauss' formal logical method and his attempts at reducing the *inter-modal gegenstandrelation* to the *intra-modal logical subject-objectrelation*. The unserviceableness of the formal-logical method appears from the fact that a logical contradiction in an argument can, in general, be removed without abandoning the material content of the argument, whereas an antinomy originates from a false material conception of the relation between different modal aspects, resulting in an apparent conflict between their lawspheres. Kant has neglected this fundamental difference in the transcendental dialectic of his *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* by identifying the metaphysical antinomies with logical contradictions between two opposed arguments, which both seem to be irrefutable, though he *did* see that these contradictions are insoluble because of a false view of the theoretical ideas. His reduction of the antinomies to logical contradictions was due to his logicistic view of the epistemological synthesis between the logical categories and the sensory "matter" of theoretical knowledge, which was even maintained in his doctrine concerning the "Schematisierung der Verstandsbegriffe in die apriorischen Anschauungsformen durch die tranzendentele Einbildungskraft."

12. Nevertheless he tries to maintain the inter-modal character of conceptual knowledge by means of his epistemological form-matterscheme: It is, according to him, the logical form of the category which arranges the in itself chaotic multiplicity of sensory impressions to the logical unity of the concept.

It was not Kant's acknowledgement of the inter-modal character of the

epistemological synthesis, as Strauss thinks, but much rather the form-matterscheme, by means of which he tried to account for it, which involved his view in antinomies. This is why the Marburg school of neo-Kantians, sticking by Kant's logicist view of the epistemological synthesis, abandoned this scheme and did not accept a sensory source of knowledge presenting the matter to the logical form.

In the philosophy of the Cosmonomic Idea there is neither place for the Kantian form-matterscheme nor for the neo-Kantian logicistic view of the epistemological concept. Strauss thinks to avoid this Kantian and neo-Kantian subjectivistic logicism by taking the logical subject-objectrelation in an ontological sense. That this subject-objectrelation in itself, i.e. apart from the gegenstand-relation, is not of an epistemological character clearly appears from the fact that it plays an essential part in pre-theoretical concept formation, which does not yet know epistemological problems. In consequence of the blurring of the limits between the theoretical and the pre-theoretical attitude of thought the author has not paid due attention to this important point.

Since the author's intention is certainly not to abandon the foundations of the philosophy of the Cosmonomic Idea, the question must be asked if within the framework of this philosophy his reduction of the gegenstand-relation to the intra-modal logical subject-objectrelation might be possible. At any rate we must establish that he has not succeeded in this reduction. In the explanation of his own conception the gegenstand-relation immediately returns where, completely in accord with my own view, he seeks the characteristic of theoretic thought and experience in its antithetical analytical ("uiteen- en tegenoverstellende") activity, which cannot be explained from the logical subject-objectrelation in its ontological sense.

The author is thereby also obliged to acknowledge the inter-modal character of the gegenstand-relation, which he now, in an intrinsically contradictory way, tries to fit in the intra-modal logical subject-object-relation. "Within (modally in) the disclosed subject-objectrelation", so he writes, "the modal aspects of reality are distinguished (i.e. logically objectified) set in inter-modal opposition to each other" (*Begrip en Idee* p. 125). Here the author's argument is not only contradictory in a formal logical sense. It contains much rather a real antinomy, as we shall show later. Strauss has on the contrary tried to show that my conception of the inter-modal gegenstand-relation and of the inter-modal theoretic synthesis entangles itself in logical contradictions. Again it strikes us that he does not speak here of antinomies. But, as we have noted, the difference between the intra-modal logical contradiction and the inter-modal antinomy does not fit in his reduction of the inter-modal gegenstand-relation to the intra-modal logical subject-objectrelation. For the rest it must be denied that he has shown logical contradictions in my argument. A semblance of their presence only derives from a wrong use of formal logic in his criticism of my method of analysing the modal structures. This method has been continuously followed in my *New Critique* and my *Encyclopedie der Rechtswetenschap* and has proved its usefulness and material fruitfulness over against both the static traditional and the present day historicistic methods of theoretical concept formation.

It does not move in a vicious circle, as the author wrongly supposes.

He has overlooked that what he *calls* so is nothing but a necessary consequence of the transcendental groundideas concerning the mutual irreducibility and the unbreakable mutual meaning-coherence of the modal aspects, which ideas lie at the foundation of my whole theory of these aspects, and are accepted by Strauss himself. For, these ideas are unquestionably of an *inter-modal* character. Not a single logical contradiction exists between them. Much rather they are connected in an unbreakable interrelationship with each other and with the transcendental groundidea of their religious root-unity and of their absolute Origin in God's creative Word.

Since the author tries to interpret the *inter-modal antithesis* between the logically objectified modal aspects, which he wants to maintain, in an intra-modal logical sense, he gets involved in veritable antinomies. In order to maintain both the mutual irreducibility of the theoretically abstracted modal aspects and the supposed intra-modal logical character of the epistemological antithesis he is now obliged to assume that also their irreducible meaning-kernels function in an intra-modal logical sense without an inter-modal synthesis of our analytical activity with the non-analytical modes of our experience. This would be tantamount to a complete destruction of the material contents of the epistemological concept and its dissolution into empty logical relations. From this indeed logicist view of the concept there arises an authentic antinomy between the modal lawsphere of the logical aspect and those of the other aspects *whose meaning-kernels cannot be interpreted in an intra-modal logical sense without canceling their irreducibility*. The author tries in vain to get himself out of this impasse which must lead him into the pitfall of a logicistic epistemology (which he himself has recognized and rejected) by stressing the view that the modal structure of the logical aspect is not to be understood in a *purely* logical sense because its analogical structural moments refer to their inter-modal meaning-connection with the modal structures of the other aspects. For this reference *ought to come to expression in the epistemological concept of the modal structure itself*, and it is just that which is made impossible by reducing the inter-modal gegenstand-relation to the intra-modal logical subject-object-relation. This is the weak spot in Strauss' acute argument.