

Dutch Neo-Calvinism: Worldview, Philosophy and Rationality

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IN DISCUSSING THE VIEW OF RATIONALITY HELD in Dutch neo-Calvinism, it is important to make a number of preliminary distinctions, and to clarify some underlying assumptions about philosophy and worldview. These distinctions and assumptions have this peculiarity: they play a decisive role both in the writings of the neo-Calvinists under discussion and in the present discussion about them. That is to say, the ensuing analysis of Dutch neo-Calvinism is undertaken by someone who self-consciously stands in the neo-Calvinist tradition. This approach has obvious drawbacks; it may also have its advantages.

A cardinal distinction to be made in this connection is that between “worldview” and “philosophy.” This is a distinction of relatively recent date, having first been made in nineteenth-century German philosophy. It is found, for example, in the writings of Wilhelm Dilthey and Heinrich Rickert, although they are by no means the first to adopt it. They contrast *Weltanschauung*, as a pre-scientific view of the world, with *Philosophie*, as its scientific counterpart. The connotations of “pre-scientific,” in this context, are: subjective, haphazard and contradictory, arising out of emotional and religious prejudices. “Scientific,” by contrast, implies a mode of cognition that is objective, methodical and coherent, founded on neutral and rational principles. Based on this view, the philosophies of the past (since the time of the Greeks) have confused *Weltanschauung* and *Philosophie*; the task now is to develop a rigorously scientific philosophy which will disabuse itself for all *weltanschauliche* elements. Worldview and philosophy, although alike in both offering a view of the totality of things, are basically at odds with each other. In the vocabulary of German philosophy to this day, the adjective *weltanschaulich* includes “unphilosophical” among its connotations.

The English word “worldview” seems to owe its existence to this [114] distinction and contrast in German philosophy. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word first appeared in English in 1858, as a translation of *Weltanschauung*, presumably because of its implied contrast with a strictly rational philosophy. It does not seem to have caught on in English,

however, until well into the twentieth century, in the heyday of neo-Kantianism; in 1917, we find the American theologian B.B. Warfield referring to it as a word newly in fashion.

Whatever its semantic history, the term “worldview” (or its equivalent “world-and-life view”) seems to pinpoint a useful distinction between philosophy as a methodologically rigorous academic discipline (a “science” in the sense of *Wissenschaft*), and the commonsense perspective on life and the world, the “system of values” or “ideology,” which in one form or another is held by all normal adult human beings regardless of intelligence or education. In this sense, worldview does indeed precede science, and is therefore quite different from philosophy in the strictly theoretical sense.

It is, however, an unwarranted prejudice to regard pre-theoretical common sense as more prone to error and uncertainty than theoretical science, and therefore to depreciate the cognitive claims of worldview as compared to those of philosophy. As a matter of fact, a good case can be made for the epistemological *priority* of worldview over philosophy. That is to say, philosophy (like all scientific knowing) is necessarily based on pre-scientific intuitions and assumptions that are given with the worldview of the philosopher concerned. Worldview necessarily plays a decisive role in philosophy, and the attempt to emancipate philosophy from worldview is doomed to failure.

This is a state of affairs that philosophers do not generally recognize, although historians of philosophy repeatedly point out the role of an underlying worldview in individual philosophers. Werner Jaeger’s treatment of Plato in his *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture*, vols. II and III (1943, 1945) may be taken as one example. The technical philosophy of Plato (including, for example, his arguments for the existence of the Forms) is there seen as the expression of a cultural ideal, a vision of men and society current in fifth-century Athens that was not itself theoretical in nature. We may think also of Rudolf Eucken’s best-selling work *Die Lebensanschauungen der grossen Denker* (1890), in which he discusses the worldviews of such philosophers as Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, Spinoza, Leibniz and Kant. Lewis White Beck, in his *Early German Philosophy* (1969), makes a telling case for the role of *Weltanschauung* (Beck’s word) in [115] the theoretical philosophy of Immanuel Kant. The same point about Kant is made by G.A. van der Wal in a Dutch work specifically devoted to the problem of the relationship of worldview to philosophy (*Wereldbeschouwelijk denken als filosofisch probleem* [The Hague, 1969]). Van der Wal also explores the role of worldview in the philosophies of Spinoza and Leibniz, and comes to the general conclusion that pre-theoretical worldview and theoretical philosophy are like the two foci of an ellipse comprising all the giants of the philosophical tradition.

If this is so, then philosophers should clearly develop their philosophical thought in

direct touch with their own worldview, and not pretend that they do not have one. A good deal of the confusion and lack of communication in philosophy may be due to a failure to recognize the role of worldview in philosophy. Many apparently philosophical disputes may mask differences on a pre-theoretical level which will never be resolved if they are not recognized for what they are. Rather than attempting the impossible task of doing philosophy in a worldview vacuum, philosophers should put their worldview cards on the table and enter the philosophical debate with none of those cards up their sleeve. Moreover, they should explicitly, self-consciously and unapologetically engage in philosophical systematics on the basis of their worldview. (This is much to be preferred over the alternative: doing philosophy in a manner that is implicit, unaware or apologetic.) Such an attitude and practice will not hinder philosophical communication, but foster it.

For Christian philosophers, the obvious implication is that they must seek to orient their philosophizing to a Christian worldview. Or to put the case a bit more strongly and accurately, the Christian must seek to philosophize on the basis of the Christian worldview—that is, the *biblical* worldview. Presupposed in such a formulation is the conviction that there is one Christian worldview, and that it is taught in the Scriptures. We will not argue for either of these crucial points here, but take them as points of departure. It may be useful, however, for our purposes here, to elaborate on the distinctiveness of a *Calvinistic* understanding of the Bible's worldview.

All traditions of orthodox Christendom (those who accept the ecumenical creeds, thus including not only the Greek Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches, but also the Lutheran, Anabaptist and Calvinistic streams of Protestantism) agree on some basic Christian beliefs. To use a Trinitarian formulation favored by Herman Bavinck, they all agree that: [116]

the Father reconciles his
created but fallen world through the death of his Son, and
recreates it by his Spirit into a Kingdom of God.

A Christian's worldview, the pre-scientific overall perspective which he has on life and the world, may be said to be the way he relates this basic confession to the everyday realities of his personal, societal and cultural experience. Distinctive about the Calvinistic understanding of the Christian worldview (building on a long tradition which includes Irenaeus, Augustine, Chrysostom and Tyndale) is that it takes all the operative words of this basic formulation in a universal, all-embracing sense. The *created world* is as wide as our experience, including culture and society, and its *fall* and *reconciliation* are equally cosmic in scope. So the *Kingdom of God* is truly a *re-creation*, a

restoration of the entire range of earthly reality to its original goal. Other traditions of Christendom tend to restrict the scope of creation, fall and redemption, and thus to come to some kind of two-realm worldview: one realm where creation applies, and another where fall and redemption apply. The variations that are possible here are described in the well-known book by H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (1951), where the last chapter elucidates the tradition that is here called “Calvinistic.”

Christian philosophy must be oriented to a biblical worldview, and there are different traditional understandings of that worldview. So it would seem that the choice of “understanding” will be decisive in philosophy. This is particularly true of Calvinism, since it rejects a two-realm theory which would allow philosophy to be treated as part of the “natural” realm, unaffected by sin and grace. A Christian thinker whose worldview is dominated by a nature/grace dichotomy will still base his philosophizing on his worldview insofar as “natural reason” must *allow for* an area where sin and grace are decisive. But he will feel much more easily justified in following the current and fashionable manifestations of that natural reason than a Calvinist who denies the existence of a purely “natural” reason.

Here we shall conclude our brief discussion of worldview and philosophy. It remains for us to make a preliminary remark about the concept “categorical framework.” This term, which we are adopting from Stephan KOrner (see his *Categorical Frameworks* [Oxford, 1974]), refers to something central in both worldviews and philosophies: the most basic distinctions and relations which a person accepts as valid, and which govern his outlook and argumentation. Worldviews and [117] philosophies are both centrally concerned with the fundamental distinctions to be made in reality and with the relations which obtain among the resulting “domains.” If KOrner is right, such “categorical frameworks” are so important that they establish a person’s standards of rationality; they prescribe his *logic*. Consequently, all analysis and argument presuppose and are governed by one’s tacit categorial assumptions.

We turn now to a discussion of neo-Calvinism and its worldview, beginning with an historical overview and concluding with a systematic review of the categorial distinctions of its worldview.

The term “Calvinism” (including its compound form “neoCalvinism”), as here used, refers not so much to a theological system, but to an all-embracing worldview or *Weltanschauung* which has a bearing on the whole of human life. This is the sense in which the word is used in Kuyper’s well-known *Lectures on Calvinism*, delivered at Princeton in 1898. It is particularly important to make this point in an English-speaking context, since the term Calvinism is readily equated in the Anglo-Saxon world with a certain view of predestination, or associated narrowly with the so-called “five points of Calvinism.” Calvinism as a worldview is comparable to Marxism: it has the same claim to comprehensiveness and immediate applicability.

The term “neo-Calvinism” refers to the revival of Dutch Calvinism in nineteenth-century

Holland, chiefly associated with the name of Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920). The term was originally coined by Kuyper's opponents but was accepted by him and his followers, who recognized that their views were a development, not simply a restatement, of the classical Calvinism of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. "Kuyperian" is an adjective with much the same denotation as "neo-Calvinistic," as is "reformational," although the latter term again tends to designate a *development*—in this case of Kuyper's basic outlook.

Although Abraham Kuyper was clearly the towering giant of the neo-Calvinistic movement, he was clearly not its only leader. As a scholar and teacher he was certainly matched by Herman Bavinck. There were a number of others, mainly pastors or professors at the Free University in Amsterdam, who helped shape and consolidate the movement. We will briefly review those among the neo-Calvinists who had the greatest concern for philosophy.

Kuyper himself was certainly one of these. He can be described as the romantic genius, a prodigy in both intellectual and practical [118] pursuits. He began as a theologian (trained at modernist Leiden) and spent the first years after receiving his doctorate as a pastor in the national Dutch Reformed Church. Here he was converted to orthodox Calvinism and became a leading voice in ecclesiastical affairs. Soon his influence became national in scope, and he led not only a secession from the largely modernist *Hervormde* Church, but also wrote books on theology, edited a daily and a weekly newspaper, founded in 1880 the Free University of Amsterdam as a specifically Calvinistic institution (where he taught theology and Dutch literature), and became leader and member of Parliament for the Calvinistic Anti-Revolutionary Party. In 1901 he became Prime Minister of the Netherlands, a post which he held until 1904. He was the undisputed leader of neo-Calvinism, a movement which combined spiritual and theological renewal with fresh beginnings on a broadly cultural front: political, social, economic, educational and academic.

Herman Bavinck (1854-1921) was a very different sort of man than Kuyper, although he shared Kuyper's ideals and laid claim to a scholarly reputation which at least equalled Kuyper's. Bavinck came from the circles of the 1834 *Afscheiding*, a secession from the national church which later largely joined Kuyper's forces to form a single Reformed denomination. Bavinck, too, received a doctorate in theology from Leiden, although he never let go of the orthodox faith of his upbringing. After one year as a pastor, he became professor of systematic theology, first for twenty years at the theological seminary of his church at Kampen, then for another twenty years (after the merger of the two churches) at the Free University, where he succeeded Kuyper. He is the author of a magisterial four-volume work entitled *Reformed Dogmatics*, which is currently being translated into English. During the last ten years of his life, Bavinck turned his attention to non-theological disciplines, especially philosophy. His scholarship is characterized by an impressive breadth and

balance, and by an ecumenical spirit which allowed him to appreciate and honor the strengths and insights of thinkers of entirely different persuasions than his own.

Next to these two titans, we should mention two other professors of the Free University: Jan Woltjer and W. Geesink. Woltjer (1849-1917) was a classicist who had written his doctoral dissertation on Lucretius, and who maintained an active interest in philosophy all his life. He wrote a number of essays outlining the importance of the *Logos* of John 1 for a Christian understanding of the world. Geesink (1854-1929) taught ethics and philosophy at the Free University, and is chiefly known for his multi-volume popular work *On the Ordinations of the Lord*, in which he outlines an approach to philosophy on the basis of a neo-Calvinistic understanding of the Scriptures.

All four of these men were keenly interested in philosophy, but none had the time or training for specialized work in the area. This was left to a number of men of the second generation, who worked out the implications of neo-Calvinism for specifically philosophical questions. Three in particular should be mentioned, although they were by no means the only neo-Calvinists who pursued philosophy with explicit reference to their worldview.

Geesink's successor in philosophy at the Free University was D.H.T. Vollenhoven (1892-1978). Vollenhoven came to study theology at the Free in 1911, at the time when Bavinck's interests were shifting to philosophy. Vollenhoven followed his teacher's interests and wrote a doctoral dissertation in 1918 entitled *The Philosophy of Mathematics from a Theistic Standpoint*. After a number of years as pastor, he received the philosophy appointment at his *alma mater* in 1926, where he remained until his retirement in 1963. Besides original work in philosophical systematics, Vollenhoven is known for his distinctive work in the history of philosophy. Among his most important publications are *Calvinism and the Reformation of Philosophy* (1933) and *History of Philosophy*, vol. I (1950), both written in Dutch.

Vollenhoven's brother-in-law, Herman Dooyeweerd (1894-1977), was professor of jurisprudence at the Free University from 1926 to 1965, and worked together with Vollenhoven on the development of a Calvinistic philosophy. Dooyeweerd's own major philosophical publication appeared in English in the 1950s under the title *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*. Dooyeweerd is the best known, internationally, of the Dutch reformational philosophers, chiefly because a number of his philosophical works have been translated into English. Other titles include: *Transcendental Problems of Philosophical Thought* (1948), *In the Twilight of Western Thought* (1960), and *Roots of Western Culture* (1979). His own term for his philosophy is "the philosophy of the cosmological idea." It takes a unique approach to the history of Western philosophy, and also provides a

detailed analysis of reality which notably includes a distinctive view of theoretical thought, human society and history.

A third reformational philosopher, on a par with Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd, is the South African Hendrik Stoker (1900-). Stoker came to Amsterdam to study under Bavinck in 1921, the very year that Bavinck died. Thwarted in his plans to pursue philosophy at [120] the Free University, Stoker studied under the phenomenologist Max Scheler in Cologne, receiving his doctorate in 1925 (with a thesis in German entitled *Conscience*). He returned to South Africa to teach philosophy at the Christian University of Potchefstroom, where he remained until his retirement in 1964. He stayed in close touch with Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd, and his philosophy, to which he gave the name “philosophy of the creation idea,” closely parallels their mutual concerns.

These three men are the most original thinkers in the reformational movement in philosophy which emanated from the Free University, and which is sometimes referred to as the “Amsterdam School.” However, they were not the only ones of the second generation of neo-Calvinists who did work in philosophy. For example, the missionary and missiologist J.H. Bavinck (a nephew to Herman Bavinck) published writings on philosophical topics in his early career, as did V. Hepp, who was Bavinck’s successor at the Free University. Hepp delivered the 1930 Stone Lectures on the topic *Calvinism and the Philosophy of Nature*. H. Hoekstra, a Kampen theologian who also lectured in philosophy, had received his doctorate in the philosophy of religion under the well-known Kantian W. Windelband in Heidelberg. None of these theologians, however, made a lasting impact with their philosophical work.

For all their differences in originality, influence and philosophical training, the neo-Calvinists of the first and second generations were united in their basic worldview. We turn now to the basic categorial distinctions which define this worldview and which account for the cohesiveness of reformational philosophizing, in spite of philosophical differences.

As I see it, there are five categorial distinctions that define the unity and distinctiveness of neo-Calvinism as a whole. These are fundamental in the thought of each of the men we have mentioned, although not every distinction is fruitfully developed for philosophy in each of these men. It should be noted that each distinction brings with it a relation between the domains or realities that are distinguished; moreover, the specification of the relation is one of the most important features of each distinction within a categorial framework.

The first distinction is that between *God and creation*. This is of course fundamental to any Christian or theistic worldview, but it appears here in a particularly marked form. Calvinism carries within itself a strong aversion to any tendency toward pantheism or idolatry, [121] any shading of the boundary separating the Creator from his creature. A keen sense of the sovereignty and transcendence of God makes the neo-Calvinist shy away from any view that points to a common denominator for both God and creation, making the difference between them gradual

rather than qualitative. By the same token, “creation” becomes the category for all that is not God, including the whole range of visible and invisible reality.

The second categorial distinction is that between *God’s creational ordinances and what is subject to these ordinances*. Creation is defined (in characteristically Calvinistic fashion), in terms of a cosmic *law* (decree, statute, word, ordinance), as the expression of God’s sovereignty. In the terminology of “cosmo-nomic” philosophy, creation is always a matter of “the law-subject correlation.” That correlation holds not only in the world of nature (where we all speak readily enough of the “law of gravity” and the “laws of thermodynamics”) but also for all other kinds of reality, such as music, politics, business, entertainment, worship and so on. A postulated creational “law” that must be responsibly implemented makes all these areas philosophically accessible *as creation*. This law thus enables philosophy to take seriously the comprehensive scope of creation in the Calvinistic understanding of the basic Christian confession. The distinction between law and subject, understood to apply across the board within creation, is perhaps the most fruitful one for a biblically based philosophy. Although this distinction is developed most extensively in the reformational philosophies of Vollenhoven, Dooyeweerd and Stoker, it is by no means restricted to them.

A third categorial distinction, which cuts across the preceding one, is that between “*earth*” and “*heaven*,” or between the earthly creation and the creaturely dwelling place of God and the angels. It is important to distinguish here between a broader and a narrower sense of these scriptural terms. The narrower sense refers to heaven as “sky” and to earth as “dry land.” Both of these, according to biblical usage, are subdivisions within the earthly creation (“earth” in the broader sense). The latter, called “the cosmos” in Stoker’s terminology, is the horizon of normal human experience, and therefore sets the limits of empirical investigation and scientific analysis.

The fourth categorial distinction is that between different stages of *development within the earthly cosmos*. The earth must be formed or developed (“subdued”) in human culture so that its creational potential can be historically unfolded or opened up to God’s glory. The distinction between “undeveloped” and “developed” is therefore one that is given with creation, and is not the result of the Fall. Man’s [122] task of developing the earth is part of God’s eschatological plan for his creation, so that human culture is fundamentally recognized as worthwhile, part of creation’s movement toward a final consummation. The idea of the “cultural mandate” here militates against any attitude to human civilization and its development that would be quietistic or historically reactionary.

The final categorial distinction is the only one of the five that is the result of the Fall into sin. This is the distinction between “*structure*” and “*direction*,” or between “the order of creation” and “the order of sin and redemption” (Calvin). “Structure” refers to the created cosmos as it was meant to be; “direction” refers to that cosmos as it is misdirected by

sin and redemptively redirected by Christ. Because sin and redemption, in the Calvinist understanding, are cosmic in scope, this distinction holds in principle for all of the earthly creation, including natural, cultural and societal life as well as morality and piety. Here the Calvinist stress on the radical and comprehensive scope of man's Fall, as well as the equally radical and comprehensive scope of Christ's redemption, finds expression in a succinct categorial formulation. At the same time, this fundamental distinction reflects the basic Calvinist intuition that salvation is *re-creation*, that is, that grace does not destroy or supplement, but rather *restores* nature.

Having dealt with the categorial framework of the neo-Calvinists, we can turn now to their view of rationality. We discover that there is widespread agreement among them on the worldview level, but there is a marked development on the philosophical level. We shall deal with each of these themes in turn.

The neo-Calvinists are agreed that rationality is a good creature of God, meant to be developed and cultivated to his glory. The categorial framework of their worldview is clearly in evidence here. Rationality is a creature, which implies that it is not divine (reason may not be deified), is subject to creation norms, and is meant to be developed as part of man's earthly task before the face of God. Because it belongs to the order of creation, it may not be deified—but for the same reason it may not be vilified either, for everything created by God is *good*. However, rationality also participates in the order of sin and redemption, that is to say, it is fundamentally *religious*—under the influence of sin and in need of redemption. In other words, the categories “structure” and “direction” apply to rationality as much as they do to any other part, feature or dimension of the cosmos. Rationality is not religiously neutral.

It is evident how decisively the neo-Calvinists' understanding of [123] the biblical worldview governs their thinking at this point. Clearly they part company here with the doctrine of an autonomous or religiously neutral reason, either in its humanist or its Christian form. It was their distinctive view of the religious nature of rationality, and thus of all science and rationality, which led to the establishment of the Free University in 1880. There, all scholarship was to be guided by “the reformed principles,” that is, by a Calvinist understanding of the biblical worldview.

Kuyper explicitly spoke in this connection of *tweerlei wetenschap*, “two kinds of scholarship (science).” One kind of scholarship arose out of a regenerate heart, and was therefore prepared to interpret the world in the light of authoritative Scriptures. The other kind arose out of an unregenerate heart, and therefore rejected the light of Scriptures. Kuyper consequently called for the reformation of scholarship, for the development of scripturally directed learning.

Bavinck's view of rationality has been analyzed in an excellent work by E.P. Heideman, *The Relation of Revelation and Reason in E. Brunner and H. Bavinck* (1959). Bavinck treats rationality in the light of his fundamental and constantly recurring theme that grace (salvation) restores nature (creation). Christ's redemption therefore means that man's rational powers can be fundamentally freed from the enslaving effects of sin, and restored to their original creational function. Christianity does not lead one to the irrational, but to the truly rational. In this connection Bavinck borrows Calvin's image of the Scriptures as corrective glasses, which allow bleary-eyed fallen man once more to see clearly. The Scriptures allow reason to function once again as it was intended. The biblical worldview must be the Christian's guide in reasoning, both in daily life and in philosophy and science. So Bavinck enthusiastically seconded Kuyper's call for a reformation of the academic disciplines in the light of the Scriptures, and Bavinck increasingly participated in the effort to bring about that reformation in fields outside theology.

The emphasis on the *religious* nature of philosophy also accounts for Bavinck's critique of Scottish common-sense philosophy, with its doctrine of an infallible intuition. In a dissertation written under Bavinck (*The Intuitive Philosophy of James McCosh* [1914], S. Volbeda singles out this feature of McCosh's thought for criticism (p. 386)).

Both Kuyper and Bavinck, as well as the other neo-Calvinists of their day, stress the importance of *principles* in the functioning of rationality, and stress this approach in the doing of scholarship. These [124] principles are the axioms or underlying presuppositions which govern theoretical reasoning. They are of a philosophical, and ultimately of a religious, nature. Characteristic of the neo-Calvinist approach to rationality is this stress on philosophical principles as the link between religious commitment and the process of scientific reasoning. In our terminology, the pre-scientific categorial distinctions and relations on the worldview level will immediately reflect an allegiance to revelation (either the Scriptures or some substitute). These distinctions and relations become operative in the scientific enterprise when they are philosophically elaborated. It is clear how important the role is that philosophy, as the "categorial" discipline *par excellence*, assumes in this view. The reformation of scholarship in accordance with reformed principles would depend very largely on the development of a distinctly Calvinistic *philosophy*. It is to this topic that we now turn.

It bears repeating that the unity of the neo-Calvinist movement, at least insofar as this can be defined in intellectual terms, lies in a common commitment to the worldview principles we have outlined. Philosophically, however, there was no such unity, although there was a widespread agreement among the first generation that further clarity and consensus on a Calvinistic philosophy was a task of high priority. Their understanding of rationality reflects the process of development that came about as their philosophy, explicitly geared to

their understanding of the biblical worldview, came into clearer focus. That process of development can be roughly categorized by two phases, which I will designate by the labels “neo-Platonic” and cosmonomic.”

The initial attempts to articulate a Calvinistic philosophy, on the part of men like Kuyper, Bavinck, Woltjer and Geesink, were still very much indebted to the tradition of Christian neo-Platonism. This tradition, largely initiated by Augustine and strongly reinforced in the early Middle Ages by the Latin translations of Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite, I take to be virtually equivalent to the history of Christian orthodoxy in the West. This tradition is characterized by the idea of “the great chain of being,” the cosmic hierarchy of different grades of *ousia*. God is defined as the highest grade of “being” (*summum ens*) and “being” itself, as both “substance” and “essence,” and *is* defined as the objective correlate of rationality (*logos, nous*). A brief excursus on the history of this scheme may be helpful to put into context the initial neo-Calvinist attempts to give a philosophical account of rationality.

Plato’s Forms, characterized as both truly real and truly rational, had put rationality at the center of pagan Greek ontology. [125] This basic feature was not fundamentally affected by the immanentization of the Forms by Aristotle, or by the pantheistic materialism of the Stoics. Plotinus capitalized on this by bringing together all these major streams of Greek thought (Platonic, Aristotelian and Stoic) into his neo-Platonic hierarchy of being. Plato’s two worlds were conceived as two tiers of a five-tier ontology (One-Intellect-Soul-WorldMatter). These were correlated with different grades of being (super-being, true being, two grades of attenuated being, and non-being), which were at the same time different grades of rationality and goodness (evil in materiality, the absence of such goodness). Stoic categories (*logoi spermatikoi*, cosmic *sympatheia*) were drawn on to account for the sensible World, and Aristotelian categories served to elucidate Matter and Intellect (cf. Aristotle’s *hyle, noesis, noeseos*), as well as to provide the basic ontology of the visible World (the categories, immanent eide, genus/species). The commanding overall framework remained Platonic (*chorismos*, participation, intelligible world, virtue as separation and *homoiosis theo*), with two important innovations: the intelligible world (true being) is equated with the divine Intellect (“ideas in the mind of God”), and the One/Good transcends both.

Augustine read his Bible with the aid of this neo-Platonic framework: the One was collapsed into the Intellect and equated with God, so that the Logos of the prologue of John refers simultaneously to the second person of the Trinity and to the complex of Platonic Forms as the rational archetype and source of created things. Within creation (sensible World), the ontological structure of things must be seen as the ectypical grade of being/rationality designated by the Stoic *logoi spermatikoi* (*rationes seminales*) or

Aristotle's *eidē (formae)*.

This basic ontological framework was bequeathed by Augustine to the Latin Middle Ages during which time it was modified in detail (Pseudo-Dionysius, Eriugena) but never fundamentally challenged. This also holds true for the impact of the rediscovery of the Aristotelian corpus in the thirteenth century. The achievement of Aquinas was possible because the inherited Platonic-Augustinian framework of classical dogmatic orthodoxy was neo-Platonic in character—it had been designed to accommodate Aristotelian categories from the outset. Aquinas in effect re-integrated Aristotle into Augustinian Platonism, but Plotinus had already laid the foundations. Aquinas merely strengthened the hold which the neo-Platonic philosophical paradigm has had on classical Christian orthodoxy—a hold which was loosened but not broken by the Reformers, and continues to this day.

The thought of the early neo-Calvinists was no exception to this rule. The basic features of the paradigm are present: God as *summum ens*, the Son or Logos understood as archetypal ideas in the mind of God, creation as the imposition of ectypal *formae* on matter, evil understood as *privatio boni*, the connection of rationality with the image of God, and so on. Herman Bavinck is perhaps most explicit about the connection of rationality with this underlying ontology (see his booklet on *Christian Scholarship* [1904] and his discussion in *The Doctrine of God* [1951]). For him, scholarship was a matter of “thinking God’s thoughts after him.” Bavinck, more than the other neo-Calvinists, was influenced by the revival of Thomism that was taking place in Catholic circles in response to the encyclical *Aeterni Patris* (1879). Woltjer, too, in his booklet *The Science of the Logos* (1891), is very explicit in his attachment to the traditional metaphysics. Perhaps most telling in this regard is a philosophical dissertation, supervised by Bavinck, which was defended at the Free University in 1917 by H.W. Smit. Entitled *The Philosophy of Nature and Theism*, it simply equated Calvinistic philosophy with a Christianized synthesis of Plato and Aristotle, meaning by this essentially a version of Augustinian neo-Platonism. There continued to be the privileged link between rationality and both reality (true being) and divinity.

Cosmological philosophy in many respects constitutes a break with this privileged link, and therefore with the received paradigm. From the outset, Vollenhoven, Dooyeweerd and Stoker sought to reform philosophy in the light of the Scriptures, and they were keenly aware of the dangers of mingling biblical themes with those of pagan or humanistic philosophy (a mingling which they called “synthesis”). They sought to make the categorial distinctions of the biblical worldview *intrinsic* to their philosophical systematics, and not to accommodate them to inherited patterns. Although each started with the classical framework (what they later referred to as “Logos speculation”), they gradually moved away from it, under the pressure of the implications of their worldview. It will be instructive to look briefly at how these implications affected their

understanding of rationality.

The God-creation distinction is, of course, one that is common to all Christian thought. But the radicality and primordality of that distinction in neo-Calvinism, which seeks to capture the force of the Isaianic passages on the incomparability and transcendence of Yahweh, has some unexpected implications. If rationality is *creature*, and there is no creaturely principle of continuity between the Maker^[127] and the made, then rationality disqualifies as that principle. There is no rational order that encompasses Creator and creation—not because the Creator is irrational, but because rationality *is* creature. Accordingly, the reformational philosophers break with the ancient Christian tradition (beginning with Justin Martyr in the second century) which identifies the *Logos* of John 1 with the *logos* of Heraclitean and Stoic paganism. This point is expressed most clearly in some of the early writings of Vollenhoven. Here he systematically discriminates between *Logos* as the sovereign person of the Godhead, and *logos* as one of the dimensions (the reasoning one) of man's creaturehood.

Moreover, once this fateful connection between divinity and one kind of creatureliness is severed, the connection between rationality and "being," as the common denominator of all reality, also becomes problematic. If rationality is not intrinsically divine, how can it possibly reflect "being"—of which it is itself a part? Or how can "being" be the objective correlate of rationality unless the latter is something divine which transcends all creaturely being? Against all efforts to absolutize (that is, to deify, to idolize) rationality, the reformational philosophers asserted its *subordinate creaturehood*. Perhaps it is better to say "its *coordinate* creaturehood," since rationality was considered to be on a fundamentally equal footing with all other creaturely dimensions (e.g., morality, spatiality, physicality, aestheticity, etc.). The point was not to depreciate rationality (everything created by God is good), but to put it in its creaturely place.

The law-subject distinction, too, proved fruitful for the reformational appreciation of rationality. For instance, the law, as God's reliable creative command for all creatures, "took over" from rationality (and its correlate, being) the burden of accounting for the constancy, order and unity of created reality. In addition, this second categorial distinction allowed for an analysis of rationality which could honor both its commonality to all men (its law-determined structure is universal by virtue of creation) and its religious diversity (the *direction* of people's response to the law on the subject side is diverse). (We shall presently discuss the structure-direction distinction.) That is to say, the creational law as a transcendental *a priori* constitutes the possibility of rationality, and this is part of the creaturely makeup of all humans, whatever their religious persuasion or commitment.

At the same time, that creational law *prescribes* how human beings, as creatures subject to that law, must respond (they are to ^[128] observe the law of non-contradiction and all its implications). Sometimes this imperative is not upheld on the subject side, and in many

cases religious prejudices may lead to hidden fallacies or to an open flouting of any norm of rationality. Nevertheless, rationality is still structurally common to all men, even though it does not escape the effects of sin or the Fall outside the range of redemption.

Furthermore, the category of the law-subject correlation opens the way to an investigation of the “laws of thought” as specifications of a creational ordinance—one that is both *sui generis* (not reducible to psychic laws, for example, as in psychologism, or to biological ones, as in behaviorism) and linked to other kinds of creaturely lawfulness (e.g., that of numerical reality in mathematical logic, or that of faith in the logic of “God-talk”). Some of these implications, and others as well, are explored in such works as Vollenhoven’s *The Necessity of a Christian Logic* (1932) and his *Fundamentals of Logic* (1948).

The categorial distinction between earth and heaven is of limited relevance to the subject of rationality. However, in reformational philosophy this distinction does remind us that rationality as we know it is limited in its application to the earthly cosmos. Our knowledge of heaven must be based on the relatively sparse givens of the Scriptures, not on speculative reasoning that extrapolates from earthly reality. At the same time, human reasoning must not exclude the existence of angels (or demons).

The distinction between “undeveloped” and “developed,” the fourth one listed above, also had implications for the cosmological philosophers. Part of the historical task of mankind is to exploit the creaturely possibilities of human reasoning. The development of non-Aristotelian logic within the last century is an example of this task. Vollenhoven’s dissertation welcomed this evidence of the cultural development of possibilities inherent in man’s rational capacity. The “opening up process” that plays such a key role in Dooyeweerd’s thought is relevant also for his view of the logical or analytical function of man (his term for rationality). Theoretical thought itself is an example of the opening up of the analytical realm, and Dooyeweerd’s system envisages hitherto unsuspected developments in logic. Thus cultural development helps to disclose currently latent anticipations-in the analytical function.

The fifth and final categorial distinction, that between structure and direction, has already been mentioned in the law-subject distinction. Clearly this is one of the crucial elements for the reformational concept of rationality. Although the structure of rationality,[129] guaranteed by the constant law-order of God, is a creational given in all rational subjects, direction is not. This is in fact the rationale for the whole enterprise of a scripturally directed philosophy and scholarship. Human rationality, in the sense of the actual process of reasoning (the human response to the creational law for rationality), is never religiously neutral. Vollenhoven, Dooyeweerd and Stoker never tire of emphasizing

this point. Fallacies and error (understood as incorrect inferences from the available evidence or from justified premises) manifest the fallenness of human rationality; clearing up muddled thinking is one aspect of the restoration of creation, which is the goal of the Kingdom of God. Rationality gone awry manifests itself in many different ways, according to the Dutch reformational philosophers. One such example is the theoretical absolutization of a creature or creaturely aspect, such as rationality itself. Reductionism is another error: an attempt is made to subsume one kind of creational lawfulness under another. According to Dooyeweerd, this inevitably leads to antinomies and dialectical tensions—theoretical contradictions which by definition are unresolvable.

We conclude this brief survey of neo-Calvinism and rationality with some general observations on rationality in the Calvinian tradition. I think it is important to distinguish between worldview and philosophy when we evaluate differences among philosophers of Calvinistic persuasions. Dialogue needs to take place on both levels, but these levels should not be confused. Many apparently philosophical differences are in reality differences in worldview. The dispute between evidentialists and presuppositionalists in apologetics, for example, seems to reflect a difference on the worldview level. The same holds true for debates about the existence of God or other minds, or the objectivity of values or causality. Until the philosophical discussion reckons with the presence and influence, on both sides, of categorial assumptions which are not themselves of a philosophical kind, communication will be frustrated. To foster and promote communication—a genuine understanding of each other’s point of view—the worldview issues must be put on the table.

Furthermore, Christians should recognize that worldview differences can be of many kinds. Christians and non-Christians clearly differ in this regard, but Christians and non-Christians also differ among *themselves*. The differences among Christians in understanding the biblical worldview, even among those who proceed from the assumption that the Scriptures are unitary on this point, are quite significant. Even adherence to the same doctrinal standards does not obviate such differences. (I may affirm in church that man is “totally [130] depraved,” but I never think to bring this belief into my philosophizing.) The twentieth century seems to be characterized by a realignment of Christians, not along traditional theological lines, but in accordance with different worldviews: Baptists and Methodists; adopt a reformational worldview, Presbyterians and Anglicans take over an Anabaptist perspective, Mennonites and charismatics espouse a traditionally Lutheran two-realm theory, and so on. Among Christian philosophers these differences need discussing, because they play a role in what is said on the philosophical level.

This is not to downplay the importance of philosophical discussion in its own right. Here, too, however, it is useful to distinguish two types of issues: those involving faithfulness to (one’s

understanding of) the biblical worldview, and those of a more strictly analytical or empirical kind.

If the main points of this essay are granted, namely that philosophy always reflects some worldview and that Christian philosophy therefore ought to reflect the biblical worldview, then an important task of Christian philosophers, especially those who are agreed on their basic understanding of the scriptural world-and-lifeview, is to focus on the philosophical implications of that shared commitment. Is it consonant with our biblical understanding that God is treated as *summum ens*, that God the Son is equated with the principle of rational order, that error is treated as sin, that constant standards are presumed to hold for music and architecture? Such discussion can be very fruitful if an agreement on the worldview level can be presupposed throughout.

The other kind of philosophical discussion is of the more traditional kind, where categories and conclusions are tested in the light of the available evidence and commonly accepted standards of analytical rigor. Here, too, worldview considerations play a role, but the given creation in which we all live and move guarantees the possibility of meaningful dialogue, despite fundamental differences in worldview. For the creation speaks with a persuasive voice through both the structure of our rationality, so that we are forced to give due weight to cogent argumentation, and through the evidence of other created things, which we may have overlooked, repressed or misconstrued. Even worldviews may be changed as a result, and our philosophical positions, too.

[131]

Bibliographical Note

There is little in English by and about the Dutch neo-Calvinists and their view of rationality. To date, the best resources are probably the following:

Dooyeweerd, Herman. *Roots of Western Culture: Pagan, Secular and Christian Options*.

Toronto: Wedge Publishing Foundation, 1979. This is the most accessible of Dooyeweerd's own publications.

Kalsbeek, L. *Contours of a Christian Philosophy: An Introduction to Herman Dooyeweerd's Thought*, Bernard and Josina Zylstra, eds. Toronto: Wedge Publishing Foundation, 1975. This volume contains two useful additions: the "Introduction" by Bernard Zylstra, which sets Dooyeweerd in his historical setting, and the extensive "Bibliography" (pp. 307-345) which lists many English and some French and German publications by and about the Dutch neo-Calvinist thinkers.

Young, William. *Toward a Reformed Philosophy: The Development of a Protestant Philosophy in Dutch Calvinistic Thought Since the Time of Abraham Kuyper*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Piet Hein Publishers, 1952.