
INTRODUCTORY: THE TRANSCENDENTAL CRITIQUE IN THE FIELD OF BIOLOGY

BY

PROF. DR. J. P. A. MEKKES *)

To many the intentions of Calvinistic philosophy rather than its contents have been the motive for questioning. This is not astonishing, because it is not in the first place this philosophy itself which is at issue, but rather its service. In any case, as one of its first tasks it took up the elucidation of the philosophical presuppositions which exert their influence in the study of the special sciences. Its originator, Professor HERMAN DOOYE-WEERD, has set the example with respect to the juridical sciences.

It was further to be expected that in this respect in the field of the so-called *humanoria*, the harvest would have appeared ripe earlier than in that of the natural sciences. It would be interesting to subject this view to a structural analysis, but here we must confine ourselves to one of its applications.

The author of the two following articles DR. J. J. DUYVENÉ DE WIT, professor of Zoology at the university of the Orange Free State, Republic of South Africa, has asked us to introduce his papers to the readers with a concise philosophical review. This, then, leads us to the field of the natural sciences.

In these papers we have to deal with the methodical application of the so-called transcendental critique in biology, especially with respect to the, alas, burning question which the doctrine of evolutionary transformism imposes on all of us.

Naturally, we do not anticipate what the author has to say on the subject, but we wish to invite special attention for a few salient points.

That which, today, in the transformist doctrine is first at issue appears not to be the intrinsic value of its dogma, but rather the scientific authoritative *power* of it.

Yet, the struggle for power, although it is presented here in a scientific context, is not of a scientific nature itself, but of historical concern.

The implications of this kind of historically qualified power will become evident on acquaintance with professor DE WIT'S argumentation.

Among those who foster a christian scientific enterprise one may well be especially careful because the scholastic fold, from which this kind of approach originated and which itself was nourished by a profound respect for rational thought, was forced to leave it children in the lurch over and

*) Professor J. P. A. MEKKES holds the Chair of Philosophy at several universities in the Netherlands under the auspices of the Society for Calvinistic Philosophy.

against a threat with modern means, in this case the presentations of the later darwinists. Within the calvinist circle, ancient scholasticism has gradually struck its colours, but only to leave the defence of its blazon to calvinistically coloured dialecticians showing a similar aprioristic devotion to cultural wisdom.

He who fails to be attentive at this point capitulates, not so much because he is beaten by scientific weapons but by those of diplomatic 'bluff'. The consequence is then a speedy return to a new scholastic compromise.

Professor DE WIT has subjected the argumentations of the 'transformists' to a profound investigation of the most recent information and commentaries available. He keeps himself far off from every kind of scholasticism and he orients himself merely to the state of present-day scientific knowledge.

Judged from a purely scientific point of view (according to the *structure* of the practice of science), two limiting concepts regarding the origination of the basic organic forms appear to present themselves. The first is the transformist one, implying a gradual and continuous development of the living world towards and including man. The second one, in its retrospective search in the space-time dimension of organic development, makes a pertinent stand before the scientific barrier which manifests itself in the sudden presence of the basic organic forms (*generatio spontanea* in a modern sense) discovered so far.

Now the curious thing is — and here we find ourselves within the focus of professor DE WIT'S demonstration — that only the latter point of view presents a truly *scientific* limiting concept. The transformist view has surpassed the limit to which the scientific field of inquiry is intrinsically bound, in a no longer 'verifiable' faith of the religious transformist doctrine. This faith remains defective, and it *must* remain defective in demonstrating the genetic continuity of the so fervently demanded interphyletic connections for the simple reason that a state of affairs like this does not *reveal* itself.

However, the *power* exerted by the transformist cult manifests itself the more by the fact those, too, who have *scientifically* halted before the barrier, now 'confessionally' transgress it by declaring with the authority of a student of science that *nevertheless* man descends from the animal. Even biologists who wish to be Christians, feel ashamed over and against this *power* of colleagues who refuse to bow their heads here *scientifically*.

On Scriptural grounds, the author makes it quite clear how a contestation of the rejected doctrines can never start from *communications* of Holy Writ because, although its promulgation occurs within and with our temporal existence, it transcends this existence in what (especially with respect to God's sovereign creation) it has to say.

The argumentation becomes almost dramatic when the author feels called upon to contest the Christian paleontologist TEILHARD DE CHARDIN who is entirely entangled in the scholastic scheme. As a matter of fact, scientifically enchanted by the transformist doctrine, T. DE CHARDIN has speculatively elaborated its postulate of continuity from a presupposed non-differentiated 'Life' on earth to Christ the Redeemer.

Here, too, professor DE WIT has restricted himself entirely to the

structural framework of the transcendental critique, indicating the influence of the complicated religious dialectical tensions which inevitably originate from a mutual accommodation of the humanistic and the scholastic religious motive.

The basic antinomy in which the humanistic evolutionary doctrine, in what we might call its naturalistic historicism, becomes entangled, namely, that of reason belonging to 'nature' which, at the same time, elevates itself *above* nature (also in its still *proceeding* development), has escaped T. DE CHARDIN by allowing evolution to continue beyond evolving human self-consciousness towards the all-embracing idea of a cosmic Christ. In this way, T. DE CHARDIN loses himself in a gnosticist speculation which, as professor DE WIT correctly observes, finally also causes the absorption of 'super-nature' by the evolution of 'nature'.

In the discussion of T. DE CHARDIN'S conception, the author not only indicates the profound influence of the humanistic religious basic motive, but also very clearly demonstrates the devastating effect of the centuries old scholastic synthesis, which in this great and devout thinker, from the scriptural point of view, has lead to perplexing excesses.

We hope that, without anticipating the following papers too much, the indication of these few marking points may suffice to have called the necessary attention for this study, which is not only important from the viewpoint of its cosmonomic and scientific outlook, but especially from that of the philosophical method used, which is entirely orientated to the norm of the transcendental critique.

As a consequence of the scholastic influences which the Reformation has not been able to banish sufficiently, in protestant circles, too, affability to reactions like those of T. DE CHARDIN exists. Yet, they can only lead from one pain into another one, because it is ultimately one and the same basic motive which maintains itself in these reactions. The attempt to explain the heavens from the earth, as it is experimented by an apparently disappointed and pragmatizing protestantism today, bears, instead of being reformatory as it is pretended, the sign of the running counter-reformation on its forehead.