

Ethics: theoretical or practical science?

"The problem of reconciling reality and thought about reality is as old as philosophy - we might say, as old as thought itself ... In a certain sense the history of philosophy is the record of a series of attempts to make this reconciliation"

Quentin Lauer: *Phenomenology. Its genesis and prospects*. New York, Harper & Row, 1965
p 5, 6.

"Theory and practice", the theme of the present congress,*) is definitely not a novelty. It is one of the oldest problems of mankind. The two questions "What is the case?" and "What is to be done?" have always accompanied each other like twin brothers. The problem of previous ages, viz the correct relationship between the two, is still an issue today. It happened in the history of Western thought that the pendulum swung between two extremes: some regarded the theoretical and others the practical approach as of primary importance. As usually happens in the case of difficult problems a third group tried to compromise with a position in between.

Today we have a noteworthy tendency of renewed emphasis on the practical application of science in all spheres of life. Questions like the following are urgent: How do scholars treat issues presented to them by society, and should they? How do scholarly results get "translated" into non-

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scholarly categories? Can only academic research be justified which has an immediate relevance for society? etc.

Many leaders, in especially the Third World countries, today want the university to be fully committed to active participation in social transformation, economic modernization and the amelioration of the conditions of life and work of ordinary men and women. The university must not pursue knowledge for its own sake. It should place emphasis on that which is immediately relevant and useful.¹⁾

1. Introduction

The ordinary usage of "theory" and "practice" is marked by a sharp distinction; sometimes accentuated by a polar opposition. This contrast is for instance, clear in the exploration of the word "theory" in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. "True in theory but false in practice" is a well-known idea. The common man, distrustful of intellect when not directed to immediate practical ends, speaks of theory in disparaging tones. We get the idea that "theory and practice" is an opposition of mutually exclusive elements of human life.

This distinction is used in different areas. For instance to characterize or qualify certain branches of sciences like, for example, theoretical and practical (or applied) paedagogics, theoretical and practical chemistry, biology etc. In examinations a division is often made between a theoretical and practical part.²⁾

Some people do speak about "practical Philosophy" but for most of us this sounds like a *contradictio in terminis*. People usually think philosophers are absentminded, dwelling in the clouds, lacking the know-how of practical life. Philosophical discussions can - without any loss - be dismissed to the realm of theory which has no intrinsic connection with our practical problems and daily routine. The philosopher is estranged from life. In his glorious isolation he acts as an interpreter or spectator from the tribune.

Of course not all philosophers were quite satisfied with this idea about philosophy. According to Karl Marx the time for a static interpretation of reality has passed. The real task of philosophy is to change reality dynamically.³⁾ Not interpretation and knowledge are the most important, but change and action. The philosopher should not be a passive spectator from the tribune but active in the arena.

When isolated from life philosophy becomes a meaningless enterprise. When totally absorbed in practical life it is murdered because it loses its character. What exactly is the task then of philosophy?

In this paper I will confine myself to the science of Ethics as an illustration of the problem of theory and practice in philosophy. Usually Ethics is regarded as a practical science. It is the science in which (Moral) Philosophy approaches the closest towards everyday life.

Before we embark on a discussion of the problems around Ethics a brief survey of Western philosophy may be worthwhile in order to ascertain how various philosophers and philosophical currents viewed the problem of theory and practice.

2. In survey: some viewpoints throughout history

The famous Greek philosopher, Socrates, was a proponent of *practicalism*. He was convinced that if somebody has a correct understanding of a situation, he will act morally correctly. Proper insight leads to proper action. Also, according to the Stoics, vice consisted in ignorance and good insight guarantees correct action. The Epicurians held the same practicalistic idea that vice is merely the result of false judgement.

These ancient practicalists, men of action, emphasized the necessity of insight in order to be able to act correctly. By "insight", however, they did not understand scientific thought but pre-scientific, practical thinking.

The science of Ethics, being the focal point of philosophical speculation, flourished in these different types of practicalistic philosophies.

The concept of "theory" refers to the Greek term "*theoria*" which originally had a cultic and religious emphasis. It combines *theos* (god) and *horao* (see), and serves to indicate an elevated cultic spectacle. (Consequently, a *theoros* was also the spectator of a cultic-festival.)

In this original use of the term *theoria* the thought which comes to the fore in time of Plato and Aristotle is already present, namely *theoria* as a view of reality, a meditation on form. By them the reflective capacity of man is promoted to the highest factor of elucidation. To be able to see the truth, this concept must be completely divorced from sensory representations. As a result of this emphasis on the abstract concept a schism developed between philosophy and daily experience, between theory and practice.

Plato is not interested in the world of phenomena, but only in eternal, superhuman ideas. Thought is thus detached from daily experience. Theoretical knowledge is ascetic knowledge. The scholar stands estranged from the world, over against the people of daily experience - the *bios theoretikos* as against the *bios praktikos*. (Cf Socrates' narrative of the philosopher Thallos who, absorbed in thought and gazing at the stars, fell into a well!) Plato indeed admits that philosophy has a practical, forming value; but this value does not, however, negate the original alienation of *theoria* from daily, naive experience: man has always still to choose either the theoretical or the practical attitude towards life.

Because for Aristotle the ideas or forms must be sought not in a supra-sensory region but rather in concrete things, his *theoria* brings him a little nearer to practice. He distinguishes the theoretical and the practical according to their separate goals: the final goal of the first is truth, and that of the second is action. The theoretical has *eternal* truth or principles, and the practical

the *temporary* or *present*, in mind. Unlike Plato, Aristotle made the distinction of a *three*-faceted life-form: *bios theoretikos*, *bios praktikos* and *bios apolaustikos*. The first-mentioned is the highest form of life because within it the divine is most closely approached, and it leads thus to *eudaimonia*. In the second, lower, practical life-form (which includes political life) man no longer seeks *eudaimonia* but rather honour (*time*). The lowest form - which man has in common with the animals - is the *bios apolaustikos*, in which man seeks *pleasure* in order to satisfy his sensual urges.

Aristotle does not regard these three life-forms as alternatives, since man can progress from one to the other. He finds, then, an element of *theoria* in the two lower phases also. Even the practical man ought to reflect on what he has in mind, and the hedonist should act with due consideration. Against Plato, who reserves *theoria* as the way of life for a few adepts, it is thus for Aristotle a way of life which stands open for all men. Both however agree that the *bios theoretikos* is a meditation of form wherein man becomes of like form to the gods and thus reaches his highest felicity.

During the Middle Ages we encounter the important distinction between intellect and will: the first knows the truth and the last loves the good.

According to Thomas Aquino the intellect is more important than the will. Accordingly he built up an intellectualistic Ethics. According to John Duns Scotus, however, the will is the nobler faculty in man because of its commanding position in human activity. It even commands the intellect: we know only because we will to do so. Accordingly his Ethics bears a voluntaristic tendency. Ethics is not a theoretical but practical science.

In earlier Rationalistic philosophy we first get a strong current of scientialism (circa 1600-1700). By the term "Scientialism" I mean the exaggeration of (theoretical) reason. Adherents of this type of philosophy believed that reason could also control the doing, the *praxis* of man. Scientialism was

interested in practice but primarily from a theoretical or scientific point of view. Scientistic Rationalism advocated a natural, mathematically scientific ideal which could not do justice to the totality of practical experience.

In reaction against scientism the following movement in rationalistic philosophy, called Enlightenment, dominated the scene from approximately 1700-1800. This type of rationalism realized that apart from theoretical, scientific knowledge practical knowledge is as important because a large area of human knowledge does not presuppose theoretical analyses. Life is more than merely (mathematical - scientific) theory. Language, technology, society, ethical and economic life, politics, arts, education, in other words all the supra - analytical dimensions of human existence, are no longer to be approached merely scientifically or theoretically but in a practical manner. Such practical knowledge is not necessarily the consequence of theoretical analysis. The philosophers of the Enlightenment realized that distortions will be the result when scientific theory controls practical life.

In this renewed rationalistic form of what we already called practicalism in Socrates and Hellenistic philosophy, practical, pre-scientific knowledge is placed on the same level as scientific knowledge, even more importance is attributed to it. There is however a marked difference from ancient practicalism. Socratic practicalism simply used to mean good (practical) insight which guaranteed the correct action. Now it acquires a rationalistic tone. The insight is now a practical a-priori, the practical reason. In the eighteenth century there was a great desire to apply the a-priori principles of rationalism concretely, in all areas of life. The broader view of the "Aufklärung" philosophers, compared with the scientists of the seventeenth century, was much more influential and culturally more significant. Practicalistic rationalism spread far and wide. Ethics became so important that we may speak of moralism amongst some of these kinds of philosophers.

The third current in earlier rationalistic philosophy, called Idealism, was an attempt to reconcile the scientistic and practicalistic forms of rationalism by accepting one reason with a theoretical and practical "compartment".

I Kant (1724-1804), the world famous philosopher from Königsberg, was the father of this type of philosophy. In his most significant works *Critique of Pure Reason*, *Critique of Practical Reason* and *Critique of Judgment* he discussed the domains of theoretical reason, practical reason and the combination of theoretical and practical "ratio".

Apart from these main works some of his smaller works provide interesting material about his views on theory and practice, for instance *Was heißt: sich im denken orientieren?* (*Immanuel Kant Werke in Zehn Bänden* by Wilhelm Weischedel, Vol 5, p 265-283) and especially his *Über den Gemeinspruch: Das mag in der Theorie richtig sein, taugt aber nicht für die Praxis* of 1793 (*Immanuel Kant Werke in Zehn Bänden* by Wilhelm Weischedel, Vol 9, p 125-172). In this work it is clear that the priority Kant ascribed to the practical above the theoretical reason does not imply priority of practice above theory. Kant is clearly not in agreement with the opposition between theory and practice. He makes the interesting statement that, if a theory does not work in practice, the fault is not necessarily the theory but it may be that the scientist did not have *sufficient* theoretical knowledge to apply it successfully in practice!

The period of late rationalism (roughly 19th century) consists of three currents which resemble the three stages of early rationalism: first the scientism of the positivists, secondly the practicalism of the neo-positivists and thirdly a movement which tried to reconcile the previous two, viz neo-idealism. In a different form the old problem of theory and practice returned once again in late rationalism.

In the 19th century already the ideas of men like F Nietzsche and S Kierkegaard had heralded the end of the "Age of Reason". Irrationalism became one

of the leading philosophic currents in the twentieth century. As the name indicates it is a reaction to rationalism, anti-rationalism. Irrationalism, however, is not a philosophy void of reason. Irrationalistic philosophers still accepted science but the significance of reason is relegated to a rather small area. Reason and theoretical knowledge is dethroned but not put out of commission altogether. Depending upon the type of irrationalism a certain domain of human life (the irrational) escapes the scope of reason. Reality is not merely a rational reality, all of life is not causally determined or scientifically predictable.

Irrationalism is a philosophy of practice. Though at a distance, this type of philosophy follows Immanuel Kant's philosophy. His division of reason into a theoretical and practical reason was intended to make room for the practical facets of life, e.g. the freedom and ethical responsibility of man. Man should not bow under theoretical reason in the moral decisions to be made. Ethical life proceeds from an origin, though still a rational one of its own. Irrationalism went further on the same road and substituted for Kant's practical reason the practical free act - not regulated by reason. It abandoned the idea of a universal rational-moral law and replaced it with human autonomy and creative freedom.⁴⁾

Pragmatism, one twig on the branch of irrationalism (the two other irrationalistic currents are "Lebensphilosophie" and Existentialism) proclaimed that truth cannot be expressed merely in theoretic concepts. Theory is meaningful only when it promotes practical usefulness. An idea is not true until it becomes true in a practical situation.

In reviewing the history of Western thought it is clear that whenever emphasis was placed on the so-called practical side of human life interest in ethical problems awakened. It seems to be a fixed idea throughout Western philosophy that Ethics has as its definite field of investigation the practical conduct of man.

3. In critique: traditional viewpoints about Ethics

The very strong tradition of regarding the practical as the field of study of Ethics is still today clearly reflected in most contemporary definitions of this discipline. A choice at random will prove this.

- + Mackenzie, *A manual of ethics*:
"Ethics may be defined as the study of what is right or good in conduct. It is the general theory of conduct and considers the actions of human beings with reference to their rightness or wrongness, their tendency to good or evil... Ethics ... we may say, discusses men's habits and customs, or in other words their characters, the principles on which they habitually act, and considers what it is that constitutes the rightness or wrongness of those principles, the good and evil of those habits."
- + Cronin, *Science of ethics*:
"Ethics may be defined as the science of human conduct as according with human reason and directed by reason towards man's natural, final end."
- + Carritt in *The theory of morals. An introduction to ethical Philosophy* concentrates his study of Ethics on what duty is:
"What then is the nature and authority of duty? What are our duties? What makes it right?"
- + Frankena, *Ethics*:
"Ethics is the systematic study of human actions from the point of view of their rightness or wrongness as means for the achievement of ultimate happiness."

From these definitions of Ethics the following deductions can be made about the subject matter of this science:

1. Practical life.
2. The human being (his character, habits, duties, virtues, pleasures, happiness and final end).
3. Human conduct.

4. Human conduct according to principles.
5. Good and bad conduct or judgements.

My main point of criticism is that the traditional idea of the *praxis* as the field of study of Ethics misled moral philosophers to assign a far too broad spectrum of life to investigation by the science of Ethics.

If we assume (more or less in the line of the Western tradition) the practical side of life to be the non-scientific (in the sense of pre-scientific) or non-theoretical part of life, it is necessary to notice that the concept of a "practical life" is a very vague one. Practical life displays a rich diversity. It consists of a variety of at least fifteen different aspects:⁵⁾ the arithmetic or numerical (discrete quantity), spatial (continuous extension), kinematic (motion), physical (energy), biotic (vitality/life), sensitive or psychic (feeling), logical (distinction), historical (formative power), lingual (symbolic meaning), social (intercourse), economic (frugality in managing scarce goods), aesthetic (harmony), juridical (retribution), moral (truth) and pistic (faith or assurance). The ethical or moral is only one aspect of multi-dimensional reality.

If Ethics has the whole (practical) life as its field of investigation the implication is that it is a universal science, a hegemony of this science over all the other disciplines which are either merely subdivisions of this all - encompassing Ethics or have no right of independent existence at all.

My contention is that Ethics is a special science which studies a specific facet of reality, viz the moral aspects. The traditional concepts about the ethical (as identical with the practical) are far too broad. The whole of (practical) reality can not be viewed through the keyhole of the ethical.⁶⁾

Lacking clear distinctions the "ethical box" is given any size, shape and content. Ethics is not clearly distinguished from, for instance, Anthropology (Bingswanger), Cultural Philosophy

(Scheler), Paedagogy (Bollnow), Political Science (Brunner), Sociology (Neurath and De Rougemont), Dogmatics (Barth), Linguistics (Hare), Psychology (Schlick and Spranger), Ecclesiology (Althaus and Heim), etc.

Against this background it will be clear why I cannot accept the five viewpoints about Ethics listed above.

1. The origin of the distinction "theoretical/rational - ethical" should be obvious from our historical survey of Western Thought. It is derived from the ancient distinction between theory and practice. Man, however, is not merely a rational - ethical being but his existence displays a variety of aspects. Apart from the rational (or logical) and moral (or ethical) facets, we distinguished above at least thirteen other different aspects. Therefore it would be just as arbitrary and incomplete a definition to call man an historico-lingual being. We should be on our guard against those merely one- and two-dimensional viewpoints about man in which the history of Western thought abounds (Cf *homo orans*, *homo economicus*, *homo viator* and today *l'homme révolté*).

2. For the same reason Ethics cannot have as field of study the habits, character, duties, virtues etc of the human being. Man's habits, character etc may have an ethical aspect which can be the subject matter of this science. Habits, character and so forth *as such*, however, should not be regarded as its field of study. Economic habits, religious duties, social virtues are something different from ethical habits, duties etc and should be studied in the respective sciences, viz Economics, Theology and Sociology. If we do not draw a clear line of demarcation the consequence will be that there is no difference whatsoever between Ethics and Anthropology.

3. The same remarks are applicable to the idea that human conduct should be ascribed to Ethics.⁷⁾ When Ethics studies ethically qualified conduct, then we would agree. It can by no means have as field of study the whole range of human conduct

and activity. Man is always busy in a variety of at least fifteen different activities.

Some moral philosophers have introduced a supplementary criterion: not all human conduct, but specifically human conduct *in relation to one's fellowmen*.⁸⁾ This is a slight improvement - because it excludes, for instance, one's conduct in relation to God which, to my mind, is definitely not of a moral but a religious nature. Still "conduct in human relationships" is much too wide. The human being can act in biological, psychical, juridical, lingual, and many more relationships towards his fellowmen. All these types of activity should be studied by Biology, Psychology, and the Sciences of Law (Jurisprudence) and Linguistics. Otherwise Ethics could not be safeguarded against imperialism in the field of science. Because many theologians also accepted the idea of Ethics being the study of human conduct in relationships to one's fellowmen, and because they divided the Decalogue into two parts (the first four and last six commandments) of which the second regulates human relationships, they also considered the so-called second table of the Law of God as part of their Ethical studies. I cannot agree with this division between religious laws (first table) and ethical commandments (second table). All ten commandments of the Decalogue are laws of the covenant, religious in character. Man's relation towards his fellowmen is also part of his religion. Again: these commandments also have an ethical aspect but they are definitely not purely ethical as such.

4. Yet another view about this much disputed science is that it should confine itself to the principles of human conduct. (As illustrated in the survey of history the Rationalists emphasised a-priori practical moral principles. Practical conduct should be directed by good insight.) The idea that Ethics has the monopoly of studying matters of normativity is wrong. Many moralists today are of the opinion that all questions about what one ought to do automatically are ethical in nature. Man, however, ought to do many things:

promote justice, love his neighbour, serve his country, etc.

There is no such a thing as an "universal ought". Upon investigation this so-called universal ethical "ought" falls apart into various "oughts". An ought is not as such necessarily ethical.⁹⁾ Because all the abovementioned aspects of life are subjected each to its own norms or principles we get a logical ought, an historical ought, a lingual, social, economic, esthetic and ethical (moral) ought. "Ought" always bears a qualification.

Ethics should also study, apart from ethical phenomena, the ethical norms which indicate what man ought to do, how to act in this specific facet of life. I may add here that the contrast between description - evaluation is untenable. It is impossible to study ethical (or any other human) "facts" apart from values. (Values viewed as the answers or reactions of the human being to the norms.) Every human act reveals a positive or negative answer to the norms in a certain domain of life, be it ethical, juridical or economical. Ethics cannot be a merely descriptive science without any prescriptions because as a human being one knowingly or unknowingly passes certain judgements which cannot be neutral. In the light of the above the old theological distinction between - Dogmatics and Ethics, viz that the first should study the *norma credendorum* (norms of belief) or *credenda* and the last the *norma agendorum* (norms of conduct) or *facienda* is also unacceptable.¹⁰⁾

5. The current idea about what ought to be done brings us to the next, viz that Ethics has to do with good and bad, right and wrong in conduct. My reply in this case could be predicted by this time. I am repeating - monotonously, I agree - that good and bad are not specific ethical concepts. One may speak about a good or bad piece of art, good or bad biological or psychical conditions, a good or bad usage of language, good and bad judgements, and so forth. Because after original sin the good - bad distinction goes right through the whole cosmos, we get economical or uneconomical, logical or

illogical, moral and immoral behaviour. Good and evil bear different meanings dependent on the area of concern. To compose a bad (grammatically incorrect) sentence or to behave socially incorrectly is not to be guilty of an immoral act. Ethics should confine itself to the morally good and bad.

It is important to distinguish here between the immoral and the amoral. The field of study of Ethics is the moral aspect of life including the morally good as well as the immoral (ethically bad). Its field of study is not the a-moral (non-ethical), in other words the economically, juridically etc good and bad.

4. *In Outline: a new perspective*

In this concluding perspective I will first make a few comments about the relationship between theory and practice in order to be able, in the second place, to add something about ethics as special science.

4.1 *Theory and practice*

There is a difference between a mother's knowledge about the illness of her sick baby and the diagnosis of the medical professor. The judgement of a woman buying expensive cosmetics and the economist's reflection on the buying habits of women differ. The same difference exists between a mother's advice to her daughter and the ethicist's reflection on the ethical aspect of her advice. This difference is the difference between pre-scientific (if you wish "practical") knowledge and theoretical, scientific knowledge.

We should clearly distinguish these two types of human knowledge but must never see them in opposition to each other as has happened throughout the history of Western thought and as is still the case in ordinary language.¹¹⁾ Usually pre-scientific knowledge is regarded as practical and scientific knowledge as impractical. The truth is that both kinds of knowledge are practical. The difference between the professor of medicine and the

medical doctor is not that the one is a theorist and the other a practitioner, but rather that it is the practice of the former to investigate certain aspects of human illness and to impart the results of these investigations to the students who wish to become doctors, whereas it is the practice of the latter to use the knowledge thus acquired to cure people in whom these aspects appear to be malfunctioning. The activities of both are very practical even though one man is theoretical and the other is not.

Not theory is opposed to practice, but impractical to practical. It is therefore important to distinguish between practical (and impractical) activities of a theoretical, and such activities of a non-theoretical nature. What is usually considered as a practical activity can be very impractical, and at the same time a theoretical activity can be very practical!

The pre-scientific is not unscientific but non-scientific. It is of another kind than scientific knowledge and therefore would be judged by other standards than those of science. Consequently there is no difference in value between scientific and pre-scientific.¹²⁾

The difference between those two kinds of knowledge is that pre-scientific knowledge comes earlier. Naive experience (from Latin *nativum*, meaning "original") precedes science, it is a necessary condition for the acquisition of theoretical knowledge. The fact that pre-theoretical knowledge is less complicated than theoretical knowledge does not therefore imply that the former is of less value.

These two types of knowledge are not mutually exclusive but mutually complementary. Practical pre-scientific knowledge (including one's view of life and world) directs one's scientific endeavours while scientific knowledge may help us to attain a deeper insight into our daily "practical" activities.

Therefore our view of life (or philosophy, as the

theoretical explication of our "Weltanschauung") is not isolated from our daily walk of life but part of it.¹³⁾ Our walk ("lebenswandel") is closely bound to our philosophy of life ("lebensvisie") since the serious walker looks about him and orientates himself as he goes. He knows both his destination and the various stages of his journey as he reaches them.

I reject scientism in which too great a role has been assigned in life to *scientia*, science. Scientism is not the same as science. It is a conviction of faith about the place of science in the whole of our life. The scientific (not scientific) thinker has wrongly identified all proper knowledge with scientific knowledge.¹⁴⁾ For example: to speak of the sun's going down is not an unscientific or primitive statement because according to modern science there is no (beautiful) sunset!

Recapitulating on what has already been said about reality consisting of at least fifteen different modalities or aspects, I have the following concluding remarks. Firstly: In the distinction theory - practice the theoretical (Logical) is contrasted with the rest of reality. From the preceding it will be clear now that this is not necessary. There is no opposition between the theoretical and "the rest". Secondly: the "rest" is usually viewed under a single denominator, namely the ethical/moral. It will be as obvious now that to designate all a-theoretical as practical or ethical is not correct. Reality reveals a richness not to be captured in a single concept.

4.2 *The essence of the ethical*

In the third part of this paper I was busy peeling an onion so to speak. One layer after another was rejected (practice, human relationships, conduct, ought, good and bad) because it was not the kernel or nucleus of the ethical. If the ethical cannot be identified with the practical, conduct etc, what then? Is the essence loyalty, respect, responsibility,¹⁵⁾ solidarity,¹⁶⁾ love?¹⁷⁾

The question about the kernel is not a speculative but a very practical, urgent question as it will enable us to draw a line of demarcation between Ethics and all the other special sciences as far as their fields of investigation are concerned. Although it is true that reality has an ethical aspect, it is very difficult to describe and impossible to define absolutely surely its kernel moment. This is due to the a-logical, irreducible nature of the kernel moments of all aspects of reality. Science has to recognize its impotence to grasp exactly what the "essence" (not in the sense of law) of the ethical is.

The best definition thusfar, I think is that of troth.¹⁸⁾ "Troth is an old English term for truth, faithfulness, loyalty, and honesty. The single word *troth* captures the nuances of trust, reliability, stability, scrupulousness, ingenuousness, authenticity, integrity, and fidelity. To be fickle, capricious, unreliable, shifty, whimsical, disloyal, rootless, perfidious is to be anything but trothful."¹⁹⁾ Troth is a facet of God's many-sided call to love. Just as thrift is the economic expression, so justice is the juridic expression and troth the moral expression of the central commandment of love.

Whereas the state is qualified by the juridical, the business enterprise by the economic and the church by the pistical aspect, marriage, family and friendship relationships are qualified by troth or fidelity. Of course marriage, family and friendship also have economic, lingual, esthetical, social etc facets when analyzed philosophically but the ethical is the pilot of qualifying function. The science of Ethics will therefore have as its field of study these three societal relationships especially. (Of course also other sciences may investigate marriage and family relations from their respective vantage points.) This does not imply that nothing else should be the subject matter of Ethics. Because the state, school, church, university and sportsclub also have ethical facets these may also be investigated by the ethicist.

Time and space do not permit me to work out in details this new perspective on the science of ethics. I prefer to leave it for the moment in its embryo stage to provide some time for discussion.

I hope my main contention is clear.

Ethics is not the dull hobby of an even duller academician. It is an important science. Because it is a science - and to my mind a science with a limited scope - it is not void of meaning but full of practical relevance.

Philosophical, abstract, theoretical reflection is not a racking of the brains about matters which never trouble the average man. In the previous pages Philosophy helped us to attain more clarity about different issues especially the vexing problem of theory and practice. We must philosophize or ... fossilize. Aristotle once said: "Whether we will philosophize, or whether we won't philosophize, we must philosophize."²⁰

B J van der Walt
PU for CHE

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7. Cf P G W du Plessis, op cit, p 20.
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- "Wijsbegeerte en Levenspractijk", In H J & J M Spier, *Wijsbegeerte en Levenspractijk*. Kampen, Kok, 1948, p 7-24.
2. Cf The essay of H E Runner: "Scientific and Pre-Scientific" In *Christian Perspectives 1961*. Hamilton, Ontario, Guardian Pub Co, 1961, p 11-52.
 3. Cf K J Popma: *Levensbeschouwing V*. Amsterdam, Buijten & Schipperheijn, 1962, p 39.
 4. Cf Runner, op cit, p 41.
 5. The viewpoints of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Richard Niebuhr.
 6. Cf F N von Meyenfeldt, *The meaning of ethos* (1974), p 38, 57.
 7. According to most Calvinistic philosophers the root or nuclear-meaning of the ethical is love. Cf H Dooyeweerd *A new critique of theoretical thought* Vol I, p 48 and II, 152-59 ("temporal relationships of love"); H G Stoker: *Teologiese, wysgerige en vakwetenskaplike Etiek*, In *Oorsprong en Rigting I* (1967) p 227 ("persoonsliefde"); 'n Wysgerige benadering van die sedelike, In *Oorsprong en Rigting I* (1967), 250-51 ("persoonsbehartiging"); *Wysbegeerte van die Skeppingsidee*, In *Oorsprong en Rigting II* (1970), p 285 ("Persoonsbehartiging ... d w s persoonsliefde") and *Beginnelys en metodes in die wetenskap* (1969), p 165 ("persoon-, m a w self- en naasteliefde"); A Troost, *Casuïstiek en Situasie - Ethiek*, (1958), p 40, 48, 110, 116, 345 ("naasteliefde"); H van Riessen, *Wijsbegeerte* (1970), p 182 and 188 ("liefde"); E A Venter, *Wysgerige Temas (s j)*, p 35-37 ("persoonlikheidsliefde" d w s "self- en naasteliefde").
 18. Cf J H Olthuis, *Facts, Values and Ethics*. (1968), p 199.
 19. J H Olthuis, *I pledge you my troth* (1975), p 21. We find Olthuis' viewpoint also in the publications of predecessors like D H Th Vollenhoven, *Isagoogè Philosophiae*, (1943, reprint 1967), p 24; J A L Taljaard, *Die mens, die liefde en die sedelike*, *Koers*, 23(6):19, 1956 and K J Popma, *Inleiding in de Wijsbegeerte* (1956), p 17.
 20. J W Tunderman, op cit, p 22 correctly stated: "Wie ... meent, dat de practijk zelf-genoegzaam is en van opvatting is, dat hij zich met een glimlach van alle wijsgerige bezinning kan afkeren, zal daarmede blyk geven, zonder het te weten, slachtoffer te zijn van een bepaalde wijsgerige opvatting nl het practicistiese".

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The contribution of the Gereformeerde Kerk to Afrikaner culture

I

The term culture is employed in this paper in the same comprehensive sense as in Van Til's work.¹⁾ Its fullest meaning is contained in the divine command to man to replenish the earth and to subdue it. God Almighty, by the strength of his Word, created what we usually refer to as nature in the broadest sense of the word. Man's calling is to "create", in a secondary sense, by unfolding the embryonics of nature. The Lord God created nature, man is bound by divine command to bring forth culture. The two specific and interrelated subjects then are the Gereformeerde Kerk and Afrikaans culture in mutual relation.

An analysis of this kind unavoidably meets with the problem stated by prof Karl Holl²⁾ in his excellent book on the significance of the Reformation for the cultural life of Germany and Western Europe. To pinpoint definite cultural institutions as creations or direct contributions by a specific church appears to be rarely possible. Max Weber's thesis³⁾ on the relation between protestant ethics and the spirit of capitalism is well known and probably as much abused. Troeltsch⁴⁾ sought to uncover a causal link between protestantism and modern civilisation. By and large the attempts of these eminent scholars did not succeed in achieving much more than pointing to the impact of the Reformation in modifying either by way of diminishing or strengthening existing cultural institutions.

Typical of the nature of an analysis of this order