

Herman Dooyeweerd & Alvin Plantinga

Philosophy and Rationality in the Reformed Tradition

Bas Hengstmengel

Wie alles sich zum Ganzen webt,
eins in dem andern wirkt und lebt!
Wie Himmelskräfte auf und nieder steigen
Und sich die goldnen Eimer reichen.

Goethe, *Faust*, I, 447-450

Introduction

This text has originally been written as a master thesis in philosophy at the Faculty of Philosophy, Erasmus University Rotterdam, The Netherlands. The thesis was written under the supervision of Prof.dr. Ger Groot and Prof.dr. Roel Kuiper, with support of Dr. Henri Krop. Because of size limitations some material was excluded in the original version. In the current version this material has been included. Also some grammatical corrections have been made. Although my thought on some points has developed since, the text still represents my thought at that moment.

This text has been translated into Dutch, and is currently being edited and extended. It will be separately published as a book by Buijten & Schipperheijn publishers (Amsterdam) in the Verantwoording-series of the Association for Reformational Philosophy. The publication is scheduled in the end of 2011 or early 2012. Maybe an English version will follow. We will see.

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1 Introduction

In his momentous book *Christianity and Philosophy* the French neo-Thomist philosopher Étienne Gilson (1884-1978) opposes Calvinism on the ground that it can have no philosophy.¹ According to Gilson, the depraved reason of man as sketched by the Reformers cannot attain truth. Therefore no philosophy as a substantive discipline can exist in Calvinism, only theology. There are Calvinists who agree with Gilson: Calvinism and philosophy are natural enemies. Maybe fideism is the only alternative. The Calvinist doctrine of all-embracing sin – understood as total depravity of man – and absolute grace leaves *a priori* no space for philosophical exploration, let alone for the autonomy of reason. Likewise, Alisdair MacIntyre in *After Virtue* suggests that Calvinism is close to irrationalism. By discarding a rationally knowable human *telos*, as was widely accepted in medieval thought, and believing the power of reason to be destroyed by the fall of man, the Calvinist can do nothing more than just obey God's directives. These directives may be arbitrary, but there is no other, philosophical basis for living. According to MacIntyre, Protestants at this point are close to Jansenist Catholics like Pascal.² However, there are people who claim to be both philosophers and Calvinists. They are, as I will use the term, 'Reformed philosophers'.

1.1 Reformed philosophy

Reformed philosophers are not only inspired by the sixteenth-century theologian and church-reformer John Calvin, but also by the fourth- and fifth-century church father Augustine. Besides, it is worth mentioning that they have warm feelings for the nineteenth-century Dutch theologian and politician Abraham Kuyper and his neo-Calvinist movement. One of these Reformed philosophers is Alvin Plantinga (born 1932), since 1982 a colleague of MacIntyre at the philosophy department of the catholic University of Notre Dame.

In 1992 Plantinga wrote an article about *Augustinian Christian Philosophy*.³ An important element in Plantinga's conception of Christian philosophy is *philosophical criticism*. Plantinga adopts the Augustinian distinction between two opposing forces in human history, namely the City of God (*Civitas Dei*) and the Earthly City or City of the World (*Civitas Mundi*). In the nineteenth century Abraham Kuyper, a follower of Augustine, called this distinction an *antithesis* between belief and unbelief. Plantinga writes: "Augustine and Kuyper are right; and the contemporary Western intellectual world, like the worlds of their times, is a battleground or arena in which rages a battle for men's souls."⁴ He distinguishes a couple of contestants the contemporary Christian philosophers have to battle against: naturalism, subjectivism, nihilism and relativism.

A Reformed philosopher of an earlier generation is the Dutch thinker Herman Dooyeweerd (1894-1977). In his comprehensive work *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* (1953-1985) he writes: "The great turning point in my thought was marked by the discovery of the religious root of thought itself, whereby a new light was shed on the failure of all attempts, including my own, to bring about an inner synthesis

¹ Étienne Gilson, *Christianity and Philosophy*. New York: Sheed and Ward 1939, p. 14, 18.

² Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 2nd Edition, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press 1984, p. 53-54.

³ Alvin Plantinga, 'Augustinian Christian Philosophy', *The Monist* 75:3 (1992), 291-320.

⁴ Plantinga, 'Augustinian Christian Philosophy', p. 295.

between the Christian faith and a philosophy which is rooted in faith in the self-sufficiency of human reason.”⁵ The elements of antithesis, the religious root of thought and the non-self-sufficiency of human reason to which Plantinga and Dooyeweerd refer are characteristic elements in the Reformed tradition in philosophy, as will be shown.

When I use the expression ‘Reformed tradition’ in this book I mean the Calvinian branch of the sixteenth-century Reformation, including the nineteenth-century neo-Calvinistic movement. This tradition, although originally a theological movement, has become a world view that includes political and philosophical engagement. The Reformed tradition in contemporary philosophy is a multicoloured, international tradition, claiming ancient roots. Well-known contemporary Reformed thinkers are Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff. They represent the so-called North American movement of ‘Reformed epistemology’. There are close connections between these thinkers and Herman Dooyeweerd, because they can be regarded as representatives of the North-American and Dutch branches of the typical Dutch movement of neo-Calvinism. In order to understand these connections, the Dutch philosophical and theological influence in North-America needs to be investigated later in this book. The lines of influence in the Reformed tradition in philosophy are schematically represented in the appendix to this book.

I choose not to give a preliminary definition of Reformed philosophy. Instead, I will present the philosophies of Dooyeweerd and Plantinga as prominent examples of the philosophies of thinkers who claim to stand in the Reformed tradition. In the concluding chapter a reflection will be given on the phenomenon of Reformed philosophy, using these examples.

1.2 Objective, questions and limitations

In this book I want to investigate the characteristics of the Reformed tradition in philosophy and its Augustinian-Calvinian roots. Interesting questions arise: How does the thought of Augustine and Calvin influence contemporary philosophers in this tradition? What are its central philosophical claims? What makes this multicoloured tradition one? This is of course a comprehensive theme. In order to limit this project I choose as my central question: *What are the conceptions of philosophy and rationality in the Reformed tradition?* This question will be leading, though in connection to the conceptions of philosophy and rationality some relevant and related themes – such as the possibility of metaphysics and natural theology – will be discussed where this seems enlightening. As previously stated, the philosophies of two prominent thinkers in this tradition will be used as examples: Herman Dooyeweerd and Alvin Plantinga. I present the main lines of their philosophies also as a clarification of the range and consequences of their own conceptions of philosophy and rationality.

This book is a philosophical one, not a theological one. However, theological themes have to be discussed, because the Reformed tradition in philosophy cannot be understood without the Reformed theological tradition. The religious element in philosophy actually is one of the central claims of the Reformed philosophers. Nonetheless, when discussing theological themes I will focus as far as possible on the themes that are directly relevant for Reformed philosophy, especially when discussing

⁵ Herman Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, Vol. I, Amsterdam/Philadelphia: Paris/Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company 1953-1958, p. V.

the thought of Augustine and Calvin. Some Augustinian and Calvinian elements that are most important for Reformational theology turn out to be of little or no importance in Reformed philosophy. Still, one has to remember that in the time of Augustine the contemporary division between philosophy and theology didn't exist.

Although his shadow will be present through the whole book, I will not offer an introduction to the thought of Thomas Aquinas, simply because I have to limit myself. For the same reason, I will mostly ignore the 1930s French debates about Christian philosophy, among philosophers such as Étienne Gilson, Jacques Maritain, Maurice Blondel, Gabriel Marcel, Fernand Van Steenberghen and Antonin Sertillanges. Although these debates are very interesting from the perspective of this book, I will only briefly refer to the thought of Gilson in the last chapter.⁶

1.3 Structure of the book

This book is structured as follows: In chapter 2 some main lines in the work of Augustine are discussed. This is not at all meant to be an extensive discussion of his thought. This introduction is only meant to make it easier to understand the elements that are picked up in the Reformation by Calvin, and in the neo-Calvinistic movement by Kuyper, Dooyeweerd and Plantinga. In chapter 3 the thought of Calvin is discussed into somewhat more detail, because his thought, more than Augustine's, is the firm foundation for Kuyper, Dooyeweerd and Plantinga. Large parts of their thought cannot be understood without it. In chapter 4 the cultural movement of neo-Calvinism in the Netherlands is discussed, being especially the influence of Abraham Kuyper's thought. These chapters are the necessary preparation to understand the thought of Dooyeweerd and Plantinga, but also to have an understanding of the Reformed tradition in philosophy as such. Then, in chapter 5 the thought of Herman Dooyeweerd will be introduced as a philosophical elaboration of neo-Calvinism. In chapter 6 the influence of neo-Calvinism and Dooyeweerd's philosophy in North-America will be discussed first. After that special attention will be given to the work of Alvin Plantinga, one of the leading thinkers in the contemporary philosophy in the Reformed tradition. In chapter 7 a comparison will be made of central elements in the philosophies of Dooyeweerd and Plantinga. Doing so, the main lines of the conceptions of philosophy and rationality in the reformed tradition will be sketched. Finally, in chapter 8 I summarize and conclude the book.

⁶ See Greg Sadler, 'Christian Philosophy: The 1930s French Debates', in: James Fieser & Bradley Dowden (Eds.), *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <<http://www.iep.utm.edu/>>, visited November 6, 2009.

2 Augustine

The fourth- and fifth-century church father Augustine (354-430) is often regarded by the sixteenth-century Reformers and their followers as their forerunner on important issues. In this chapter I will first sketch some of Augustine's thoughts, focusing on those elements that are important in the Reformed tradition.

2.1 Christianity and philosophy

In the early history of Christianity a struggle took place within the awakening Christian consciousness regarding the relationship between the developing Christian doctrine and the influences of Greek philosophy.⁷ Two lines of thought can be distinguished, already in the writings of Paul. One line of thought emphasizes the affinity between Christianity and Greek philosophy. Representatives of this line, like Justin Martyr (100-165), Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-215) and Origen (c. 185-254), considered Greek philosophy as a *preparatio evangelica* and Socrates even as a Christian philosopher. Another line of thought emphasizes the radical difference between the Gospel and Greek philosophy. The main representative of this line is Tertullian (c. 155-220). Tertullian rejects "that worldly wisdom which the Lord called foolishness, choosing the foolish things of the world to put philosophy to shame", because "worldly wisdom culminates in philosophy with its rash interpretation of God's nature and purpose. It is philosophy that supplies the heresies with their equipment. (...) From philosophy come those fables and endless genealogies and fruitless questionings, those "words that creep like a doth a cancer."⁸ According to Tertullian, we should beware of philosophy, the human wisdom "which attacks and perverts truth". He asks: "What has Jerusalem to do with Athens, the Church with the Academy, the Christian with the heretic?" The Lord has to be sought in simplicity of heart. Therefore, Tertullian writes: "I have no use for a Stoic or a Platonic or a dialectic Christianity. After Jesus Christ we have no need of speculation, after the Gospel no need of research. When we come to believe, we have no desire to believe anything else; for we begin by believing that there is nothing else which we have to believe."⁹

This second line of thought however, never became the main stream of the Christian relationship to philosophy, although it always remained a part of the Christian consciousness throughout the ages. It was not until the philosophical mind of Augustine (354-430) that a synthesis took place between Christian doctrine and Greek (neo-Platonic) philosophy, in which Greek philosophy became an integral part of a Christian theological framework.

⁷ See for example: Adolf von Harnack, *History of Dogma*, Vol. 2, Boston: Little, Brown & Company 1899, especially Ch. IV; Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine, Vol. 1: The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1971, especially Ch. 1; Werner Jaeger, *Early Christianity and Greek Paideia*, Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press 1962.

⁸ Tertullian, 'The Prescriptions against the Heretics', in: S.L. Greenslade (Ed.), *Early Latin Theology. Selections from Tertullian, Cyprian, Ambrose, and Jerome*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox 2006, 31-64: p. 35.

⁹ Tertullian, 'The Prescriptions against the Heretics', p. 36.

2.2 Circles of thought

The church historian Adolf von Harnack recognized three ‘circles of thought’ in Augustine’s work, being a “union of three great circles of thought, which he reconstructed and connected absolutely”.¹⁰ The first circle consists of Neo-Platonist and monastic Christian elements like the soul, alienation from and hunger for God, unrest in the world and rest in God. Human reason and spiritual aspiration (also of non-Christians) play a central role. The second circle consists of Pauline elements like sin, faith, love, hope, predestination, the need for grace, and the bondage of the will. The Pelagian emphasis on freedom and merit are battled here. The third circle consists of the authority of the church, its role as a dispenser of grace and as an administrator of the sacraments, and revelation. Especially the Pauline, more individualistic elements of the second circle, like predestination and grace, are picked up in the protestant Reformation. The first circle took the interest of the humanists of the northern Renaissance, while the third circle was especially relevant for the Roman-Catholic church.¹¹ Because of the emphasis the Reformers put on the doctrine of grace, unlike the main line of thought of the Roman-Catholic church, one can truly say that “the Reformation, inwardly considered, was just the ultimate triumph of Augustine’s doctrine of grace over Augustine’s doctrine of the Church.”¹²

2.3 Augustine’s conception of philosophy

In Augustine’s work we do not find the Thomistic and contemporary distinction between philosophy and theology. His ‘philosophical’ thought can only be presented when it is unravelled from its ‘theological’ context.¹³ The term ‘philosophy’ in his times was not reserved for a separate discipline, but had the general connotation of ‘wisdom’ Likewise, ‘Christian philosophy’ was the wisdom that could be found in and through the Christian faith. Augustine speaks of “our Christian Philosophy” in his *Against Julian*: “I beg you, do not let the philosophy of Gentiles be more honest than our Christian philosophy, which is the one true philosophy, for its name means the quest or love of wisdom.”¹⁴ Christian doctrine, true philosophy and wisdom are in harmony, or more precisely: they are one and the same.

Augustine did not simply reject the non-Christian philosophy of his time. He wanted to preserve what was true in it and use it, after a ‘transformation’, to preach the gospel. “Any statements by those who are called philosophers, especially the Platonists, which happen to be true and consistent with our faith should not cause alarm, but be claimed for our own use, as it were from owners who have no right to them.” He uses the Biblical theme of the *spoliatio Aegyptiorum*, the robbery of the Egyptians.¹⁵ The non-Christian philosophy has to be ‘robbed’ from the pagans and transformed. Augustine compares the intellectual treasures with “the treasures of the ancient Egyptians, who possessed not only idols and heavy burdens, which the people of Israel hated and shunned, but also vessels and ornaments of silver and gold, and clothes, which on leaving Egypt the people of Israel, in order to make better use of

¹⁰ Adolf von Harnack, *History of Dogma*, volume 5, Boston: Little, Brown & Company 1899, p. 4-5.

¹¹ Eugene Teselle, ‘Augustine and Augustinianism’, in: Donald K. McKim (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of the Reformed Faith*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox 1992, 17-18.

¹² Benjamin B. Warfield, *Calvin and Augustine*, Edited by Samuel G. Craig, Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co. 1980, 322.

¹³ Copleston, *A History of Philosophy 2*, p. 49

¹⁴ Augustine, *Against Julian*, New York: Fathers of the Church 1957, IV.xiv.72

¹⁵ Saint Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, Book II, par. 144-147.

them, surreptitiously claimed for themselves (they did this not on their own authority, but at God's command, and the Egyptians in their ignorance actually gave them the things of which they had made poor use) [Exod. 3: 21-22, 12: 35-36].” The same should be done with “all the branches of pagan learning”, because they “contain not only false and superstitious fantasies and burdensome studies that involve unnecessary effort, which each of us must loathe and avoid as under Christ's guidance we abandon the company of pagans, but also studies for liberated minds which are more appropriate to the service of the truth, and some very useful moral instruction, as well as the various truths about monotheism to be found in their writers.” Actually the intellectual treasures were not the property of the pagans and where misused by them. After conversion they should be used for their right purpose. “These treasures like the silver and gold, which they did not create but dug, as it were, from the mines of providence, which is everywhere which were used wickedly and harmfully in the service of demons must be removed by Christians, as they separate themselves in spirit from the wretched company of pagans, and applied to their true function, that of preaching the gospel.” Some of the treasures are more essential than others. “As for their clothing which corresponds to human institutions, but those appropriate to human society, which in this life we cannot do without this may be accepted and kept for conversion to Christian purposes. This is exactly what many good and faithful Christians have done.” Christians should even be trained in the converted wisdom of the pagans, because, Augustine writes, “[i]sn't this what had been done earlier by Moses himself, that most faithful servant of God, of whom it is written that he was trained in all the wisdom of the Egyptians [Acts 7: 22]?”¹⁶ This theme of transformation returns in the thought of John Calvin (par. 3.4), but also in Herman Dooyeweerd's conception of a reformation of philosophy (par. 5.13).

According to Augustine there is a battle going on in history between two opposing spiritual and moral forces or principles: the City of God (*Civitas Dei*) and the Earthly City or City of the World (*Civitas Mundi*). The cities – primarily thought theologically, not politically – are guided by two different loves: “the earthly by the love of self, even to the contempt of God; the heavenly by the love of God, even to the contempt of self.”¹⁷ They live by the “standard of the flesh”, that is man's standard, or the “standard of the spirit”, that is turned toward God's will.¹⁸ The citizenship cannot be reduced to external characteristics, but is essentially a matter of the heart. Just like the historical struggle between the two cities there is the inner struggle of man about salvation and sin. The theme of the two cities returns in Abraham Kuyper's thought of the antithesis (par. 4.7), but also in Alvin Plantinga conception of ‘Augustinian Christian philosophy’ (par. 6.10).

2.4 Augustine's inward turn

Augustine, building on the (neo-)Platonists, ‘invented’ the inner self.¹⁹ He wrote the first ‘autobiography’ ever: the *Confessions*. The self is never completely transparent to man, he is never in complete control.²⁰ Augustine's search for the self was at the

¹⁶ Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, Book II, par. 144-147

¹⁷ Augustine, *City of God*, XIV, 28

¹⁸ Jean Bethke Elshtain, ‘Augustine’, in: Peter Scott & William T. Cavanaugh (Eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, Malden: Blackwell 2004, 35-47: p. 42

¹⁹ Phillip Cary, *Augustine's Invention of the Inner Self. The Legacy of a Christian Platonist*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2000.

²⁰ Elshtain, ‘Augustine’, p. 37.

same time a search for God (*noverim me, noverim te*). In the *Soliloquies* Augustine has an exchange with his interlocutor, Reason: “Reason: What then do you want to know? Augustine: All these things I have prayed for. Reason: Summarize them briefly. Augustine: I wish I could know God and the soul. Reason: Nothing more? Augustine: Nothing at all.”²¹ The whole of philosophy is about two kinds of knowledge: knowledge of God and knowledge of the soul (*Deum et animam scire*). Therefore Augustine can state: “truth lives in the inner man” (*in interiore homine habitat veritas*).²² The knowledge of God and the knowledge of the self are the source of true happiness. We can have an internal union with God, a “universal, immediate, noninferential knowledge of God”, though ultimately not through our reason.²³ This is the most certain form of knowledge.

According to Augustine, man has a religious core: the heart, i.e. the inner self. He also often uses the Platonic term soul (*anima*) and seems to use the terms interchangeably, although in the *Confessions* he most often uses the Biblical term heart (*cor*). The term soul has a more technical-philosophical connotation, while the term heart has a more religious one, although these meanings cannot be sharply separated in Augustine’s thought.

Man is created ‘unto God’. He reaches toward something that is greater than himself. In his *Confessions* Augustine writes: “For thou hast created us for thyself, and our heart cannot be quieted till it may find repose in thee.”²⁴ At another place he writes: “Thy words had stuck fast even to the very roots of my heart, and I was hedged round about by thee.”²⁵ There is a direct connection between the hearth and philosophical wisdom. Augustine writes about his own heart that had become “the temple of its own idol”.²⁶ Likewise, when speaking about pagans, he writes about “their foolish heart” that is darkened. “[They] changed the glory of thy incorruptible nature into idols, and divers shapes, into the likeness of the image of corruptible man, and birds, and beasts, and serpents; yea verily, into that Egyptian food, for which Esau sold his birthright ; for that people, which was thy firstborn, worshipped the head of a four-footed beast instead of thee, turning in their heart back towards Egypt; and bowing thy image (their own soul) before the image of a calf that eateth hay.”²⁷

2.5 Augustine’s conception of knowledge and rationality

Part of Augustine’s search for God was a struggle with scepticism. He has a very ‘modern’ solution to the problem of doubt. We can doubt because we can deceive ourselves, but we cannot doubt our own doubt. When we doubt, we exist (*Si fallor, sum*). This knowledge can be regarded as assured knowledge. Because certain knowledge can exist, scepticism must be rejected. This ‘Cartesian’ argument should not be interpreted in the sense that this certain knowledge is the basis for other knowledge. Augustine only uses it in order to reject scepticism. The question of the

²¹ Augustine, ‘The Soliloquies’, in: *Earlier Writings*, Edited by J.H.S. Burleigh, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press 1953, 17-63: I.2.7.

²² Augustine, *De vera religione*, XXIX.72

²³ Skirbekk & Gilje, *A History of Western Thought*, p. 119; Hoitenga, *Faith and Reason from Plato to Plantinga*, p. 175

²⁴ Augustine, *Confessions*, London: William Heinemann 1912 (Loeb Classical Library), I.1 (*tu excitas, ut laudare te delectet, quia fecisti nos ad te et inquietum est cor nostrum, donec requiescat in te.*)

²⁵ Augustine, *Confessions*, VIII.1

²⁶ Augustine, *Confessions*, VII.14

²⁷ Augustine, *Confessions*, VII.9

mature Augustine was not “*Can we attain certainty?*”, but “*How is it that we can attain certainty?*”²⁸ Besides knowledge about my doubts I can also have knowledge about my internal mental states (wanting, loving, thinking, feeling). This is another rejection of scepticism. Mathematics and logic can also deliver certain knowledge, i.e. necessary and unchangeable truths.²⁹

The most reliable knowledge is produced by introspection, i.e. inner experience.³⁰ There is also much of what we believe about this world that must rest on trust and authority. We also have to believe many things we can never understand.³¹ Besides, belief can be necessary in order to understand, because some things can only be understood as soon as they are believed, such as human reasonings. Other things, namely theological topics, are first believed and afterwards understood.³² Faith takes an epistemological precedence over understanding, but also enlightens understanding (*credo ut intelligam*). Faith is the necessary starting point for theological knowledge.³³ Here faith precedes understanding and reason.

There can be no final conflict between faith and reason when reason is correctly understood.³⁴ The relationship between faith and reason in Augustine’s thought can be characterised as *fides quaerens intellectum* (faith seeking understanding). Anselmus of Canterbury coined the Augustinian words *credo, ut intelligam* (I believe so that I may understand).³⁵ To believe is to think with assent (*credere est assensione cogitare*). There can however be no true philosophy without the grace of God. Augustine writes: “the grace of God is necessary for the acquisition, not, indeed, of any philosophy, but of the true philosophy”.³⁶ Without the aid of God, there can be no true knowledge of him.

In the next chapter it will be shown how some of these elements are absorbed in Calvin’s sixteenth-century theology, especially the elements of the precedence of faith, the knowledge of God and the self, God as creator and lawgiver, and the transformation of philosophy. In chapters 3, 4 and 5 it will be shown how other Augustinian elements, like the Augustinian realism and the doctrine of the struggle between the two cities are absorbed that get less or no emphasis in Calvin’s thought.

2.6 Augustinian realism

Augustine’s conception of epistemology and ontology are important in order to understand Plantinga’s (chapter 6). Augustine’s thought, in turn, cannot be understood apart from Plato’s. Characteristic of Plato’s thought is a dualism between appearance and reality, opinion and knowledge. It is the task of philosophy to distinguish between changing opinion (*doxa*) and unchanging knowledge (*episteme*). Plato’s ontology and

²⁸ Copleston, *A History of Philosophy* 2, p. 52-53.

²⁹ Copleston, *A History of Philosophy* 2, p. 53; Skirbekk & Gilje, *A History of Western Thought*, p. 117.

³⁰ Copleston, *A History of Philosophy* 2, p. 54-55.

³¹ Copleston, *A History of Philosophy* 2, p. 55

³² Gareth B. Matthews, ‘Augustine’, in: E. Craig (Ed.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <<http://www.rep.routledge.com/>>, visited November 6, 2009.

³³ Houtenga, *Faith and Reason from Plato to Plantinga*, p. 87

³⁴ Gunnar Skirbekk & Nils Gilje, *A History of Western Thought. From ancient Greece to the twentieth century*, London: Routledge 2001, p. 121.

³⁵ The original Augustinian words are: *crede, ut intelligas* (believe, so that you may understand) and can be found in *Sermones ad populum*, 43.7ff

³⁶ Augustine, *City of God*, New York: The Christian Literature Publishing 1890, XXII, xxii.

metaphysics can be characterized as realism. The Ideas or Forms – not the appearances – exist independently of us. In other words: ‘universals’ exist independently from ‘particulars’. The realm of Ideas or Forms is the realm of Beauty, Goodness and Truth.³⁷ Plato’s theory of truth can be called a correspondence theory of truth, because a proposition is regarded as true when something is in fact the case.

According to Augustine (‘the Christian Plato’), the sensible world is temporal and transitory, while the intelligible, eternal realm is atemporal and contains abiding realities.³⁸ The wisdom of God is a world of Forms or Ideas, i.e. *formae* or *rationes rerum* that are eternal and invariable and exist in God’s mind. Thus, truths are ideas in the mind of God. This ontological and metaphysical theory of Augustine can be called Augustinian realism. This can be regarded an adapted version of Platonic realism.

The divine truth is invariable and transcends human reason, like pure mathematical concepts or the highest good. This truth is truth and wisdom itself of which we can only have vision and which gives us happiness.³⁹ This is the *eudaimonistic* element in Augustine’s ontology and epistemology. God is called by Augustine *aeterne Veritas*. This eternal Truth is the highest Being and Goodness, God (Plotinus’ ‘One’), the source of light. Man can be illuminated by God in order to view the eternal truths (*rationes aeternae*).

³⁷ Anthony C. Thiselton, *A Concise Encyclopedia of the Philosophy of Religion*, Oxford: Oneworld 2002, p. 230.

³⁸ Michael Mendelson, ‘Saint Augustine’, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <<http://plato.stanford.edu/>>, visited November 6, 2009

³⁹ C.J. de Vogel, *Wijsgerige aspecten van het vroeg-christelijke denken. Kleine geschiedenis van de patristische en vroeg-middeleeuwse wijsbegeerte*, Wageningen: H. Veenman en zonen 1970, p. 68-70.

3 John Calvin

One of the key figures of the sixteenth-century Reformation was the French church-Reformer John Calvin (1509-1564). The Reformed tradition in philosophy developed from the Calvinian branch of the Reformation. I will sketch some of the important themes in Calvin's thought, focusing on those aspects that significantly influenced his philosophical legacy in the Reformed tradition. Special attention will be given to Calvin's conception of philosophy and rationality.

3.1 The Augustinian Reformation

The Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century can be regarded as an Augustinian movement.⁴⁰ Augustine has been called the 'church father of the Reformation'. Strongly stated: "[I]t was Augustine who gave us the Reformation."⁴¹ According to Calvin his theology was not an innovation, but a return to the church fathers, especially to Augustine.⁴² He wrote: "Augustine is so completely of our persuasion, that if I should have to make written profession, it would be quite enough to present a composition made up entirely of excerpts from his writings."⁴³ The conformity was however especially in thinking about grace, sin and predestination, not in hermeneutical questions. "Augustine is in matters of dogma unquestionably superior to all others. But in seeking first and foremost the religious meaning of Scripture he becomes overly subtle and commensurately less solid and reliable." Augustine's allegorical and numerological interpretations of Scripture couldn't please Calvin. He preferred Chrysostom's more literal reading. However, in main lines one can say: "The system of doctrine taught by Calvin is just the Augustinianism common to the whole body of the Reformers – for the Reformation was, as from the spiritual point of view a great revival of religion, so from the theological point of view a great revival of Augustinianism."⁴⁴

3.2 Reformation and philosophy

John Calvin was a humanistic legal scholar by education, a practical teacher and pastor by profession and a theologian by legacy. He certainly was no systematic philosopher, although his thought has philosophical significance. In Reformational thought philosophy as such did not have a central place. Theological questions were dominant, philosophical questions only when they were important for theology, for example regarding free will. That doesn't mean that the Reformation didn't have an important meaning for philosophy. Especially the individuality of faith, without the mediation of the church, and the isolated individual's relation to God can be regarded as important factors in the development of philosophical individualism. There are important connections between Reformational thought and humanism. "Humanism was the ally of the Reformation in so far as it, too, worked for the emancipation of the

⁴⁰ Richard A. Muller, 'Augustinianism in the Reformation', in: Allan D. Fitzgerald (Ed.), *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1999, 705-707: p. 705.

⁴¹ Benjamin B. Warfield, *Calvin and Augustine*, Edited by Samuel G. Craig, Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co. 1980, p. 322.

⁴² David J. Marshall, 'John Calvin', in: Allan D. Fitzgerald (Ed.), *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1999, 116-120: p. 116.

⁴³ John Calvin, 'Aeterna Dei praedestinatione' (1552), in: *Corpus Reformatorum* 8:266, as cited in Marshall, 'John Calvin', p. 116.

⁴⁴ Warfield, *Calvin and Augustine*, p. 22.

human spirit; and, wherever it was religious, it became the seed-plot of the Reformation.”⁴⁵ There is also an important influence of the Reformation on what Max Weber called the ‘demystification’ or ‘disenchantment’ (*Entzauberung*) of the world.

Calvin agreed with Luther in main lines, but also significantly developed Reformational thought on some points. The former Augustinian monk Luther rejects natural theology’s knowledge of God. He gives faith a central place (*sola fide*) and stresses the importance of individual faith. He also rejects the institutional remission of sins; instead he emphasizes God’s grace and forgiving love (*sola gratia*). Calvin agrees on this points, but Luther goes further. It has to be said that Luther’s apparently radical and fierce statements and character easily lead to misunderstanding concerning his conception of reason and philosophy. He called human natural reason “the whore reason” (*die Hure Vernunft*) and philosophy “the devil’s whore” and detests Aristotle, calling him “that buffoon who has misled the church”. Based on words like these it is an easy mistake to think that Luther rejected reason and philosophy as such. This is certainly not the case. Reason only has to know its proper place. It easily guides man in the wrong direction and asks the wrong questions.⁴⁶ When faith is concerned, reason has to be supplanted by faith.⁴⁷ In these matters the Word of God is the only guide (*sola scriptura*). On the other side, reason guided by faith can be theology’s handmaid. Reason can clarify and organize, but it stands in the second position, although when government is concerned, reason takes the first place.⁴⁸ After all however, Luther’s hard-to-grasp conception of philosophy and reason seems more negative than positive.

Like Augustine, Calvin had a more positive view of Plato than of Aristotle, but was not as negative about Aristotle as Luther was. Calvin’s use of philosophy can be regarded as historical. Like the Christian humanists of the sixteenth century, he looks for illustrations of the truth in the history of philosophy, but does not systematically use philosophy as a guide to truth.⁴⁹ The Platonic-Augustinian realism is not explicitly accepted by Calvin, but his thought goes very well together with realism, although he rejects metaphysical ‘speculation’ as will be shown below. Calvin is no systematic philosopher, but on the other side, he does not reject a systematic use of philosophy at all. He leaves room for reason, although corrupted. “Since reason (...), by which man distinguishes between good and evil, and by which he understands and judges, is a natural gift, it could not be completely wiped out; but it was partly weakened and partly corrupted, so that its misshapen ruins appear.”⁵⁰ In general Calvin’s work shows a distinct familiarity with philosophy, although at times he is very critical about philosophers who do not know their proper place. But again, his conception of

⁴⁵ Warfield, *Calvin and Augustine*, p. 323.

⁴⁶ David M. Whitford, ‘Martin Luther’, in: James Fieser & Bradley Dowden (Eds.), *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <<http://www.iep.utm.edu>>, visited November 6, 2009.

⁴⁷ Martin Luther, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians* (1535), tr. Theodore Graebner, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House 1949, commentary on 3:6: “When we pay attention to reason, God seems to propose impossible matters in the Christian Creed. (...) Let your faith supplant reason. (...) Everyone who by faith slays reason, the world’s biggest monster, renders God a real service, a better service than the religions of all races and all the drudgery of meritorious monks can render.”

⁴⁸ Whitford, ‘Martin Luther’

⁴⁹ Charles Partee, *Calvin and Classical Philosophy*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox 2005, p. 4, 146.

⁵⁰ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Edited by John T. McNeill, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press 2006, II.2.12 (the reference ‘II.2.12’ is to ‘book II’, ‘chapter 2’, ‘paragraph 12’)

philosophy is not a negative one. Calvin, a humanist by education, for example introduced logic in the curriculum of the Academy in Geneva teaching the pastors and doctors of the church.⁵¹ Before inquiring Calvin's opinion on philosophy somewhat further, his doctrine of *corruptio totalis* needs clarification, because this doctrine is sometimes regarded as a blockade for all philosophy.

3.3 *Corruptio totalis*

Calvin (and the other Reformers) rediscovered the Paulinian notion of sin, being a totalitarian force. There is a total corruption of human nature (*corruptio totalis*). Sin is not only a defect, but also a rebellion against God, a corruption of the heart, which has its effect in the whole of life.⁵² Sin overturns the whole man. According to Calvin, "all parts of the soul were possessed by sin after Adam deserted the fountain of righteousness. For not only did a lower appetite seduce him, but unspeakable impiety occupied the very citadel of his mind, and pride penetrated to the depths of his heart."⁵³ The corruption is more than impulses of the senses. "Paul removes all doubt when he teaches that corruption subsists not in one part only, but that none of the soul remains pure or untouched by that mortal disease. For in his discussion of a corrupt nature Paul not only condemns the inordinate impulses of the appetites that are seen, but especially contends the mind is given over to blindness and the heart to depravity."⁵⁴ Not only parts of the soul, but its entire nature is opposed to supernatural grace. "[S]in occupies both mind and heart. (...) [T]he whole man is overwhelmed – as by a deluge – from head to foot, so that no part is immune from sin and all that proceeds from him is to be imputed to sin. As Paul says, all turnings of the thoughts to the flesh are enmities against God [Rom. 8:7], and are therefore death [Rom. 8:6]."⁵⁵

It is very important to notice that the total corruption of human nature does not mean that man can do no good on earth or that reason is completely useless. This would be contradictory to what Calvin writes about the excellence of the natural gifts of man (see below). Instead, total corruption means there is no part of life that is not affected by sin. Likewise, there is no 'nature' as distinguished from 'grace'. Further, the doctrine of *corruptio totalis* stays one-sided when it is not preached in combination with the doctrines of common grace and redemption *sola gratia*.⁵⁶

3.4 Transformation

Like sin overthrows the whole man, grace reforms the whole man, including the mind. Calvin writes: "[T]he Spirit, who is opposed to the old man and to the flesh, not only marks the grace whereby the lower or sensual part of the soul is corrected, but embraces the full reformation of all the parts. Consequently, Paul not only enjoins that brute appetites be brought to nought but bids us "be renewed in the spirit of our mind" [Eph. 4:23]; in another passage he similarly urges us to "be transformed in newness of mind" [Rom. 12:2]." What can be concluded from this? "[T]hat part in which the excellence and nobility of the soul especially shine has not only been wounded, but so

⁵¹ R. Ward Holder, 'John Calvin', in: James Fieser & Bradley Dowden (Eds.), *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <<http://www.iep.utm.edu>>, visited November 6, 2009.

⁵² J. Klapwijk, 'Calvin and Neo-Calvinism on Non-Christian Philosophy', *Philosophia Reformata* 38 (1973), 43-61: p. 45.

⁵³ Calvin, *Institutes*, II.1.9

⁵⁴ Calvin, *Institutes*, II.1.9

⁵⁵ Calvin, *Institutes*, II.1.9

⁵⁶ Klapwijk, 'Calvin and Neo-Calvinism on Non-Christian Philosophy', p. 45.

corrupted that it needs to be healed and to put on a new nature as well.”⁵⁷ This doctrine of transformation plays an important role in the neo-Calvinistic thought of Abraham Kuyper, as will be explained below. The transformation is also important in Calvin’s vision on philosophy.

According to Calvin, following Paul, Christians are “not their own”, but “the Lord’s”. They have to live their lives to the glory of God. “From this is derived the basis of the exhortation that “they be not conformed to the fashion of this world, but be transformed by the renewal of their minds, so that they may prove what is the will of God” [Rom. 12:2].”⁵⁸ Therefore Calvin writes: “We are not our own: let not our reason nor our will, therefore, sway our plans and deeds. We are not our own: let us therefore not set it as our goal to seek what is expedient for us according to the flesh. We are not our own: in so far as we can, let us therefore forget ourselves and all that is ours.” What then is the transformation aimed at? “Conversely, we are God’s: let us therefore live for him and die for him. We are God’s: let his wisdom and will therefore rule all our actions. We are God’s: let all the parts of our life accordingly strive toward him as our only lawful goal [Rom. 14:8; cf. I Cor. 6:19].”⁵⁹ Christians have to live in the service of the Lord. Therefore they have to ‘empty their mind’ and direct it to God’s Spirit. Christian philosophy is renewing, converting, or transformational philosophy.⁶⁰

Concerning the transformationist (or conversionist) motive in Calvin’s thought the theologian Richard Niebuhr writes in his *Christ and Culture* (1951): “Calvin is very much like Augustine. The conversionist idea is prominent in his thought and practice.” Niebuhr emphasizes the difference between Luther and Calvin on this point. More than Luther Calvin “looks for the present permeation of all life by the gospel.” Calvin has a “more dynamic conception of the vocations of men as activities in which they may express their faith and love and may glorify God in their calling”, a more humanistic view of the gifts of human nature, even after the fall, an emphasis on “the resurrection of the flesh” and, above all, on “the actuality of God’s sovereignty”. Niebuhr concludes that all this leads to “the thought that what the gospel promises and makes possible, as divine (not human) possibility, is the transformation of mankind in all its nature and culture into a kingdom of God in which the laws of the kingdom have been written upon the inward parts.”⁶¹

3.5 Christian philosophy

Calvin often uses the humanistic term *philosophia christiana* (Christian philosophy) in the *Institutes*. This term was used by the Greek and Latin Church fathers, and medieval and renaissance writers, most significantly by Erasmus. Most of the time Calvin just refers to ‘the sound Christian teaching’ with it. On some places however, he seems to refer more specifically to philosophy in a technical sense. Calvin distinguishes very sharply between general philosophy (‘the philosophers’) and Christian philosophy.⁶² Philosophers-in-general – who do not belong to God but are their own masters – have not submitted and subjected their reason to the Holy Spirit

⁵⁷ Calvin, *Institutes*, II.1.9

⁵⁸ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.7.1

⁵⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.7.1

⁶⁰ Klapwijk, ‘John Calvin (1509-1564)’, p. 129.

⁶¹ H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, New York: Harper & Row 1951, p. 217-218.

⁶² Partee, *Calvin and Classical Philosophy*, p. 15.

and Christ is not living and reigning within them. Their thought has to be transformed. How can this be done? Man has to “depart from himself” in order to “apply the whole force of his ability in the service of the Lord”. ‘Service’ is more than obedience to God’s word; it is emptying the mind of its “carnal sense” and making place for God’s Spirit.⁶³ Philosophers-in-general did not understand this. “While it is the first entrance to life, all philosophers were ignorant of this transformation, which Paul calls “renewal of the mind” [Eph. 4:23]. For they set up reason alone as the ruling principle in man, and think that it alone should be listened to; to it alone, in short, they entrust the conduct of life.” This is different in Christian philosophy: “the Christian philosophy bids reason give way to, submit and subject itself to, the Holy Spirit so that the man himself may no longer live but hear Christ living and reigning within him [Gal. 2:20].”⁶⁴ Reason is not the final foundation of knowledge, not a true guide and not self-sufficient. Christian philosophy is obedient philosophy.⁶⁵

Calvin does not reject philosophy. He only emphasizes that philosophy is of little help when faith is concerned. “The true conviction which believers have of the Word of God, of their own salvation, and of all religion, does not spring from the feeling of the flesh, or from human and philosophical arguments, but from the sealing of the Spirit, who makes their consciences more certain and removes all doubt. The foundation of faith would be frail and unsteady if it rested on human wisdom (...).”⁶⁶ This theme returns in the thought of Plantinga (chapter 6).

The best source of wisdom is Scripture. It has much more power than any philosophy. “Now this power which is peculiar to Scripture is clear from the fact that of human writings, however artfully polished, there is none capable of affecting us at all comparably.” To state it sharply: philosophy is good, but Scripture is better. Therefore, Scripture is the best starting point for a philosopher. Christian philosophy is also ‘Scriptural philosophy’. Human understanding “is an unstable and transitory thing in God’s sight, when a solid foundation of truth does not underlie it.”⁶⁷ Thus, Scripture is the best source of truth concerning what is most important in life, but given this framework of truth, there is certainly a place for philosophy. This doesn’t make Scriptural philosophy theology.

3.6 Faith and reason

The relationship between faith and reason in Calvin’s thought can be summarized as follows: faith is beyond reason, not against it. However, reason without faith – autonomous reason – is incomplete and rudderless, because it does not know its limits and can easily be aimed in the wrong direction. Likewise, “The prophets and apostles do not boast either of their keenness or of anything that obtains credit for them as they speak; nor do they dwell upon rational proofs. Rather, they bring forward God’s holy name, that by it the whole world may be brought into obedience to him.”⁶⁸

⁶³ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.7.1

⁶⁴ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.7.1

⁶⁵ Jacob Klapwijk, ‘John Calvin (1509-1564)’, in: J. Klapwijk, S. Griffioen & G. Groenewoud (Eds.), *Bringing into Captivity every Thought*, Lanham: University Press of America 1991, 123-142: p. 129.

⁶⁶ John Calvin, Com. Eph. 1.13, as cited in Partee, *Calvin and Classical Philosophy*, p. 18.

⁶⁷ Calvin, *Institutes*, II.2.16

⁶⁸ Calvin, *Institutes*, I.7.4

When we want certainty in matters of religion, human reason is not a good guide. When we follow reason, we will be “perpetually beset by the instability of doubt or vacillation” and we will “boggle at the smallest quibbles”. Therefore, according to Calvin, “we ought to seek our conviction in a higher place than human reasons, judgments, or conjectures, that is, in the secret testimony of the Spirit”.⁶⁹ Believing in God, like believing in the truth of Scripture, is not based on rational proof, but on the ‘testimony of the Spirit’ in our hearts. Unbelieving men think that religion is nothing but ‘opinion’. They don’t want to believe “anything foolishly or lightly”. Therefore they want rational proof (cf. Plantinga, par. 6.4). But, according to Calvin, “the testimony of the Spirit is more excellent than all reason”.⁷⁰

3.7 Two regiments

In order to understand Calvin’s sometimes seemingly contradictory statements about the human potential to understand and to act, it is essential to make a distinction between two regiments.⁷¹ Man is a citizen of two kingdoms or regiments: a spiritual regiment (*regnum spirituale*), which regards conscience and the inner religion, and a civil or political regiment (*regnum politicum*), which regards societal life. In this context, regarding the knowing and acting of sinful people, a sharp distinction has to be made – following Augustine – between earthly things (*res terrenas*) and heavenly things (*res caelestes*).⁷² In earthly matters, such as public administration (*politia*), the management of the household (*oeconomia*), mechanical skills (*artes omnes mechanicae*) and the liberal arts (*disciplinae liberales*), including ethics and philosophy, sinful people with their natural gifts can excel thanks to the ‘natural light’ of reason.⁷³ Because the Spirit of God is the only source of truth, we would give him too little honor, according to Calvin, when the truth in this area that can be found by pagan philosophers and writers, would be denied.⁷⁴ In heavenly matters, however, like knowledge of God and his will, even the most sensible people are “blinder than moles” without the biblical revelation.⁷⁵ Concerning the second table of the Decalogue, people can have a lot of knowledge, thanks to the natural light of reason, outside the Biblical revelation. As the first table is concerned, they can not.

Regarding earthly matters, Calvin can be regarded a natural law thinker, although he never worked out a detailed theory.⁷⁶ In the spiritual regiment, natural law only has

⁶⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, I.7.4

⁷⁰ Calvin, *Institutes*, I.7.4

⁷¹ See D. VanDrunen, ‘The Context of Natural Law: John Calvin’s Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms’, *Journal of Church and State* 46 (2004), 503-525.

⁷² Calvin, *Institutes*, II.2.13

⁷³ Calvin, *Institutes*, I.15.8

⁷⁴ Calvin, *Institutes*, II.2.15

⁷⁵ Anthony N.S. Lane, ‘Antropologie’, in: Herman J. Selderhuis (red.), *Calvijn Handboek*, Kampen: Kok 2008, 309-324: p. 318.

⁷⁶ For Calvin’s conception of natural law, see Susan Schreiner, *The Theater of His Glory: Nature and Natural Order in the Thought of John Calvin*, Durham: The Labyrinth Press 1991, ch. IV; Stephen J. Grabill, *Rediscovering the Natural Law in Reformed Theological Ethics*, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing 2006, ch. 3; L.S. Koetsier, *Natural Law and Calvinist Political Theory*, Victoria: Trafford 2003, ch. 2; J. Bohatec, *Calvin und das Recht*, Aalen: Scientia 1971 (1934), pp. 1-129; J. Bohatec, *Calvins Lehre von Staat und Kirche mit besonderer Berücksichtigung des Organismusgedankens*, Breslau: Marcus 1937, pp. 19-35; Paul Helm, *John Calvin’s Ideas*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2006, ch. 12; Irena Backus, ‘Calvin’s Concept of Natural and Roman Law’, *Calvin Theological Journal* 38 (2003), 7-26; C. Scott Pryor, ‘God’s Bridle: John Calvin’s Application of Natural Law’, *Journal of Law and Religion* 22:1 (2007), 225-254; David VanDrunen, ‘Natural Law, Custom, and Common Law in the Theology of Aquinas and Calvin’, *University of British Columbia*

the negative role of pointing to sin.⁷⁷ With regard to earthly life in civil regiment however natural law plays an important, positive role. It is first of all ‘God’s bridle’ with which He holds disbelievers tight, be it for reasons of shame, fear, calculation or self-preservation.⁷⁸ In addition, it is a culture-making tool. Created reality in itself is not evil or alien to the believer. God maintains the ‘work of His hands’ by His providence.⁷⁹ Likewise, science is for Calvin a gift of God.⁸⁰

3.8 Creation and common grace

Calvin places an emphasis on the created world. In the first five chapters of the *Institutes* a great appreciation for created order can be discovered.⁸¹ God sustains and governs his creation. The Creator “supports us by his power, governs us by his providence, nourishes us by his goodness, and attends us with all sorts of blessings”.⁸² God also created an order of nature (including a moral order) that directs the creatures. After a transformation of the heart man can understand and embrace the moral order. This moral order can ultimately be known through both tables of the Decalogue. The first table can only be known through revelation, the second also by human reason.⁸³ Through Christ, man’s calling of dominion over creation, though limited by sin, has been restored. This is called man’s creational or cultural mandate.⁸⁴

Part of God’s providence is that he, although man has fallen into sin, has left many good things to mankind and constrains the effects of sin.⁸⁵ These include the gifts of science and philosophy. Calvin writes: “Whenever we come upon these matters in secular writers, let that admirable light of truth shining in them teach us that the mind of man, though fallen and perverted from its wholeness, is nevertheless clothed and ornamented with God’s excellent gifts. If we regard the Spirit of God as the sole fountain of truth, we shall neither reject the truth itself, nor despise it wherever it shall appear, unless we wish to dishonor the Spirit of God.”⁸⁶ Therefore, we shall not deny the truth of the ancient arts and sciences. “Shall we deny that the truth shone upon the ancient jurists who established civic order and discipline with such great equity? Shall we say that the philosophers were blind in their fine observation and artful description of nature? Shall we say that those men were devoid of understanding who conceived the art of disputation and taught us to speak reasonably? Shall we say that they are insane who developed medicine, devoting their labor to our benefit? What shall we say of all the mathematical sciences? Shall we consider them the ravings of madmen? No, we cannot read the writings of the ancients on these subjects without great admiration.”⁸⁷ Even the pagan poets “confessed that the gods had invented philosophy, laws, and all useful arts.” If the ‘natural men’ were so sharp and

Law Review 33:3 (1999), 699-717; R.S. Clark, ‘Calvin on the Lex Naturalis’, *Stulos Theological Journal* 6:1-2 (1998), 1-22.

⁷⁷ Calvin, *Institutes*, II.2.22

⁷⁸ Calvin, *Institutes*, II.2.27, II.3.3

⁷⁹ Schreiner, *The Theater of His Glory*, p. 94-95.

⁸⁰ Calvin, *Institutes*, II.2.15

⁸¹ I. John Hesselink, ‘Calvin’s theology’, in: Donald K. McKim (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2004, 74-92: p. 85.

⁸² Calvin, *Institutes*, I.2.1

⁸³ Guenther H. Haas, ‘Calvin’s ethics’, in: Donald K. McKim (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2004, 93-105: p. 94.

⁸⁴ Haas, ‘Calvin’s ethics’, p. 94.

⁸⁵ Calvin, *Institutes*, II.3.3

⁸⁶ Calvin, *Institutes*, II.2.15

⁸⁷ Calvin, *Institutes*, II.2.15

penetrating, we should acknowledge “how many gifts the Lord left to human nature even after it was despoiled of its true good.”⁸⁸ Calvin speaks about “common grace”, God’s “kindness”, “mercy” and “gentleness” or generally about his providence.⁸⁹ In the neo-Calvinistic reception of Calvin, especially by Abraham Kuyper as we will see (par. 4.7), the concept of common grace is emphasized. In Calvin’s work this concept doesn’t have the technical meaning it has in Kuyper’s work.⁹⁰ Neither does it demarcate a scholastic domain of ‘nature’ distinguished from ‘grace’.⁹¹

3.9 Speculation

Creation is also a boundary between God and man. According to Calvin we cannot and should not go behind God’s act of creation in our “wicked and hurtful speculations”.⁹² This will only lead us into idolatry and superstition. “What is God? Men who pose this question are merely toying with idle speculations.”⁹³ Only Scripture teaches us who and what God is. Calvin cites an example already given by Augustine: “When a certain shameless fellow mockingly asked a pious old man what God had done before the creation of the world, the latter aptly countered that he had been building hell for the curious.”⁹⁴ Man is not capable of seeing God. Therefore, “let us remember that that invisible God, whose wisdom, power, and righteousness are incomprehensible, sets before us Moses’ history as a mirror in which his living likeness glows. For just as eyes, when dimmed with age or weakness or by some other defect, unless aided by spectacles, discern nothing distinctly; so, such is our feebleness, unless Scripture guides us in seeking God, we are immediately confused.”⁹⁵ Calvin stresses to have Augustine on his side: “Augustine rightly complains that wrong is done to God when a higher cause of things than his will is demanded. Elsewhere the same man wisely warns that it is no less wrong to raise questions concerning immeasurable stretches of time than of space.”⁹⁶ Therefore Calvin concludes, “let us willingly remain enclosed within these bounds to which God has willed to confine us, and as it were, to pen up our minds that they may not, through their very freedom to wander, go astray.”⁹⁷ There is still another form of knowledge than the knowledge of reason or the knowledge through Scripture; it is the knowledge of the heart.

No man can reach to God’s essence, the *essentia Dei*. Calvin writes that “his essence is incomprehensible; hence, his divineness far escapes all human perception. But upon his individual works he has engraved unmistakable marks of his glory, so clear and so prominent that even unlettered and stupid folk cannot plead the excuse of ignorance.”⁹⁸ Although we cannot know God’s essence, we still can know his nature

⁸⁸ Calvin, *Institutes*, II.2.15

⁸⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, II.2.17, I.5.14, III.3.25, II.2.14, II.2.17.

⁹⁰ Jacob Klapwijk, ‘Rationality in the Dutch Neo-Calvinist Tradition’, in: H. Hart, J. van der Hoeven & N. Wolterstorff (Eds.), *Rationality in the Calvinian Tradition*, Boston: University Press of America 1983, 93-111: p. 99-101; Klapwijk, ‘Calvin and Neo-Calvinism on Non-Christian Philosophy’, p. 47.

⁹¹ Klapwijk, ‘John Calvin (1509-1564)’, p. 136.

⁹² See e.g. Calvin, *C.w.*, I.14.4

⁹³ Calvin, *Institutes*, I.2.2

⁹⁴ Calvin, *Institutes*, I.14.4; Augustine, *Confessions*, XI.xii

⁹⁵ Calvin, *Institutes*, I.14.4

⁹⁶ Calvin, *Institutes*, I.14.4

⁹⁷ Calvin, *Institutes*, I.14.4

⁹⁸ Calvin, *Institutes*, I.5.1

as it is revealed to us (Cf. Plantinga, par. 6.12). God is immeasurable, spiritual, simple (divine simplicity), immutable, undivided. “Thereupon his powers are mentioned, by which he is shown to us not as he is in himself, but as he is toward us: so that this recognition of him consists more in living experience than in vain and high-flown speculation.”⁹⁹ Calvin however does not hesitate to use deductive reasoning. For example, when God has become known as the creator of everything, he has to be eternal, “for he whom all things draw their origin must be eternal and have beginning from himself.”¹⁰⁰ He also has to be good “if the cause is sought by which he was led once to create all these things, and is now moved to preserve them, we shall find that it is his goodness alone.”¹⁰¹ Reason here is complementary to revelation, not antithetical, though revelation comes first.¹⁰²

We cannot know God as he is *in se* (in himself), but we can know him as he is *quoad nos* (toward us), in revelation. Therefore Calvin writes: “Here, indeed, if anywhere in the secret mysteries of Scripture, we ought to play the philosopher soberly and with great moderation; let us use great caution that neither our thoughts nor our speech go beyond the limits to which the Word of God itself extends. (...) [H]ow can the mind by its own leading come to search out God’s essence when it cannot even get to its own? Let us then willingly leave to God the knowledge of himself.”¹⁰³ Scripture accommodates the knowledge of God to “our slight capacity”.¹⁰⁴ This theme of divine accommodation is central in Calvin’s thought.¹⁰⁵ The discussion remains however whether Calvin thinks that language about God is metaphorical or merely ‘literal’, though it is not probable that Calvin regards God as a Kantian unknowable *noumenon*, like some post-Kantian Protestant theology.¹⁰⁶

Speculation about God outside his revelation is unwarranted, irreligious, distracting and impious.¹⁰⁷ Therefore, “the pious mind does not dream up for itself any god it pleases, but contemplates the one and only true God. And it does not attach to him whatever it pleases, but is content to hold him to be as he manifests himself”.¹⁰⁸ There are however topics that do not concern God as such, like the soul. These topics can be studied by philosophers. Calvin writes: “I leave it to the philosophers to discuss these faculties in their subtle way. (...) I, indeed, agree that the things they teach are true, not only enjoyable, but also profitable to learn, and skillfully assembled by them. And I do not forbid those who are desirous of learning to study them.” It seems that Calvin accepts here a medieval distinction between theology and philosophy or the Faculty of Theology and the Faculty of Arts.¹⁰⁹

⁹⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, I.10.2

¹⁰⁰ Calvin, *Institutes*, I.5.6

¹⁰¹ Calvin, *Institutes*, I.5.6

¹⁰² Edward Adams, ‘Calvin’s View of Natural Knowledge of God’, *International Journal of Systematic Theology* Vol. 3 (Nov. 2001), Nr. 3, 280-292: p. 290.

¹⁰³ Calvin, *Institutes*, I.13.21

¹⁰⁴ Paul Helm, *John Calvin’s Ideas*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2006, p. 11ff.

¹⁰⁵ Helm, *John Calvin’s Ideas*, p. 184ff.

¹⁰⁶ Helm, *John Calvin’s Ideas*, p. 193.

¹⁰⁷ Helm, *John Calvin’s Ideas*, p. 22.

¹⁰⁸ Calvin, *Institutes*, I.2.2

¹⁰⁹ Helm, *John Calvin’s Ideas*, p. 23.

3.10 Knowledge of God

We cannot know God's essence, but still: what can be known about God?¹¹⁰ This theme can be regarded as the central motif in Calvin's theology.¹¹¹ Calvin writes: "[W]e are called to a knowledge of God: not that knowledge which, content with empty speculation, merely flits in the brain [*cerebrum*], but that which will be sound and fruitful if we duly perceive it, and if it takes root in the heart [*cor*]."¹¹² Man can experience God within himself, which is the best form of knowledge. Therefore, the best and most suitable way of seeking God "is not for us to attempt with bold curiosity to penetrate to the investigation of his essence, which we ought more to adore than meticulously to search out, but for us to contemplate him in his works whereby he renders himself near and familiar to us, and in some manner communicates himself."¹¹³ The recognition of God "consists more in living experience than in vain and high-flown speculation."¹¹⁴ Man should not and cannot intrude upon the *essentiae Dei*, but should listen to the revelation in the Word of God. There is no place for a metaphysics that goes beyond Scripture.¹¹⁵

The biblical revelation about God is a clarification of what is in principle known by nature. Calvin writes: "[The] conviction (...) that there is some God, is naturally inborn in all, and is fixed deep within, as it were in the very marrow. (...) It is not a doctrine that must be learned in school, but one of which each of us is master from his mother's womb and which nature itself permits no one to forget, although many strive with every nerve to this end."¹¹⁶ From nature is known that there is a God and that he should be honored, but only from Scripture is known who this God is and how he should be honored.¹¹⁷ Calvin speaks of two ways to know God (*duplex cognitio Dei*): as Creator (known from nature) and Redeemer (known from Scripture). There is an awareness of God in every person, because every person has an 'awareness of divinity' (*sensus divinitatis*) and a 'seed of religion' (*semen religionis*) engraved or planted in the heart.¹¹⁸ "There is within the human mind, and indeed by natural instinct, an awareness of divinity [*divinitatis sensum*]. This we take to be beyond controversy. To prevent anyone from taking refuge in the pretense of ignorance, God himself has implanted in all men a certain understanding of his divine majesty. Ever renewing its memory, he repeatedly sheds fresh drops."¹¹⁹ Also, every man has the possibility of thinking about and experiencing the order in the universe. Calvin uses the image of the order of the world as 'theater' or 'mirror' in which it is shown that there is a God and in which an impression of his wisdom and justice can be obtained by whom is thought about it.¹²⁰ The knowledge of God that is displayed in the

¹¹⁰ See for a comparison of Calvin and Karl Barth on this point: Cornelis van der Kooi, *As in a Mirror: John Calvin and Karl Barth on Knowing God: a Diptych*, Leiden: Brill 2005.

¹¹¹ Hesselink, 'Calvin's theology', p. 78.

¹¹² Calvin, *Institutes*, I.5.9

¹¹³ Calvin, *Institutes*, I.5.9

¹¹⁴ Calvin, *Institutes*, I.10.2

¹¹⁵ Holder, 'John Calvin'

¹¹⁶ Calvin, *Institutes*, I.3.1

¹¹⁷ David Steinmetz, 'Calvin and the Natural Knowledge of God', in: *Calvin in Context*, New York: Oxford University Press 1995, p. 23-39.

¹¹⁸ Calvin, *Institutes*, I.2.1, I.5.1, I.10.3

¹¹⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, I.3.1

¹²⁰ Calvin, *Institutes*, I.5.1, I.5.2, I.5.5; see also Susan Schreiner, *The Theater of His Glory: Nature and Natural Order in the Thought of John Calvin*, Durham: The Labyrinth Press 1991.

organization of the world and its creatures is even clearer and more reliably explained in Biblical revelation.¹²¹

3.11 The *sensus divinitatis*

The *sensus divinitatis* plays an important role in Alvin Plantinga's Reformed epistemology, as will be explained below. It is however important to remember that Calvin does not seem to want to prove the existence of God, nor does he seem to be interested in the rationality of religious belief or in religious epistemology.¹²² Let alone that Calvin anticipated the debate on evidentialism and foundationalism about theistic belief.¹²³ Of course it would be an anachronism to ascribe to this sixteenth-century thinker any (post-)Enlightenment motives. He does not seem to have a proof of God's existence in the Thomistic sense either. Calvin's thoughts are about knowledge of God, not about the rationality of believing in God.¹²⁴ Actually they are "first-order observations", no theoretical reflections.¹²⁵ Calvin does however discuss proofs when he writes about the trustworthiness of Scripture. He distinguishes between 'external proofs', being arguments and empirical evidence, and 'internal proofs', being the testimony of the Holy Spirit and the self-authentication of Scripture.¹²⁶

The possibility to knowledge of God and the actual knowledge of God are taken together in Calvin's writing.¹²⁷ He is not entirely clear about whether the *sensus divinitatis* is thought of as an innate belief in the existence of God or a disposition for such a belief.¹²⁸ Calvin specifically wants to emphasize that no one has an excuse not to honour God. However, instead of honoring God, man is more interested in himself or in other idolatry. "We know how man does not willingly humble himself so as to place other creatures over himself. Since, then, he prefers to worship wood and stone rather than to be thought of as having no God, clearly this is a most vivid impression of a divine being."¹²⁹

3.12 Natural revelation

There is no place in Calvin's thought for a natural theology, i.e. a theology based on natural reason distinguished from revelation. There is however place for a natural theology existing of "innate, properly functioning capacities common (i.e., natural) to all people", though not "based upon discursive proofs".¹³⁰ It may be better to speak about 'natural revelation'.¹³¹ Calvin writes: "[T]hat common opinion which they have taken from Augustine pleases me: that the natural gifts were corrupted in man through sin, but that his supernatural gifts were stripped from him."¹³² Man's natural gifts, like reason, are corrupt, but do still exist, while no supernatural gifts exist in him anymore.

¹²¹ Calvin, *Institutes*, I.10.1

¹²² Helm, *John Calvin's Ideas*, p. 221.

¹²³ Paul Helm, 'John Calvin, the *sensus divinitatis*, and the noetic effects of sin', *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 43 (1998), 87-107, p. 103.

¹²⁴ Helm, 'John Calvin, the *sensus divinitatis*, and the noetic effects of sin', p. 87.

¹²⁵ Helm, 'John Calvin, the *sensus divinitatis*, and the noetic effects of sin', p. 106.

¹²⁶ Helm, *John Calvin's Ideas*, p. 246ff.

¹²⁷ Helm, 'John Calvin, the *sensus divinitatis*, and the noetic effects of sin', p. 88.

¹²⁸ Nicholas Wolterstorff, 'The Reformed Tradition', in: Philip L. Quinn & Charles Taliferro, *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, Malden/Oxford: Blackwell Publishers 2000, 165-170: p. 165.

¹²⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, I.3.1

¹³⁰ Helm, 'John Calvin, the *sensus divinitatis*, and the noetic effects of sin', p. 93.

¹³¹ Adams, 'Calvin's View of Natural Knowledge of God', p. 282.

¹³² Calvin, *Institutes*, II.2.12

Calvin rejects the scholastic dualism between the natural and the supernatural which claimed that sin wasted supernatural grace, but has left natural reason intact. Instead, man's natural reason is corrupt and his supernatural gifts disappeared. Nonetheless, man is able to discover the existence of a god by and through nature, while learning more specifically about who he is through Scripture. Calvin however is very pessimistic about man's actual knowledge of God through the *sensus divinitatis* and through God's works.¹³³ This is not due to God, but due to man's stupidity.¹³⁴ Man cannot be excused. The *semen religionis* sometimes functions as a "factory of idols".

3.13 Self-knowledge

Calvin, like Augustine, stresses the importance of self-knowledge. He writes: "With good reason the ancient proverb strongly recommended knowledge of self to man. For if it is considered disgraceful for us not to know all that pertains to the business of human life, even more detestable is our ignorance of ourselves, by which, when making decisions in necessary matters, we miserably deceive and even blind ourselves."¹³⁵ Calvin opens the *Institutes* with Augustinian words: "Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves" and "it is certain that man never achieves a clear knowledge of himself unless he has first looked upon God's face, and then descends from contemplating him to scrutinize himself."¹³⁶ Self-knowledge however can take a right or a wrong form. It can be applied perversely. This happened to 'certain philosophers', who "while urging man to know himself, propose the goal of recognizing his own worth and excellence. And they would have him contemplate in himself nothing but what swells him with empty assurance and puffs him up with pride [Gen. 1:27]."¹³⁷ But what then is a good form of self-knowledge? In the first place: "knowledge of ourselves lies (...) in considering what we were given at creation and how generously God continues his favor toward us, in order to know how great our natural excellence would be if only it had remained unblemished; yet at the same time to bear in mind that there is in us nothing of our own, but that we hold on sufferance whatever God has bestowed upon us. Hence we are ever dependent on him."

Calvin regularly praises man's nature in its un-fallen state. In the second place a good form of self-knowledge is "to call to mind our miserable condition after Adam's fall; the awareness of which, when all our boasting and self-assurance are laid low, should truly humble us and overwhelm us with shame. In the beginning God fashioned us after his image [Gen. 1:27] that he might arouse our minds both to zeal for virtue and to meditation upon eternal life." Again Calvin praises man's creational nobility and reason. There is however a sharp contrast between man in his fallen and his un-fallen state: "[T]hat primal worthiness cannot come to mind without the sorry spectacle of our foulness and dishonor presenting itself by way of contrast, since in the person of the first man we have fallen from our original condition. From this source arise abhorrence and displeasure with ourselves, as well as true humility; and thence is

¹³³ In their famous discussion about the possibility of natural theology, the first point is stressed by Emil Brunner and the second by Karl Barth (*Nein!*). See Emil Brunner & Karl Barth, *Natural Theology: Comprising 'Nature and Grace' by Prof. Dr. Emil Brunner and the Reply 'No!' by Dr. Karl Barth*, Eugene: Wipf & Stock 2002.

¹³⁴ Adams, 'Calvin's View of Natural Knowledge of God', p. 290.

¹³⁵ Calvin, *Institutes*, II.1.1

¹³⁶ Calvin, *Institutes*, I.1.1-2

¹³⁷ Calvin, *Institutes*, II.1.1

kindled a new zeal to seek God, in whom each of us may recover those good things which we have utterly and completely lost.”¹³⁸ Humility and self-knowledge come together. If a person has no humility, his self-knowledge can only serve his pride and hence lead to error in his philosophy. Christian philosophy is humble philosophy.

¹³⁸ Calvin, *Institutes*, II.1.1, II.2.11

4 Neo-Calvinism

The thought of the Reformed philosophers Dooyeweerd and Plantinga cannot be fully understood when no attention is paid to a specific branch of the Calvinian legacy, namely neo-Calvinism. In this chapter I will sketch the main lines of neo-Calvinistic thought, focusing on those aspects that structured the Reformed tradition in philosophy. Special attention will be paid to the neo-Calvinistic conception of philosophy and rationality.

4.1 The struggle for Calvin's legacy

The main lines of the ideas of Calvin were commonplace in the Netherlands after the Reformation, but under the influence of eighteenth-century Enlightenment thought they were ousted. In the beginning of the nineteenth century however there was a resurgence in the movement of the Réveil (Willem Bilderdijk, Isaäc da Costa) and the anti-revolutionary political movement of Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer (1801-1876) and Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920). The anti-revolutionaries opposed the principles of 'modernity'. Kuyper writes: "[I]n deadly opposition to [the] Christian element, against the very Christian name, and against its salutiferous influence in every sphere of life, the storm of Modernism has now arisen with violent intensity." A central point is the French Revolution (1789). "In 1789 the turning point was reached. Voltaire's mad cry, "Down with the scoundrel," was aimed at Christ himself, but this cry was merely the expression of the most hidden thought from which the French Revolution sprang. The fanatic outcry of another philosopher, "We no more need a God," and the odious shibboleth, "No God, no Master," of the Convention; – these were the sacrilegious watchwords which at that time heralded the liberation of man as an emancipation from all Divine Authority."¹³⁹ Neo-Calvinism can also be regarded as a religious and social reform movement in this anti-revolutionary line, which opposed the influence of liberal thought, in the first place in theology. Under the influence of Kuyper there was a revival of the comprehensive Calvinist world view which, in addition to theology did apply in areas such as science, politics and art. Neo-Calvinism aimed at the full re-Christianizing of the Dutch culture and society. The neo-Calvinists however did not want to simply copy Calvin's sixteenth-century thoughts, they rather wanted to actualize them and make them in accordance with the actual time. New elements were added.

4.2 Philosophical Calvinism

In neo-Calvinism some thoughts of Calvin get emphasized: first, the biblical words creation, sin and salvation. Creation means that God, in his creation of the world, has made a clear order and has given laws, both to nature as to humans (laws of nature and laws of culture). Sin (the Fall) is a distortion of God's order and is essentially opposition to God. Sin works through the heart of man, the center of human existence, into all of life, including in reason. Salvation is restoration of the disturbed relationship with God, but also a re-direction of all things onto him. Important is also God's sovereignty over all areas of life and God's revelation, both in the Bible and in nature.

¹³⁹ Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1999, p. 10.

Neo-Calvinism can to a certain extent be regarded as a philosophical translation of Calvin's thought. Three emphases can specifically be mentioned. The first is divine sovereignty. Neo-Calvinists more than other Reformed groups emphasize the intellectual elaboration of God's sovereignty. Every *thought* should be brought into captivity to God.¹⁴⁰ The second emphasis is human sin. In Calvin's thought there is a certain tension between on the one side his high regard of ancient pagan writers and on the other side his emphasis on the depravity of the unredeemed human mind.¹⁴¹ Some Reformed groups reject 'worldly wisdom' as such, but neo-Calvinists have a more nuanced view. Neo-Calvinists have a negative assessment of the human mind and the noetic effects of sin in man's unredeemed state. They do however have a rather optimistic conception of the redeemed mind. The relationship between these two 'states of mind' has led to an interest in epistemological questions.¹⁴² The third emphasis is the importance of divine law. God's law is not only a moral law, but also a law through which God creates and sustains the cosmos.¹⁴³ This leads to a philosophical interest in the law-like structures of reality. These philosophical interests will return in diverse forms in the thought of the thinkers that will be discussed in this and in the next chapters.

4.3 Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer and Abraham Kuyper

One of the intellectual fathers of neo-Calvinism is the Dutch politician, jurist and historian Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer (1801-1876). According to Groen van Prinsterer the French Revolution was an expression of a religion of 'unbelief'. He regarded the rationalism of the Enlightenment as a system of belief rejecting Christianity.¹⁴⁴ It destroys the Christian spiritual foundation of Europe. Here the Augustinian theme of the struggle between the two cities can be recognized. Groen van Prinsterer was aiming at a re-Christianization of Europe. Two themes in Groen van Prinsterer's thought are especially relevant. The first is the religious motive behind every thought, whether it is Enlightenment rationality and revolutionary unbelief or Christianity. The second thought is what came to be known as *soevereiniteit in eigen kring* ('sphere sovereignty'). This concept, originating from the Calvinist legal philosopher Althusius (1557-1638), was further developed by Groen van Prinsterer regarding the separation of church and state, although it was given its full expression in the thought of Groen's political successor, Kuyper. Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) worked for Christian organization in all areas: the creation of the Anti-Revolutionary Party (1878), Christian schools and the Free University (1880) in Amsterdam, newspapers (*De Heraut* and *De Standaard*), trade unions and social care. Kuyper was mainly a theologian, politician and organizer, not a philosopher. He did however deliver philosophical building-blocks that were taken up by Dooyeweerd and others. Kuyper was a romantic mind, influenced by Augustine and Calvin, but also by romantic idealism. For example, Kuyper's view of history is clearly Augustinian, but was also influenced by the romantic idealism of Willem Bilderdijk. Elements of historical growth and cultural evolution can be recognized, very explicitly in the

¹⁴⁰ Richard J. Mouw, 'Dutch Calvinist Philosophical Influences in North America', *Calvin Theological Journal* 24 (1989), No. 1, 93-120: p. 98.

¹⁴¹ Mouw, 'Dutch Calvinist Philosophical Influences in North America', p. 98.

¹⁴² Mouw, 'Dutch Calvinist Philosophical Influences in North America', p. 98.

¹⁴³ Mouw, 'Dutch Calvinist Philosophical Influences in North America', p. 99.

¹⁴⁴ Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Unbelief and Revolution*, edited by Harry van Dyke, Amsterdam: The Groen van Prinsterer Fund 1973 (1847); David S. Caudill, 'Augustine and Calvin: Post-modernism and Pluralism', *Villanova Law Review* 51:2 (2006), 299-309: 301.

Lectures on Calvinism.¹⁴⁵ An important ally of Kuyper was the theologian and pedagogue Herman Bavinck (1854-1921).¹⁴⁶ Kuyper also had an international influence, mainly in the United States and South Africa. In the United States he lectured the famous Stone Lectures (*Lectures on Calvinism*, 1898) and had much influence at Princeton Theological Seminary, especially on the theologian B.B. Warfield (1851-1921), and on the philosopher W.H. Jellema (1893-1982), who, in turn, had an essential influence on Alvin Plantinga, as will be explained in chapter 6. In South Africa he influenced the philosopher H.G. Stoker (1899-1993), who became an ally of Herman Dooyeweerd. The neo-Calvinism as it will be presented below, can roughly be regarded as Kuyper's thought as it influenced Dooyeweerd. Others, like Bavinck, on some point laid other emphases.

4.4 World view

The term 'neo-Calvinism' "refers not so much to a theological system, but to an all-embracing world view (*levens- en wereldbeschouwing*) or *Weltanschauung* which has a bearing on the whole of human life."¹⁴⁷ Therefore, when Kuyper speaks of 'Calvinism' (meaning neo-Calvinism) he does not mean an ecclesiastical or denominational position, but a general world view, a 'life principle'. In his *Lectures on Calvinism* he writes: "[B]eyond [the] sectarian, confessional, and denominational use of the name "Calvinist", it serves moreover, (...) as a *scientific* name, either in a historical, philosophical or political sense. Only in this last-named, strictly scientific sense do I desire to speak to you on Calvinism as an independent general tendency, which from a mother-principle of its own, has developed an independent form both for our *life* and for our *thought* among the nations of Western Europe and North America, and at present even in South Africa." Calvinism is far broader than a narrow confessional domain. There need not only be a Calvinistic theology, but also (among others) a philosophy, which apparently has not been developed yet. Of course Kuyper does not deny the theological roots of Calvinism. "Calvinism is rooted in a form of religion which was peculiarly its own, and from this specific religious consciousness there was developed first a peculiar theology, then a special church-order, and then a given form for political and social life, for the interpretation of the moral world-order, for the relation between nature and grace, between Christianity and the world, between church and state, and finally for art and science ; and *amid* all these life-utterances it remained always the self-same Calvinism, in so far as simultaneously and spontaneously all these developments sprang from its deepest life-principle."¹⁴⁸ When all of life is guided by a religious principle, there is no 'neutral' domain that is not influenced by the world view a person has. Likewise, there can be a Calvinist philosophy, because when philosophy is not Calvinist it will be influenced ('directed') by another world view. A 'neutral' philosophy does not exist. Pre-theoretical world

¹⁴⁵ J. Klapwijk, 'Honderd jaar filosofie aan de Vrije Universiteit', in: M. Van Os & W.J. Wieringa (Red.), *Wetenschap en rekenschap. 1880-1980. Een eeuw wetenschapsbeoefening en wetenschapsbeschouwing aan de Vrije Universiteit*, Kampen: Kok 1980, 528-593: p. 539-542; Abraham Kuyper, *De gemeene gratie*, Vol. I, Kampen: J.H. Kok 1931-1932 (3^e druk), 240-244.

¹⁴⁶ H. Bavinck is not to be confused with his nephew J.H. Bavinck (1895-1964) who was also a professor of theology at the Free University.

¹⁴⁷ Albert Wolters, 'Dutch Neo-Calvinism: Worldview, Philosophy and Rationality', in: H. Hart, J. van der Hoeven & N. Wolterstorff (Eds.), *Rationality in the Calvinian Tradition*, Toronto: UPA 1983, 113-131: 117.

¹⁴⁸ Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, p. 14, 15, 17

view and theoretical philosophy are “like the two foci of an ellipse comprising all the giants of the philosophical tradition”.¹⁴⁹

This has an interesting implication. Unlike large parts of the natural sciences, theology, philosophy and the human sciences are unavoidably ‘perspectival’, according to Kuyper. We simply have to acknowledge that fact and let the different perspectives (Christians, humanists, naturalists etc.) have their own place. Kuyper pleaded for a pluralistic academy, thereby anticipating contemporary ‘postmodern’ conceptions of the academy.¹⁵⁰

4.5 General characterization

The neo-Calvinistic world view can be clarified in a few distinctions.¹⁵¹ There is a distinction between God and creation. ‘Creation’ is what is not God. God and creation cannot be reduced to each other. Closely connected to this is the distinction between ‘heaven’ and ‘earth’. The earth, broadly understood as “the horizon of normal human experience”, is the domain, but also the limit, of human knowledge, scientific investigation and analysis. There is also a distinction between God’s creational ordinances and what is subject to these ordinances. Creation is defined in terms of law. The relationship between God and creation is one of law and subject, both in the natural and cultural realm. In the natural realm natural laws simply exist, while in the cultural and societal realm the law needs implementation. Because of its law-like character creation is a cosmos, an ordered whole. Kuyper speaks of ‘ordinances’ of creation. Within the earthly cosmos there is a developmental potential. Man has a ‘cultural mandate’ to ‘subdue’ the earth and develop the cultural potential that is in it. This ‘opening process’ is to God’s glory. An important aspect of this is that a philosophical investigation of creation is possible. Kuyper, like Calvin, regards science as a gift of God that should be accepted in gratitude.¹⁵² Finally, there is a distinction between ‘structure’ and ‘direction’. ‘Structure’ is the world as it is with all its potential, while ‘direction’ is how the world can be developed, e.g. the world’s creational possibilities. Man can be misdirected by sin or redirected by Christ. Sin and redemption have a cosmic scope (not only an individual one), including nature, culture and society.¹⁵³ Salvation is re-creation, therefore grace does not destroy or supplement nature, but restores it.¹⁵⁴ Regarding ‘direction’ there is the Augustinian battle between two opposing forces: the City of God and the Earthly City, or the antithesis between belief and unbelief. This is also an antithesis between regenerate and unregenerate science.¹⁵⁵

Neo-Calvinism differs from parts of Jansenist Catholicism, Puritanism and ‘experiential’ (*bevindelijk*) Calvinism in not seeing God as a more or less arbitrary, sovereign elector and grace-giver, but as having a law-like relationship with

¹⁴⁹ Wolters, ‘Dutch Neo-Calvinism: Worldview, Philosophy and Rationality’, p. 115.

¹⁵⁰ Nicholas Wolterstorff, ‘The Reformed Tradition’, in: Philip L. Quinn & Charles Taliferro, *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, Malden/Oxford: Blackwell Publishers 2000, 165-170: p. 176-168.

¹⁵¹ Wolters, ‘Dutch Neo-Calvinism: Worldview, Philosophy and Rationality’, p. 120-122.

¹⁵² Calvin, *Institutes*, II.2.15-16

¹⁵³ Wolters, ‘Dutch Neo-Calvinism: Worldview, Philosophy and Rationality’, p. 122.

¹⁵⁴ Wolters, ‘Dutch Neo-Calvinism: Worldview, Philosophy and Rationality’, p. 122.

¹⁵⁵ Wolters, ‘Dutch Neo-Calvinism: Worldview, Philosophy and Rationality’, p. 123.

creation.¹⁵⁶ Accordingly, “[w]here God is viewed as committing himself to the lawful ordering of his creation, there is usually a high regard for rational inquiry on the part of Christians.”¹⁵⁷ Therefore it is interesting to note that “[t]he two confessional communities in which Christian philosophy has flourished are both very law-oriented in their perspectives on creation and redemption: Roman Catholicism and Calvinism.”¹⁵⁸

4.6 Antithesis

An important feature of the neo-Calvinist thought is the doctrine of antithesis. This is Augustine’s doctrine of the two cities supplemented by the Biblical idea of ‘enmity’ between the offspring of the snake and the offspring of the woman (Genesis 3:15). There is a radical contradiction between the power of sin and of Christ. There is no such thing as a profane and a sacred atmosphere in the world, everything belongs to God. Kuypers typical statement is: “There is no area of life of which Christ does not say it’s mine!” From this thought, Kuyper (‘Abraham the Great’) has worked on the formation of Christian organizations in all areas and has ensured the empowerment of the so-called ‘*kleine luyden*’ (‘small people’), the Reformed population of humble origin.

Kuyper distinguishes three main world views in his time: modernism, Romanism and Calvinism.¹⁵⁹ Modernism was the secular thought of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, the unbelief of every system of thought based on something outside faith and revelation. It was the ‘unbelief and revolution’ of which Groen van Prinsterer spoke. Kuyper referred to world views as *religious* perspectives. Against modernism and the ‘principle of the Revolution’ he states: “[T]he principle of [the] Revolution remains thoroughly *anti-Christian*, and has since spread like a cancer, dissolving and undermining all that stood firm and consistent before our Christian faith. There is no doubt then that Christianity is imperilled by great and serious dangers. Two *life systems* are wrestling with one another, in mortal combat.” The hearth of modernism is the autonomous man. “Modernism is bound to build a world of its own from the data of the natural man, and to construct man himself from the data of nature; while, on the other hand, all those who reverently bend the knee to Christ and worship Him as the Son of the living God, and God himself, are bent upon saving the “Christian Heritage.” This is *the* struggle in Europe, this is *the* struggle in America, and this also, is the struggle for principles in which my own country is engaged (...).”¹⁶⁰

The second world view according to Kuyper was Romanism, the scholastic thought of Roman Catholicism, based on a synthesis between Christianity and pagan philosophy. Scholastic thought followed Aristotle’s doctrine of the *eidos* (essential form) of man as reason. Reason is regarded as an autonomous faculty. In Aquinas’s philosophy two spheres are recognized: the natural and the supernatural, or nature and grace. The natural is the place of the natural light of reason, as understood in Aristotle’s philosophy. It is the place of philosophy. The supernatural is the sphere of revelation,

¹⁵⁶ Richard J. Mouw, ‘Dutch Calvinist Philosophical Influences in North America’, *Calvin Theological Journal* 24:1 (1989), 93-120: 100.

¹⁵⁷ Mouw, ‘Dutch Calvinist Philosophical Influences in North America’, p. 101.

¹⁵⁸ Mouw, ‘Dutch Calvinist Philosophical Influences in North America’, p. 101.

¹⁵⁹ Klapwijk, ‘Honderd jaar filosofie aan de Vrije Universiteit’, p. 530-531.

¹⁶⁰ Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, p. 10-11.

of church and theology. Nature is perfected by grace. Natural reason as such is not destructed by sin; it only lost the perfecting grace. In scholastic thought there is not a Christianization of philosophy. Philosophy keeps its independent position in its own sphere, relatively untouched by sin. In the order of nature and grace, philosophy (the natural) is regarded as the servant of theology (the supernatural), or *ancilla theologiae*. Pope Leo XIII's encyclical letter *Aeterni Patris* (1879) strengthened the position of Aquinas' doctrine.¹⁶¹

The different world views are not alternatives, but opposites, or in Kuyper's terminology 'principle against principle'. "If the battle is to be fought with honor and with a hope of victory, then *principle* must be arrayed against *principle*; then it must be felt that in Modernism the vast energy of an all-embracing *life-system* assails us, then also it must be understood that we have to take our stand in a life-system of equally comprehensive and far-reaching power. And this powerful life-system is not to be invented nor formulated by ourselves, but is to be taken and applied as it presents itself in history." What then is this life-system? "When thus taken, I found and confessed, and I still hold, that this manifestation of the Christian principle is given us in *Calvinism*." Kuyper uses Augustinian words when he states: "In Calvinism my heart has found rest. From Calvinism have I drawn the inspiration firmly and resolutely to take my stand in the thick of this great conflict of principles."¹⁶²

4.7 Common grace

Kuyper's doctrine of common grace (*gemene gratie*, *algemene genade*) is clearly a Calvinian legacy.¹⁶³ Kuyper however uses the concept in a much more fixed and technical sense than Calvin does.¹⁶⁴ In his voluminous work *De gemeene gratie* (1902-1905) he sketches both the 'negative' and 'positive' goals of common grace.¹⁶⁵ The negative goal is restraining from sin and maintaining creation, although affected by sin. The positive goal, which plays an important role in Dooyeweerd's philosophy, is the 'opening-process' or 'disclosure' of the creational potential.¹⁶⁶ Elements of scholastic thought can be recognized in Kuyper's thought, especially in the potential dualism between particular grace (*particuliere genade*) and common grace. The relationship between the doctrines of the common grace and the antithesis is not clear.¹⁶⁷

4.8 The heart

The Augustinian notion of the heart also plays a central role in Kuyper's thought. Kuyper speaks of "that point in our consciousness in which our life is still undivided and lies comprehended in its unity,— not in the spreading vines but in the root from which the vines spring. This point, of course, lies in the antithesis between all that is

¹⁶¹ According to Vos the protestant interpretation of Aquinas however can be disputed. See Arvin Vos, *Aquinas, Calvin, and contemporary Protestant thought: A critique of Protestant views on the thought of Thomas Aquinas*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1985.

¹⁶² Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, p. 11-12.

¹⁶³ Klapwijk, 'Honderd jaar filosofie aan de Vrije Universiteit', p. 538-539.

¹⁶⁴ Klapwijk, 'Calvin and Neo-Calvinism on Non-Christian Philosophy', p. 47-49.

¹⁶⁵ Abraham Kuyper, *De gemeene gratie*, 3 Vols., Kampen: J.H. Kok 1902-1905.

¹⁶⁶ Abraham Kuyper, *De gemeene gratie*, Vol. II, Kampen: J.H. Kok 1931-1932 (3rd ed.), 616-623.

¹⁶⁷ J. Klapwijk, 'Antithesis and Common Grace', in: J. Klapwijk, S. Griffioen & G. Groenewoud (Eds.), *Bringing Into Captivity Every Thought*, Lanham: University Press of America 1991, 169-190; Klapwijk, 'Honderd jaar filosofie aan de Vrije Universiteit', p. 539.

finite in our human life and the infinite that lies beyond it.” The heart is a religious point in man. In the heart is the ‘unity of life’, so the whole of life is religious. “Here alone we find the common source from which the different streams of our human life spring and separate themselves. Personally it is our repeated experience that in the depths of our hearts, at the point where we disclose ourselves to the Eternal One, all the rays of our life converge as in one focus, and there alone regain that harmony which we so often and so painfully lose in the stress of daily duty.” The heart is the contact point between God and man. It is the point of unity, that is the unity of man and God in prayer, but also the unity of man’s personal life. Because of the central function of the heart, Kuyper states that “[m]ovements in history (...) which do not spring from this deepest source are always partial and transient, and only those historical acts which arose from these lowest depths of man's personal existence embrace the whole of life and possess the required permanence.”¹⁶⁸ The terminology of the heart is taken over by Dooyeweerd in a specific philosophical way, as will be shown in the next chapter.

4.9 Sphere sovereignty

In 1880 Kuyper opened the Free University with the speech *Soevereiniteit in eigen kring* (Sphere sovereignty).¹⁶⁹ The title of the speech deals with the sociological view that society has a diversity of spheres, which have their own nature and structure, based on God’s creational order. Kuyper distinguished, among others, between marriage, family, company, state, church, school and university. Each of these social spheres has its own role, nature and internal authority structure. The spheres have no control over each other and are responsible only to God about the way they exercise their internal authority. The Free University Kuyper established was called free, because of its separation from church and from state. Each sphere has its own standard, its own ‘law of life’ (*levenswet*). For the state it is justice, for a company the economic standard, for the family it is love. A family can not be managed as a company, while the state can not love. Only when there is a major disorganization in a sphere, the state has to intervene in order to restore sphere sovereignty. Kuyper has not made clear what exactly are the limits of this doctrine. He has not systematically developed it.

The doctrine of sphere sovereignty has great practical resemblance with the principle of subsidiarity as developed in Catholic social thought, especially in the encyclical letter *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931). One theoretical difference is that Catholic thought is based on a hierarchical relationship between the different communities, while Calvinist thought assumes a horizontal relationship. In both views there is a conservative, anti-revolutionary resistance to government intervention in the non-state relationships and a stress on the capacity for self-organizing and self-legislation of these spheres.

Dooyeweerd copied the idea of sphere sovereignty, but has worked it out not only in a social, but also in a philosophical direction. The work of Dooyeweerd as a whole can be regarded as the philosophical elaboration and completion of the neo-Calvinistic thinking. In that sense, it might also be regarded as the completion of the emancipation of the *kleine luyden*.

¹⁶⁸ Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, p. 20.

¹⁶⁹ A. Kuyper, *Soevereiniteit in eigen kring*, Amsterdam: J.H. Kruyt 1880.

4.10 Rationality and philosophy

What is the neo-Calvinistic conception of rationality? A central notion is that rationality is created. This implies two things. First, because it is created it is good as such, while it is wanted by God. Rationality should not be disparaged. Second, because it is created it is subject to the boundary between God and his creation. There is no continuity between God and man on the basis of rationality. Therefore, there is no place for a natural theology. God is not irrational, but rationality is creature.¹⁷⁰ Rationality should not be deified. Still, rationality is not neutral from a religious perspective. The categories of 'structure' and 'direction' can also be applied to it.¹⁷¹ Rationality has to be governed by 'principles' (axioms, presuppositions) underlying it. These principles are of a philosophical nature. The Calvinist philosophy that had to be developed would play a very important role as "the "categorical" discipline *par excellence*".¹⁷² Philosophical principles would be the 'link' between religion and science. "The reformation of scholarship in accordance with reformed principles would depend very largely on the development of a distinctly Calvinistic philosophy."¹⁷³

Neo-Calvinism can be regarded as a brand of Reformed Christianity with a strong interest in philosophical thought. Kuyper has always stressed the importance of a Calvinist philosophy. As has been said, when philosophy is not Calvinist it will be influenced ('directed') by another world view. A 'neutral' philosophy does not exist. That does not mean that a Calvinist philosophy is subjected to a Calvinist theology. Both philosophy and theology need 'Calvinistic treatment', according to Kuyper. The Calvinist Reformation in the Netherlands of course had its own theology, but a Reformed Christian philosophy didn't exist.¹⁷⁴ In his *Lectures on Calvinism* Kuyper writes: "Theology is only one of the many sciences that demand Calvinistic treatment. Philosophy, psychology, aesthetics, jurisprudence, the social sciences, literature, and even the medical and natural sciences, each and all of these, when philosophically conceived, go back to principles, and of necessity even the question must be put with much more penetrating seriousness than hitherto, whether the ontological and anthropological principles that reign supreme in the present method of these sciences are in agreement with the principles of Calvinism, or at variance with their very essence."¹⁷⁵ This language about 'principles' is characteristic for Kuyper.

4.11 Calvinistic Philosophy

According to the neo-Calvinists an integral Calvinistic philosophy had not been developed until then. There had only been 'synthesis philosophy', i.e. a (superficial) combination of Calvinistic thought with pagan and humanistic philosophical elements. For example, there had been the humanistic-Calvinistic Ramist movement in the sixteenth and seventeenth century.¹⁷⁶ In the Netherlands in the seventeenth century there had been mixtures of Calvinism with Aristotelism, humanism, Cartesianism, empiricism and even Spinozism in the thought of Antonius Walaeus, Willem Ames, Paulus Voet and Lambertus van Velthuysen. There also was the

¹⁷⁰ Wolters, 'Dutch Neo-Calvinism: Worldview, Philosophy and Rationality', p. 126-127.

¹⁷¹ Wolters, 'Dutch Neo-Calvinism: Worldview, Philosophy and Rationality', p. 122.

¹⁷² Wolters, 'Dutch Neo-Calvinism: Worldview, Philosophy and Rationality', p. 124.

¹⁷³ Wolters, 'Dutch Neo-Calvinism: Worldview, Philosophy and Rationality', p. 124.

¹⁷⁴ William Young, *Toward a Reformed Philosophy*, Grand Rapids: Piet Hein Publishers 1952, p. 9; Klapwijk, 'Honderd jaar filosofie aan de Vrije Universiteit', p. 529.

¹⁷⁵ Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, p. 194.

¹⁷⁶ Young, *Toward a Reformed Philosophy*, p. 31-32.

Calvinist Scholasticism of Gisbertus Voetius. At the Synod of Dordt (1618/1619), a turning-point in the history of Calvinism, no specific philosophy was privileged. Calvinism in early modernity thus could be combined with completely different philosophical systems, although the Calvinistic confession of Dordt functioned as a “norm and touchstone” for philosophy.¹⁷⁷ The neo-Calvinists however felt the pressing need to develop a fully Calvinistic philosophy. There have been some partly attempts by Kuyper and Bavinck, but also by J. Woltjer (1849-1917) and W. Geesink (1854-1929).¹⁷⁸ There were still many neo-Platonic elements in their philosophical thought, including the ideas of the ‘great chain of being’ and God as the *summum ens* or absolute logos, and the concepts of ‘essence’ and ‘substance’.¹⁷⁹ The challenge to develop an ‘integral’ or ‘intrinsic’ Calvinistic philosophy instead of “logos speculation” was taken up in the work of Herman Dooyeweerd and his brother-in-law Dirk Vollenhoven.¹⁸⁰

4.12 Natural theology

The Reformed tradition in theology and philosophy generally has no place for a natural theology. ‘Generally’, because some nuances need to be made. There were Reformed Princeton theologians in the nineteenth century who left some place for a natural theology. These theologians, like Archibald Alexander, Charles Hodge, A.A. Hodge and B.B. Warfield, were inspired by the Scottish common sense philosophy (especially Thomas Reid). On the other ‘extreme’ there was the influential twentieth-century Reformed theologian Karl Barth who did not only reject natural theology but even insisted that there is no ‘point of contact’ (*Anknüpfungspunkt*) between God and man. Barth regarded philosophical theology as idolatry.¹⁸¹ Neo-Calvinists like Kuyper and Bavinck also reject natural theology, although they accept common grace. Plantinga has a special position in this debate, as will be shown later.

Philosophical theology, understood as philosophical speaking about God, only flourished in the American branch of neo-Calvinism, not in the Dutch and South African one. This can be regarded as a consequence of Dooyeweerd’s neo-Kantian approach to philosophy in which there is no room for an application of human concepts outside our ‘temporal horizon’, as will be shown in the next chapter. Jellema, the ‘father’ of the American branch of neo-Calvinism, had quite another philosophical orientation, namely the philosophy and theology of the Middle Ages. Philosophical theology was of course an important part of it, although it necessarily should have a perspectival character in the Kuyperian sense.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁷ Henri Krop, ‘Der Kalvinismus: Norm und Proberstein der Philosophie’, text lectured at the congress *Reformierte Philosophie in der frühen Neuzeit*, Bretten, Germany, 14-16 May 2009, forthcoming.

¹⁷⁸ Klapwijk, ‘Honderd jaar filosofie aan de Vrije Universiteit’, p. 542-546.

¹⁷⁹ Wolters, ‘Dutch Neo-Calvinism: Worldview, Philosophy and Rationality’, p. 124-126.

¹⁸⁰ Dooyeweerd also was the first to develop a Calvinistic jurisprudence in this line, that was developed further by his student and follower at the Free University of Amsterdam Hendrik van Eikema Hommes (1930-1984).

¹⁸¹ Wolterstorff, ‘The Reformed Tradition’, p. 166.

¹⁸² Wolterstorff, ‘The Reformed Tradition’, p. 168-169.

5 Herman Dooyeweerd

According to the neo-Calvinists an integral Calvinistic philosophy had not been developed until then. I think they were right. The challenge to develop an ‘integral’ or ‘intrinsic’ Calvinistic philosophy was taken up in the work of Herman Dooyeweerd that will be discussed in this chapter. Special attention will be paid to Dooyeweerd’s conception of philosophy and rationality.

5.1 Towards a Reformed philosophy

Herman Dooyeweerd (1894-1977) was educated at Kuyper’s Free University as a jurist, but developed as a philosopher. He became the systematical philosopher of neo-Calvinism. The voluminous work in which his thoughts were systematically worked out in their full width for the first time was *De Wijsbegeerte der Wetsidee* (3 volumes, 1935-1936). Through this work Dooyeweerd’s philosophy has become known as the philosophy of the cosmonomic idea. The philosopher and theologian D.H.Th. Vollenhoven (1892-1978) was Dooyeweerd’s brother-in-law and fellow thinker and one of the organizers of the Calvinistic philosophy movement in the Netherlands. Two other collaborators are worth mentioning who were influenced by Dooyeweerd’s thought (and vice versa). In the first place the South-African philosopher H.G. Stoker (1899-1993) at Potchefstroom University. In the second place the Dutch-American theologian and philosopher Cornelius van Til (1895-1987) at Westminster Theological Seminary.

From 1954 on, an English translation and expansion of *De Wijsbegeerte der Wetsidee* was published under the title *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* (4 volumes, 1953-1958).¹⁸³ The change of title is influenced by the fact that Dooyeweerd in the course of time took some distance from the term ‘Law Idea’ (or ‘Cosmonomic Idea’) and has put other accents in his work. The *New Critique of Theoretical Thought* can be regarded as the ultimate *magnum opus*. As a consequence of this translation and his many lectures abroad Dooyeweerd was internationally known. He held talks and lectures in South Africa, France – where he was introduced by philosophers like Paul Ricoeur and Gabriel Marcel – and many times in the United States (at Harvard and Princeton, among others) and in Canada. He also debated with – than – leading Roman Catholic philosophers like the professors H. Robbers and M.F.J. Marlet.¹⁸⁴

Outside the Netherlands, Dooyeweerd’s philosophy was especially influential in Canada, the United States and South Africa but also in France, Scandinavia, Australia, New Zealand, Japan and Korea.

5.2 Intellectual influences

An important intellectual influence upon Dooyeweerd is of course the legacy of Abraham Kuyper. Kuyper’s legacy in Dooyeweerd’s philosophy consists of the

¹⁸³ Herman Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, 4 Vols., Amsterdam/Philadelphia: Paris/Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company 1953-1958; published again: New York: Edwin Mellen Press 1997.

¹⁸⁴ See, for example M.F.J. Marlet, *Grundlinien der Calvinistischen ‘Philosophie der Gesetzidee’ als christlicher Transzendentalphilosophie*, München: Karl Zink Verlag 1954; H.G. Geertsema, ‘Dooyeweerd in discussie met de rooms-katholieke filosofie’, in: H.G. Geertsema a.o. (Eds.), *Herman Dooyeweerd 1894-1977. Breedte en actualiteit van zijn filosofie*, Kampen: Kok 1994, 228-254.

following points: the conception of the sovereignty of God in all spheres of life, the doctrine of the heart as the central unity of human existence, the doctrine of sphere sovereignty, the doctrine of the antithesis, and the doctrine of the common grace.¹⁸⁵ Besides the anti-revolutionary and Neo-Calvinistic thought of Groen van Prinsterer and Kuyper, there is a more direct influence of Calvin, and in particular of the church father Augustine on Dooyeweerd. Dooyeweerd emphasizes that the Reformer Calvin, for example in his criticism of the Roman Catholic Church, is building on Augustine. When Dooyeweerd opposes the alleged autonomy of human thought, he joins Augustine's idea that knowledge of the cosmos depends on self-knowledge and self-knowledge depends on God.

As has been said, Dooyeweerd was educated as a jurist at the Free University in Amsterdam. Here he was introduced to the neo-Calvinistic thought, although this influence started already in his family and at the *Gereformeerde Gymnasium* in Amsterdam he attended. Besides the general introduction to philosophy that was offered every student at the Free University, Dooyeweerd was never educated as a philosopher. His philosophical knowledge was mainly gained through self-study. He also learned a lot by discussing philosophy with his brother-in-law Vollenhoven.

In addition to Augustine, Calvin and neo-Calvinism there is influence of modern philosophy on Dooyeweerd.¹⁸⁶ Initially he was very impressed by neo-Kantianism and later by Edmund Husserl's phenomenology, but eventually he opposes both currents. However, neo-Kantianism remained his main interlocutor, especially the so-called Marburg school in neo-Kantianism (Herman Cohen, Paul Natorp, Nicolai Hartmann). Dooyeweerd's epistemology is a direct criticism of Kantian rationalism, while under Neo-Kantian influence, epistemology became the 'gateway' to Dooyeweerd's philosophy. Dooyeweerd's epistemology is a critical reflection upon the possibility and foundation of theoretical thought, neo-Kantian style. The terminology that Dooyeweerd used is partly taken from neo-Kantian philosophy. From the neo-Kantians legal philosophers he is arguing with, Stammler, Radbruch and Kelsen are important to mention. Dooyeweerd himself states: "Originally I was strongly under the influence first of the neo-Kantian philosophy, later on of Husserl's phenomenology. The great turning point in my thought was marked by the discovery of the religious root of thought itself, whereby a new light was shed on the failure of all attempts, including my own, to bring about an inner synthesis between the Christian faith and a philosophy which is rooted in faith in the self-sufficiency of human reason."¹⁸⁷

Finally, the philosophy of Dooyeweerd can be understood as a response to the spiritual climate in the twenties and thirties of the twentieth century. After the horrors of the First World War a climate of cultural pessimism arose. Oswald Spengler's *Der*

¹⁸⁵ E.L. Hebden Taylor, *The Christian Philosophy of Law, Politics and the State*, Nutley: The Craig Press 1969, p. 43, 61. See also Herman Dooyeweerd, 'Kuyper's Wetenschapsleer', *Philosophia Reformata* 4 (1939), pp. 193-232.

¹⁸⁶ A hypothesis of the Dooyeweerd scholar J. Glenn Friessen is that Dooyeweerd was also substantially influenced by the catholic philosopher Franz Xaver von Baader (1765-1841). See J. Glenn Friessen, 'The Mystical Dooyeweerd: The relation of his thought to Franz von Baader', *Ars Disputandi* 3 (2003); J. Glenn Friessen, 'Dooyeweerd, Spann, and the Philosophy of Totality', *Philosophia Reformata* 70 (2005), 2-22; Daniël F. M. Strauss: "Intellectual influences upon the reformational philosophy of Dooyeweerd," *Philosophia Reformata* 69 (2004), 151-181.

¹⁸⁷ Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* I, p. V.

Untergang des Abendlandes (1918/1922) and José Ortega y Gasset's *La rebelión de las masas* (1930) are typical for that time, as well as Heidegger's thoughts about the limits of reason. Intellectuals were searching for new foundations for science and culture. Dooyeweerd intended to contribute to the re-launch of philosophical discussion in the Occident.

5.3 Basic ideas

The words Dooyeweerd opens his *magnum opus* with, immediately give a first introduction to several basic ideas in his philosophy. He writes: "If I consider reality as it is given in the naïve pre-theoretical experience, and then confront it with a theoretical analysis, through which reality appears to split up into various modal aspects then the first thing that strikes me, is the original *indissoluble interrelation* among these aspects which are for the first time explicitly distinguished in the theoretical attitude of mind."¹⁸⁸ The key ideas that are introduced are: (1) the distinction between 'naïve', pre-scientific experience of reality versus a scientific attitude, (2) the different aspects (modalities, functions) that can be distinguished in reality and (3) the relationship that exists between all aspects of reality – Dooyeweerd speaks of a 'cosmos' (ordered whole). He distinguishes fifteen of these aspects: "An indissoluble inner coherence binds the numerical to the spatial aspect, the latter to the aspect of mathematical movement, the aspect of movement to that of physical energy, which itself is the necessary basis of the aspect of organic life. The aspect of organic life has an inner connection with that of physical feeling, the latter refers in its logical anticipation (the feeling of logical correctness or incorrectness) to the analytical-logical aspect. This in turn is connected with the historical, the linguistic, the aspect of social intercourse, the economic, the aesthetic, the jural, the moral aspect and that of faith. In this inter-modal cosmic coherence no single aspect stands by itself; every-one refers within and beyond itself to all the others."¹⁸⁹ Reality is not a chaos, but an ordered and coherent whole, a cosmic order in which the different aspects of reality refer to each other in an indissoluble interrelation.

5.4 Modal aspects

Dooyeweerd's doctrine of the so-called 'modalities' or 'modal aspects' has been mentioned the 'jewel' of his philosophy. This is an original working-out of Kuypers doctrine of sphere sovereignty. For Kuypers it was a social principle, but for Dooyeweerd it became a philosophical starting point. Just like Kuypers distinguished different social spheres and their own sovereign laws, Dooyeweerd distinguishes various modal aspects of reality that cannot be reduced to each other. These aspects are ways of experience of reality, ways of being, also called 'modalities' or 'modal aspects'. The sphere sovereignty becomes a 'cosmological principle', i.e. the structuring principle for the order in reality. In philosophical terms, Dooyeweerd cosmology can be called an ontology and the aspects ontic modes.

Dooyeweerd distinguishes fifteen modal aspects that are not reducible to each other and have their own structures and laws. The aspects are no invisible metaphysical essences, but a temporal order, law-like 'frameworks'. The aspects are the ways in which things in the world exist (modes of being), and in which we can experience them (experiential modes). There is coherence between our channels of knowledge

¹⁸⁸ Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* I, p. 3.

¹⁸⁹ Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* I, p. 3.

(the human functions) and the structure of the world. Man ‘functions’ in all the aspects.

Dooyeweerd’s theory of modal aspects outlines the characterization and definition of the aspects, their order and the references. Each aspect has a so-called ‘meaning kernel’ (*zinkern*) that characterizes the specific nature of the aspect. This specific nature of an aspect has as a consequence that the meaning kernel cannot be defined in terms of another aspect. A meaning kernel can only be approached intuitively. For example, the legal aspect of reality cannot be reduced to the linguistic, social, economic or moral aspect. Simply put: in reality there is something we call ‘law’ or ‘right’ or ‘justice’, which has something to do with language, social order and the like, but does not coincide with these aspects and cannot be reduced to them. The legal aspect is a unique aspect with its own meaning kernel which we do not exactly understand but intuitively know about. So it is with the other aspects.

The aspects (and meaning kernels) are: (1) the quantitative aspect (amount), (2) the spatial aspect (space or extent), (3) the kinematic aspect (movement), (4) the physical aspect (cause and effect), (5) the biotic/organic aspect (life processes), (6) the sensitive/psychical aspect (feeling, the sensitive), (7) the logical-analytical aspect (analytical distinction), (8) the cultural-historical/formative aspect (history, development, culture) (9) the lingual aspect (symbolic meaning), (10) the social aspect (social interaction), (11) the economic aspect (scarcity, savings), (12) the aesthetic aspect (harmony, form) (13) the legal/judicial aspect (rights, retaliation), (14) the ethical/moral aspect (moral love) and (15) faith/pistic aspect (belief). As has been said, man functions in all the aspects, unlike a stone, a flower or an animal.

5.5 Modal references

The modal aspects have their own modal laws (spheres of law). The aspects until the logical-analytical aspect are called the *natural side* and are independent of human design. The laws of nature simply work. Think about the laws of physics and chemical processes. The aspects from the logical-analytical aspect upward however are standards, an ‘ought’. Thus, there are rules of logic, language standards, aesthetic laws, but also moral standards. These laws are not a matter of taste and personal preference, but are created normative structures in the world. These laws require actualization, which means they must be recognized and realized by man. They can be violated, but their effect is not eliminated by that. This second category of laws is called the *culture side*.

The modal aspects are in a certain order, in the sense that every aspect presupposes the preceding aspect, while it is presupposed by the subsequent aspects. There is no feeling without life, but there is life without feeling and no economy without social interaction, but there is social interaction without economy. Dooyeweerd speaks of *earlier* and *later* aspects, because in his view time is not regarded as a modal aspect, but cosmic time penetrates all modal aspects. The time-factor is reflected in every aspect in its own way.¹⁹⁰ The sequence in modal aspects is not a hierarchy with ‘higher’ and ‘lower’ modal aspects. The sequence only indicates that later modal aspects presuppose earlier ones.

¹⁹⁰ This point has led to much debate among Dooyeweerd’s allies. I will not discuss it into detail.

The modal aspects thus refer to each other. Dooyeweerd distinguishes between anticipations (reference to subsequent aspects) and retrocipations (references to previous aspects). Thus, the term ‘legal scope’ retrocipates from the legal to the (previous) spatial aspect. ‘Legal guilt’ is an anticipation to the (subsequent) moral aspect. The latter doctrine is only found in developed legal systems, in which the legal aspect has ‘opened up’ to the moral aspect. The *opening process* (disclosure, unlocking) is the developing of a modal aspect into a normative direction. It is the dynamic factor in Dooyeweerd’s theory of modal aspects. Previous aspects found later ones, while later aspects disclose earlier ones. For example, there is no love (the moral aspect) without law (the legal aspect), but love brings law to a higher level, without abolishing it. Together, the anticipations and retrocipations are called the ‘analogies’ or ‘analogical structure moments’ or ‘references’.

5.6 Meaning

Reality is not sufficient to itself, i.e. it does not exist in isolation. The whole of reality, in all its modal aspects, refers to and is an expression of its origin. Dooyeweerd writes: “This universal character of *referring* and *expressing*, which is proper to our entire created cosmos, stamps created reality as *meaning*, in accordance with its dependent non-self-sufficient nature. *Meaning* is the *being* of all that has been *created* and the nature even of our selfhood. It has a *religious root* and a *divine origin*.”¹⁹¹ In this sense we can say that reality does not *have* a meaning (*zin*), but *is* meaning (i.e. referring). Reality is referral and expression. It is a meaningful whole. It is noteworthy that according to Dooyeweerd creation actually does not have *being* itself, but only *meaning*, that is: non-self-sufficient referring and expressing. At this point Plantinga criticizes Dooyeweerd’s somewhat fuzzy distinction, as will extensively be discussed in par. 7.3.¹⁹²

Dooyeweerd does not present his theory of modal aspects as a closed system. He wants to remain consistent with current scientific knowledge and does not exclude the discovery of new modal aspects or the reduction of one aspect to the other. Neither does he exclude a different sequence of the aspects. As has been sketched, the modal aspects concern the ways of being, the ‘how’ of things. Besides that Dooyeweerd has developed a theory of individuality structures (typical structures, entities), i.e. things, processes, events and social relations, the ‘what’ of things. On the basis of this theory Dooyeweerd developed a social and legal philosophy.¹⁹³ I will leave this theory aside, because it is not essential to understand Dooyeweerd’s conception of philosophy.

5.7 Anti-reductionism

An important distinction Dooyeweerd makes is between, on the one side, the ‘naïve’ pre-scientific thought and experience, and, on the other side, scientific or theoretical thought. Theoretical (scientific) thought is, according to Dooyeweerd, placing the logical-analytical function (reason) against a different aspect of reality (a *Gegenstand*). This aspect is analyzed (cut into pieces, laid apart) and abstracted. Biologists analyze the biotic aspect, psychologists the sensitive aspect and economists the economic aspect. The logical-analytical aspect however is itself an aspect of reality. People can argue (logical-analytic function), but also feel (sensitive function),

¹⁹¹ Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* I, p. 4.

¹⁹² Alvin Plantinga, ‘Dooyeweerd on Meaning and Being’, *Reformed Journal* 8 (Oct. 1958), 10-15.

¹⁹³ See for example Herman Dooyeweerd, *A Christian Theory of Social Institutions*, La Jolla: The Herman Dooyeweerd Foundation 1986.

have an aesthetic experience (aesthetic function), have a legal opinion (legal function), have a moral consideration (moral function) and have a religious experience (belief function). Being human therefore takes place in all these aspects. In other words: human beings have different functions. The logical-analytic function is not the highest one, because the sequence in modal aspects is not a hierarchy. Human reason is not predominant.

Dooyeweerd opposes the autonomous self-complacency of human reason, as he finds it among many modern philosophers. He also disputes the idea that one science would be the most fundamental. This would be making one aspect of reality absolute, at the expense of other aspects. Such absolutism leads to an 'ism' as psychologism, physicalism, historicism or economism. For example, there are more aspects of reality than the aspects that are 'measurable' in a (quasi-)scientific method. Dooyeweerd's philosophy is anti-reductionist.

5.8 Ground motives

Like Groen van Prinsterer pointed at the religious motive behind every thought and Kuyper referred to world views as *religious* perspectives, Dooyeweerd coined the term 'ground motive' (*grondmotief*) or 'cosmomic idea' (*wetsidee*).¹⁹⁴ People do not only live in a social community with others, but also in a thinking community. According to Dooyeweerd four so-called ground motives or ground themes can be found in Western thought through the centuries. The ground motives answer the questions of consistency, unity and origin of reality. First there is the Greek motive of form (idea) and matter. Then the scholastic, medieval ground motive of nature and grace (super nature), based on a synthesis between Greek and Christian thought. Furthermore, the humanistic ground motive of nature (control) and freedom, i.e. the ideals of science and personality. This is the thought of modern times (from Hobbes and Descartes). In these three ground motives a constant tension exists between the two poles. For example, in the humanistic ground motive a tension exists between on the one side freedom and autonomy and on the other side the deterministic laws of nature and control. According to Dooyeweerd, such a tension is not present in the fourth ground motive, the Christian ground motive of creation, sin and salvation.

5.9 The religious root of thought

Every thought has its roots in a conception of coherence, unity and origin of reality and human experience. Dooyeweerd wants to reveal the religious 'prejudice' in every thought. In his early work Dooyeweerd called this religious principle the 'idea of law' (or cosmomic idea). Later on he speaks of a 'transcendental ground idea'. All thought is aimed at a 'totality of meaning' (*zintotaliteit*), associated with the origin of reality. All thought therefore has a religious core. Besides, what is split up by science (analysis) should also be merged (synthesis). In synthesis ideas about cohesion, unity and origin of reality necessarily play a role. The question of the origin of reality for Dooyeweerd is a deeply religious question.

Initially the main focus in Dooyeweerd thought was on an analysis of reality with the help of his theories of modal aspects and entities. His conception of philosophy was based on the necessary religious ground-motive behind and under every philosophy, answering the question of the origin of the cosmos. Through the years a shift in

¹⁹⁴ Herman Dooyeweerd, *Roots of Western Culture: Pagan, Secular, and Christian Options*, Mark vander Vennen & Bernard Zylstra (Eds.), Toronto: Wedge Publishing Foundation 1979, p. 9.

emphasis has taken place. This becomes clear in the title of the translation of his *magnum opus*. Instead of a reference to the cosmological idea the title is *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*. The title deliberately recalls the work of Immanuel Kant. In his later work Dooyeweerd emphasized the necessary religious nature of theoretical thought as such. The theory that has a central place in the later work is the so-called transcendental critique of theoretical thought. There is also a beginning of a theory about the human person, but Dooyeweerd has not developed it any further, so I will leave it aside.

5.10 Transcendental critique

Dooyeweerd practices a transcendental critique of theoretical thought, i.e. a study of the possibility conditions of human thought, particularly of scientific knowledge.¹⁹⁵ He wants to make a “critical inquiry into the universally valid conditions which alone make theoretical thought possible, and which are required by the immanent structure of this thought itself.”¹⁹⁶ With his transcendental critique Dooyeweerd wants to reveal the religious starting point of any philosophy. From this openness a philosophical discussion can take place on the basis of shared beliefs. Of course one can oppose Dooyeweerd’s thought from the idea that philosophy can not have a religious basis, because in that case it will not be neutral anymore. This alleged neutrality of thought is however one of the dogmas of much Enlightenment Philosophy. Dooyeweerd in turn suggests that all philosophical thought is based on a religious prejudice, because it regards thought as either self-sufficient or non self-sufficient and in need of a ‘transcendent’ starting point. In both cases a religious choice is involved, as will be discussed below. ‘Religious’ must be understood in a broad sense and includes atheist and agnostic positions.

How does man relate to the aspects of reality? Man participates (‘functions’) in all aspects of reality and (potentially) in all societal relationships, but he can not be identified with one of them. “The coherence of all the modal aspects of our cosmos *finds its expression in each* of them, and also *points beyond* its own limits toward a central totality, which in its turn is expressed in this coherence. Our ego expresses itself as a totality in the coherence of all its functions within all the modal aspects of cosmic reality.”¹⁹⁷ This ‘I’ (ego) of man makes it possible to practice science, namely by focusing the logical-analytical function on a modal aspect, thus forming an antithetical *Gegenstand*-relation. This ‘I’ however is not reducible to logical analysis. It is also called the *heart* by Dooyeweerd, the center of human existence, the religious core. Through the heart man reflects on himself. The heart is the Archimedean point from which the diversity of the world of experience is brought to a unity. Dooyeweerd states: “The great turning point in my thought was marked by the discovery of the religious root of thought itself, whereby a new light was shed on the failure of all attempts, including my own, to bring about an inner synthesis between the Christian faith and a philosophy which is rooted in faith in the self-sufficiency of human reason.

195 For the first time in: H. Dooyeweerd, ‘De Transcendentale critiek van het wijsgerig denken. Een bijdrage tot overwinning van het wetenschappelijk exclusivisme der richtingen’, *Synthese* 4 (1939), No. 1, 314-339; later also in Herman Dooyeweerd, *Transcendental Problems of Philosophical Thought. An Inquiry into the Transcendental Conditions of Philosophy*, Eerdmans: Grand Rapids 1948, a preliminary study for *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*.

¹⁹⁶ Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* I, p. 37.

¹⁹⁷ Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* I, p. 3-4.

I came to understand the central significance of the “heart”, repeatedly proclaimed by Holy Scripture to be the religious root of human existence.”¹⁹⁸

Because of its direction at the origin of meaning the thinking ego of the philosopher (the ‘I’ that thinks) cannot stay untouched. A philosopher cannot do without self-reflection. The ‘know thyself’ (*gnôthi seauthon*) is a portal to philosophy.¹⁹⁹ How is this self-knowledge possible? Not through the logical-analytical function of man, because the ‘I’ transcends the logical-analytical modal function. Therefore self-knowledge cannot be theoretical. Only through knowledge of God man can have a real understanding of himself. This is where the thought of Augustine and Calvin is brought to mind. Dooyeweerd: “In an unsurpassed manner Calvin expounded in his *Institutio* the authentic Christian conception of Augustine which made all knowledge of the cosmos dependent upon self-knowledge, and made our self-knowledge dependent upon our knowledge of God.”²⁰⁰ Theoretical truth (i.e. philosophy and science) is limited and relativized by the temporal horizon. It is “in every respect dependent on the full super-temporal Truth”, therefore “[w]e cannot truthfully know the cosmos outside of the true knowledge of God.”²⁰¹

The Kantian elements in the transcendental critique will be discussed below. Through his transcendental critique Dooyeweerd criticized the Enlightenment for its ‘prejudice against prejudice’.²⁰² Dooyeweerd’s thought can in some way also be regarded as an anticipation of late-twentieth-century postmodern critiques of the concept of rationalism in Enlightenment-philosophy.²⁰³

5.11 Philosophy

It is the task of philosophy to study the totality of meaning. According to Dooyeweerd “philosophy should furnish us with a theoretical insight into the inter-modal coherence of all the aspects of the temporal world. Philosophy should make us aware, that this coherence is a coherence of *meaning that refers to a totality*.” This coherence of meaning gives man his place in the totality: “We have been fitted into this coherence of meaning with all our modal functions, which include both the so-called “natural” and the so-called “spiritual”. Philosophy must direct the theoretical view of totality over our cosmos and, within the limits of its possibility, answer the question, “Wie alles sich zum Ganzen webt”. Philosophical thought (...) is theoretical thought directed to the *totality of meaning* of our temporal cosmos.”²⁰⁴ Christian philosophy differs from a Christian world view because its view of totality is theoretical instead of pre-theoretical, although in the root they are united.²⁰⁵

Meaning cannot be self-sufficient, but has to be directed at an origin (*ârchè*), therefore “all genuine philosophical thought has (...) started as thought that was directed toward the origin of our cosmos.”²⁰⁶ All philosophical thought has this tendency

¹⁹⁸ Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* I, p. V.

¹⁹⁹ Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* I, p. 5.

²⁰⁰ Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* I, p. 196-197.

²⁰¹ Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* II, p. 561.

²⁰² John Bolt, ‘Herman Dooyeweerd’, in: Edward Graig (Ed.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Volume 3, London: Routledge 1998, p. 113-114.

²⁰³ Bolt, ‘Herman Dooyeweerd’, p. 113-114.

²⁰⁴ Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* I, p. 4.

²⁰⁵ Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* I, p. 128.

²⁰⁶ Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* I, p. 9.

towards the origin. This tendency is a restless seeking toward meaning.²⁰⁷ This restless seeking recalls Augustine's words that have been cited before: "[O]ur heart cannot be quieted till it may find repose in thee."

Because philosophy is directed at the totality of meaning, it needs a transcendent starting point, i.e. a platform ('watchtower' or 'helicopter-view') outside of the diversity of reality that is studied. This point cannot be found in reality or in philosophy itself. It has to stand above the modalities of reality. Dooyeweerd calls this point the 'Archimedean point' of philosophy after Archimedes who thought he could lift the earth if he could only have a fixed point in the universe. The relation to the Archimedean point is the distinguishing feature of every philosophy. Dooyeweerd calls a philosophy that wants to explain the origin and meaning of reality only by thought itself an immanence-philosophy. "[I]t rejects every support that is found in something which transcends the immanent boundaries of theoretic thought, as such."²⁰⁸

An important distinction in Dooyeweerd's philosophy is between *transcendent* and *transcendental* elements. He writes: "The religious pre-supposition of philosophy, toward which the ground-Idea as transcendental foundation of philosophy is directed in its contents, toward which as Idea it *points*, is of a *transcendent* nature, whereas philosophic thought is itself of a *transcendental* character."²⁰⁹ The transcendent and transcendental conditions of philosophy are no 'either-or'. Philosophy pre-supposes the transcendent condition as a starting-point for its transcendental direction. It cannot find this starting-point in itself.²¹⁰

5.12 The boundary between God and cosmos

Philosophy, although it has a transcendent religious pre-supposition (the Archimedean point), is limited to our temporal horizon. "The choice of the Archimedean point necessarily crosses the boundary line of the temporal coherence of our world. Philosophy itself, *though directed* by its ground-Idea, remains within this boundary line, *because it is possible only by virtue of the temporal order of the world.*"²¹¹ Philosophy is made possible by and bound to the temporal order. It also has to limit itself to this temporal order, otherwise it necessarily falls into speculative metaphysics that "[i]n all its varieties (...) characteristically seeks the absolute and supra-temporal within the cosmic time-order through the absolutizing of special modes of meaning."²¹² The most common form of absolutizing perhaps, especially in philosophy, is the absolutizing of the theoretical-logical function of thought. "A speculative metaphysical character also belongs to the position that the laws of special modal aspects of our cosmos (e.g. laws of number, space, logic, morality, aesthetics) possess absolute universal validity, even for God."²¹³ God can never be the ultimate cause in a modal series – such as a logic, moral or mechanical one – of cause, effect and necessity, because he is on the other side of the boundary between Creator and

²⁰⁷ Yong-Joon Choi, *Dialogue and Antithesis. A Philosophical Study on the Significance of Herman Dooyeweerd's Transcendental Critique*, Diss. Potchefstroom 2000, p. 46-47; Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* I, p. 11.

²⁰⁸ Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* I, p. 12.

²⁰⁹ Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* I, p. 88.

²¹⁰ Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* I, p. 88.

²¹¹ Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* I, p. 88.

²¹² Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* I, p. 92.

²¹³ Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* I, p. 92.

creation.²¹⁴ Besides, man cannot reach beyond his modal horizon. “The horizon of the full actual reality overarches every modal horizon. For this very reason actual reality cannot be a synthetic category. It cannot be grasped in a concept at all; it can only be approached in an Idea.” Categories like ‘possibility’ and ‘necessity’ can only function as limiting concepts, i.e. as transcendental Ideas. According to Dooyeweerd “[t]hese Ideas become speculative-metaphysical as soon as they absolutize the horizon of human experience into an eternal rational order founded in the Divine essence, and to which the sovereign God is supposed to be bound.”²¹⁵ The transcendental Ideas like ‘possibility’ and ‘necessity’ are bound to the human horizon, thus they are meaning (i.e. creation), not Divine Being.²¹⁶ In the next chapter we will see that Plantinga thinks very different about this.

The speculative theories, whether Platonic, phenomenological, traditional metaphysical – the immortal soul – or otherwise, are consequently *uncritical* according to Dooyeweerd, because they do not “appreciate the immanent limits of philosophical thought.”²¹⁷ They absolutize modal aspects “abstracted by theoretical thought from the temporal coherence of meaning”, thereby disturbing the absolutized ‘realm of meaning’.²¹⁸ God has set limits to human reason in His temporal world-order, therefore philosophy can only *point* beyond and above the boundary between God and cosmos to what it pre-supposes. “Its task, worthy of God’s human creation, is great; yet it is modest and does not elevate human reason to the throne of God.”

There is no place for metaphysics in Dooyeweerd’s philosophy, because there can be no transgression of the boundary between God and cosmos from the created cosmos. “As sovereign Origin, God is not *subjected* to the law. On the contrary this *subjectedness* is the very characteristic of all that which has been created, the existence of which is limited and determined by the law.”²¹⁹ In other words: the law is the universal boundary of the *Being* of God and the *meaning* – the non-self-sufficient referring and expressing – of his creation.²²⁰ Because God is not subjected to the law, we should not speculate about his characteristics, insofar they have not been revealed to us in Scripture. Man as a creature is not capable of rising to God through thinking. Philosophy and theology are limited to the created reality. Man should not and cannot intrude upon the *essentiae Dei*, but should listen to the revelation in the Word of God.²²¹ God’s majesty is a “deep mystery”. Here Dooyeweerd follows Calvin very closely, warning against *vacua et meteorica speculatio*.²²²

Dooyeweerd’s position regarding God’s laws for the cosmos seems to be a voluntaristic one. The modal laws, including the laws of logic, apply to the created reality, but not to the Creator. God is not arbitrary however. Dooyeweerd quotes Calvin, writing: *Deus legibus solutus est, sed non exlex*. According to Dooyeweerd Calvin intended “to refute any notion that God’s sovereignty is despotic

²¹⁴ Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* I, p. 92.

²¹⁵ Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* II, p. 551.

²¹⁶ Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* II, p. 551.

²¹⁷ Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* II, p. 40.

²¹⁸ Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* I, p. 93.

²¹⁹ Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* I, p. 100, footnote 1.

²²⁰ Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* I, p. 99, 517.

²²¹ Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* I, p. 517.

²²² Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* I, p. 517.

arbitrariness.”²²³ Still, Dooyeweerd’s position on this point remains somewhat unclear.²²⁴ Perhaps it can even be regarded as problematic, as we will see when comparing Dooyeweerd and Plantinga in chapter 7.²²⁵

Dooyeweerd wants to stay close to Augustine and Calvin when natural theology is concerned. “Nature is in its root corrupted by the fall, and is only restored or (as Calvin more pregnantly states) “renewed” by God’s grace in Jesus Christ. This was also Augustine’s conception. The Bible does not permit any view of nature, in distinction to grace, in which human reason in its apostasy from God, becomes the main stay of a “*philosophia et theologia naturalis*”.”²²⁶ Dooyeweerd stresses that Calvin rejected the “speculative natural theology”. Instead of reason Dooyeweerd states that the heart, the religious root of our entire existence, is the place of truth. Only through grace reason can function properly.

5.13 Philosophy and theology

Dooyeweerd develops a Christian philosophy, not a theology. Neither does his philosophy imply Biblicism. Although philosophy has a religious root – whatever this root is – it is philosophy. Theology is a science, thus theoretical knowledge. Theology can not be equated with the religious roots of all knowledge, because self-knowledge and true knowledge of God are non-theoretical, i.e. pre-scientific. Philosophy, as the study of the cosmos, aimed at totality, and theology, as the scholarship of the faith-aspect of temporal reality however have the same religious roots as all the sciences have.²²⁷ Dooyeweerd sharply distinguishes between faith and religion. Faith is concerned in the modal aspect of faith and is studied in theology; religion is the root of all thought. The religious origin of reality works through all modal aspects and therefore in all scientific and scholarly fields, not only in theology. Interestingly, Dooyeweerd’s conception of philosophy and theology suggests that theology is in a certain way subordinate to philosophy, because it is philosophy that shows theology its proper place by demarcating the modal aspect of faith. Theology more or less becomes the discipline of religious studies, using the methodology of the social sciences to study the phenomenon of religion. One can wonder however, whether faith and religion can be distinguished the way Dooyeweerd tries to do.

Dooyeweerd opposes a so-called ‘immanence philosophy’, that is a philosophy that explains the origin and meaning of reality only by thinking itself. “In regard to the Archimedean point of philosophy, it must cling tightly to the immanence-standpoint. Consequently it rejects every support that is found in something which transcends the immanent boundaries of theoretic thought, as such.”²²⁸ As has been explained, according to Dooyeweerd all philosophical thought starts from a religious basis, because it always in some manner refers to the totality of meaning. For the Christian philosopher Dooyeweerd, philosophy cannot be anything else but Christian

²²³ Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* I, p. 101, footnote.

²²⁴ R. van Woudenberg, ‘Theorie van het kennen’, in: René van Woudenberg e.a., *Kennis en werkelijkheid. Tweede inleiding tot een christelijke filosofie*, Amsterdam: Buijten & Schipperheijn 1996, 21-85: p. 74.

²²⁵ See generally Eduardo J. Echeverria, ‘Fides et Ratio. The Catholic and the Calvinist: Prospects for Rapprochement’, *Philosophia Reformata* 65 (2000), 72-104.

²²⁶ Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* I, p. 516.

²²⁷ William Young, ‘Herman Dooyeweerd’, in: Philp Edcumbe Hughes (Ed.), *Creative Minds in Contemporary Theology*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1966, 270-301: p. 285-293.

²²⁸ Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* I, p. 12.

philosophy, that is a radical *reformation* (Christianization) of philosophical thought, reformation of philosophy in its roots. Here the meaning of ‘reformational philosophy’ becomes clear. Dooyeweerd himself in the course of time preferred to characterize his philosophy as ‘ecumenical-Christian’ or ‘reformational’ instead of ‘Calvinistic’.

5.14 Rationality

Concerning rationality, Dooyeweerd basically stays close to Calvin and neo-Calvinism. Rationality is limited to creation, i.e. the earthly cosmos. It is not religiously neutral. Reason should not be depreciated, but put in its right place.²²⁹ There are however some original new elements in Dooyeweerd’s thought. In the first place, rationality is regarded as a modal aspect, the logical-analytical one. As previously stated, the logical-analytical function of man is only one function, not the highest one. Rational analysis is not higher than feeling, aesthetic experience or religious belief. Human reason is not predominant. Another new element in Dooyeweerd’s conception of rationality is the idea of the opening process, which is also applied to human rationality. Cultural development discloses possibilities that are latent and inherent in man’s rational function. An example is the development of non-Aristotelian logic.²³⁰

What are the effects of sin? Dooyeweerd uses the example of logic, stating that the “logical laws of thought or the modal structural law of the logical aspect are not affected by sin.”²³¹ It is only in the subjective activity of thought that apostasy comes clear. For example, man wants to set apart the logical aspect from its coherent order with the other modal aspects, thereby not appreciating the boundaries of the modal aspects.²³² The meaning (i.e. creation) is absolutized to the level of God’s Being.²³³ At this point it is relevant to note that Dooyeweerd adopts Kuyper’s view of common grace, but warns against a misconception of it that perhaps Kuyper himself was not free from: common grace according to Dooyeweerd is God’s conservation of the fallen cosmos, but it does not create an autonomous sphere for human thought.²³⁴

Dooyeweerd quite easily rejects the existence of a cleft between faith and reason, faith and science. According to him the supposed problem between philosophy and the Christian faith only arose when Christianity came under the influence of Greek philosophical metaphysics. When reason became the ‘concentration-point’ of human existence, “it blocked the way to an intrinsic penetration of philosophy by the Biblical ground-motive.”²³⁵ Alleged problems as primacy of the will or intellect in the *essential Dei* or the individual immortality of the soul can be regarded as pseudo-problems. The real problem is the conflict between the different religious presuppositions in the ground-motives.

²²⁹ Albert Wolters, ‘Dutch Neo-Calvinism: Worldview, Philosophy and Rationality’, in: H. Hart, J. van der Hoeven & N. Wolterstorff (Eds.), *Rationality in the Calvinian Tradition*, Toronto: UPA 1983, 113-131: 127.

²³⁰ Wolters, ‘Dutch Neo-Calvinism: Worldview, Philosophy and Rationality’, p. 128.

²³¹ Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought I*, p. 100.

²³² Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought I*, p. 101.

²³³ Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought I*, p. 100.

²³⁴ Young, ‘Herman Dooyeweerd’, p. 290.

²³⁵ Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought I*, p. 509.

5.15 Dooyeweerd and Kant

Dooyeweerd's transcendental criticism can be regarded as a "radicalization of Kant's transcendental approach to epistemology".²³⁶ Dooyeweerd criticizes Kant's immanence-philosophy in showing that the theoretical philosophical thought is not autonomous but determined by religious prejudices. Although Dooyeweerd tries to shift attention from the epistemological subject-object relationship to the ontological ('cosmological') law-subject relationship – this ontological turn is quite un-Kantian – his philosophy is still fundamentally influenced by Kant's. Furthermore, Dooyeweerd's philosophical discussion partners are to a large extent modern and contemporary German philosophers as Kant, Fichte, Rickert, Dilthey, Husserl, Scheler and Cassirer.

According to Dooyeweerd, there must be some truth in both the classical *ontological* view of reality (Plato, Aristotle) as well as in the modern *epistemological* view (Kant, Husserl, Scheler).²³⁷ Dooyeweerd writes (using a lot of *italic*): "There is an *a priori* complex in the *cosmological* sense of the *structural horizon of human experience*. This *a priori* as such has the character of a *law*. And there is also a *merely subjective a priori complex* in the *epistemological sense of the subjective a priori insight into that horizon*." These ontological and epistemological elements can be called the structural and the subjective a priori. They are related as the law-side and the subject-side of a priori human knowledge. At the epistemological, subjective side the categories of 'true' and 'false' apply, but only in the horizon of human experience. The subjective a priori can never be an autonomous, self-sufficient foundation for truth.²³⁸

According to Dooyeweerd, "all human experience is bound to some horizon which makes this experience possible", but this horizon of experience "is not a subjective cadre within which reality appears to us only in a phenomenal shape (determined by a supposedly creative synthesis) and behind which the fundamentally inexperienceable dimensions of some "thing in itself" ("*Ding an sich*") are situated."²³⁹ Dooyeweerd warns explicitly against a transcendental idealistic interpretation of his epistemology. "It is rather the a priori meaning-structure of our cosmos itself in its dependence on the central religious sphere of the creation, and in subjection to the Divine Origin of all things. The horizon of human experience is that of our 'earthly' cosmos as it is given in the Divine order of creation." Because the world is created and is in a concentric relation to the religious root of human existence, there cannot exist something like a "world in itself" that is not structured by the modal aspects of reality and the corresponding human modal functions.²⁴⁰ The horizon of human experience is "a truly super-individual and law-conformable cadre which is constant, in contrast with all change in actual subjective experience."²⁴¹ Experience is not formed by a Kantian transcendental subject, but by an interaction between the modal structure of reality and the corresponding human modal functions. The horizon of experience is not created by the subject himself. It is not the sovereign "transcendental subject" that structures the experience himself. Instead, according to Dooyeweerd, "[t]he modal

²³⁶ Jong Doo Kim, *Wissen und Glauben bei I. Kant und H. Dooyeweerd. Der Kantische Dualismus und Dooyeweerds Versuch zu seiner Überwindung*, special issue of *Philosophia Reformata* 48 (1983), nr. 2, p. 127.

²³⁷ Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought II*, p. 547.

²³⁸ Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought II*, p. 548.

²³⁹ Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought II*, p. 548.

²⁴⁰ Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought II*, p. 549.

²⁴¹ Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought II*, p. 548.

structure of the law-spheres abstracted in the theoretical synthesis of meaning must be carefully read from the horizon of the full temporal reality created by God.”²⁴²

5.16 Religion and truth

Our horizon of experience “is not *a priori* in the Kantian sense of *non-empirical*.”²⁴³ We intuitively have to know about this horizon in order to be able to philosophically reflect on it. “It belongs implicitly to human experience in so far as it constitutes its *a priori* determining element. This implicit experience is only made explicit in the transcendental and in the radical religious self-reflection, of which the former is based upon the intuitive insight into the cosmic order of time.”²⁴⁴ In Dooyeweerd’s transcendental analysis of human experience the religious element plays a central role. “In a transcendent sense the horizon enclosing all human experience is formed by the communal structure of the religious root of human existence. Our selfhood which experiences, is *under* the law, is a *subject, limited* and *determined* by the law in its central religious sense.” Because we are creature we cannot detach our selfhood from our religious root. “According to the cosmic order of the creation all human experience is at bottom religiously determined, in either its direction to God or in apostate direction. In this sense we can speak of the necessary religious *a priori* of all human experience”.

From this analysis Dooyeweerd develops a unique conception of truth. The classical and Thomistic definition of truth as *adaequatio intellectus et rei* according to Dooyeweerd is not meaningless, but it is limited to the horizon of human experience. The fullness of meaning of truth “cannot be understood from the absolutized (and therefore misinterpreted) theoretical-synthetical horizon.” Instead, the religious fullness of Truth liberates the human horizon. “The transcendent, religious fullness of Truth, which alone makes all truth within the temporal horizon possible, does not concern an abstract theoretical function of thought. It is concerned with our full selfhood, with the hearth of the whole of human existence, consequently also the centre of our theoretical thought.”²⁴⁵ On this basis Dooyeweerd gives a definition of truth according to its transcendental *a priori* dimension: truth is “the accordance between the subjective *a priori* knowledge enclosed by the temporal horizon, as expressed in *a priori* judgements, and the *a priori* structural laws of human experience within this temporal horizon.”²⁴⁶ Human experience is open to the transcendent fullness of Truth. Therefore, the guarantee for truth is not subjective, nor is it self-sufficient. As previously stated, theoretical truth (i.e. philosophy and science) according to Dooyeweerd is limited and relativized by the temporal horizon, but also “in every respect dependent on the full super-temporal Truth”, because “[w]e cannot truthfully know the cosmos outside of the true knowledge of God.”²⁴⁷ Nevertheless, our subjective epistemological insight is fallible, because we can misinterpret the *a priori* horizon of experience.²⁴⁸

²⁴² Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* II, p. 556.

²⁴³ Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* II, p. 549.

²⁴⁴ Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* II, p. 550.

²⁴⁵ Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* II, p. 571.

²⁴⁶ Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* II, p. 573.

²⁴⁷ Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* II, p. 561.

²⁴⁸ Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* II, p. 574.

5.17 Dialogue and antithesis

In Dooyeweerd's philosophy there is both an element of dialogue and antithesis.²⁴⁹ As the general structure of the theoretical attitude is the same for everyone a philosophical dialogue is possible. However, there is also an antithesis between thinkers that start from a different ground-motive. In order to let a real philosophical dialogue take place, Dooyeweerd's looks for clarity about the pre-theoretical prejudices of every philosophy.

According to Dooyeweerd an "intrinsically re-formed Christian philosophy" should not break off contact with immanence-philosophy. It is precisely because of its "radical-critical standpoint" that Christian philosophy is "enabled to enter into the most inward contact with immanence-philosophy."²⁵⁰ The community of thought is endangered by religious pre-suppositions that are regarded as 'axioms' that need to be accepted before being enabled to enter philosophical discussion. This is philosophical dogmatism.²⁵¹

One can argue that the proposition " $2 \times 2 = 4$ " is true for both Christian and non-Christian. According to Dooyeweerd however, this proposition is a "partial truth" that is not "true in itself", but only in the context of logical laws and laws of thought that can only exist in the order of a totality of meaning. Immanence philosophy of course can discover temporal laws and structural states of affairs that should not be denied, but a theoretical interpretation always needs to take place regarding the totality of meaning.²⁵² "Philosophical discussion about the theoretical judgments is to be based on the undeniable states of affairs in the structures of theoretical thought and of empirical reality which precede all *theoretical interpretation* (...). They are to be confronted with the different philosophical views in order to investigate whether these views, each from their own super-theoretical starting-point, are able to account for them in a satisfactory way."²⁵³ Dooyeweerd thus suggest a kind of philosophical competition concerning the explanatory power of different philosophical systems, based on the same empirical data. The theoretical judgments have to be distinguished from the pre-theoretical prejudices. "Philosophical discussion is possible between schools which do not have the same starting-point, if, and only if, a sharp distinction is made between authentic theoretical judgments (concerning which philosophic discussion is possible) and the necessary *pre-theoretical prejudices* which lie at the foundation of such theoretical judgements."²⁵⁴

Finally, a Christian philosophy is characterized by humility and modesty. This cannot go without self-knowledge, as has been sketched above. Dooyeweerd writes in the foreword to his *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*: "I wish to repudiate any self-satisfied scientific attitude in confronting immanence-philosophy. The detailed criticism of the Humanistic immanence-philosophy in [this work], must be understood as self-criticism, as a case which the Christian thinker pleads *with himself*. Unless this fact is understood, the intention of this philosophy has not been comprehended."²⁵⁵

²⁴⁹ Cf. the title of the book Yong-Joon Choi, *Dialogue and Antithesis. A Philosophical Study on the Significance of Herman Dooyeweerd's Transcendental Critique*, Diss. Potchefstroom 2000.

²⁵⁰ Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* I, p. 115.

²⁵¹ Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* I, p. 115.

²⁵² Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* I, p. 115-116.

²⁵³ Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* I, p. 527.

²⁵⁴ Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* I, p. 527.

²⁵⁵ Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* I, p. VIII.

The radical antithesis between Christian philosophy and immanence philosophy runs through the hearth of the philosopher. The antithesis is not a “line of *personal* classification”; it is “a division according to fundamental principles in the world, a line of division which passes transversely through the existence of every Christian personality.”²⁵⁶ This is what Kuyper meant with it. Dooyeweerd writes: “I should not judge immanence-philosophy so sharply were it not that I myself have gone through it, and have personally experienced its problems. I should not pass such a sharp judgment on the attempts at antithesis between non-Christian philosophy and the Christian truths of faith, had I not lived through the inner tension between the two and personally wrestled through the attempts at synthesis.”²⁵⁷ A radical self-critique is needed for everyone who engages in philosophical inquiry.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁶ Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* I, p. 542.

²⁵⁷ Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* I, p. VIII.

²⁵⁸ Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* I, p. 114.

6 Alvin Plantinga

The most well-known contemporary philosopher in the Reformed tradition is Alvin Plantinga. In this chapter some main lines of his philosophy will be sketched. Special attention will be paid to Plantinga's conception of philosophy and rationality. However, first a short introduction to the philosophical legacy of neo-Calvinism in North-America will be given.

6.1 Neo-Calvinistic philosophical influences in North-America

In order to understand the historical philosophical connection between Herman Dooyeweerd and Alvin Plantinga, it is necessary to give a short introduction to the neo-Calvinistic influence in North-America and to American (church) history. Neo-Calvinism originally was a Dutch movement, but it spread across the world. It specifically flourished in North America.²⁵⁹ Two main lines of influence can be distinguished. The first is the influence of Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck. The second line of influence is through the philosophy of Herman Dooyeweerd.

In 1857, Dutch immigrants founded the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) in Michigan, a church with a Kuyperian spirit. The CRC is the American counterpart of the Reformed Churches (*Gereformeerde Kerken*) in the Netherlands, founded by Kuyper.²⁶⁰ The CRC has developed from the Dutch immigrants that left Holland after the Succession (*Afscheiding*) of 1834. Another wave of immigrants arrived after WWII.²⁶¹ Among these immigrants were the (Frisian) parents of Alvin Plantinga (born 1932). In 1876, the CRC founded Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan. This college originally was a theological school, but in 1894 it also became a liberal arts college. There were and are many Kuyperians and Dooyeweerdians among the faculty. For some Dooyeweerd's philosophy has got a more or less 'canonical' status, but there are also other 'schools' that are very critical about the Dooyeweerdians.

Another bastion of Kuyperian thought in the United States was Princeton Theological Seminary, with theologians like B.B. Warfield (1851-1921) and Geerhardus Vos (1862-1949). In 1898, Kuyper presented his famous Stone Lectures at Princeton. A student of Warfield was the Dutch-American theologian and philosopher Cornelius van Til (1895-1987), who was also influenced by Kuyper and an ally of Dooyeweerd. Conservative Kuyperian theologians left Princeton in 1929 and founded Westminster Theological Seminary.

Besides Kuyper's influence in philosophy through Dooyeweerd, Vollenhoven and Stoker, there was a line of influence through W.H. Jellema, who significantly influenced Plantinga. The philosopher William Harry Jellema (1893-1982) was the founder of Calvin College's philosophy department. He was profoundly influenced by Kuyper. Calvin college developed to an important centre for philosophy. Four of its alumni became president of the American Philosophical Association, which is very much an honour for a philosopher in the United States: Oets K. Bouwsma (1898-

²⁵⁹ See generally James D. Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America. A History of a Conservative Subculture*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1984.

²⁶⁰ A present, "committed if sometimes disapproving" member of the CRC is Alvin Plantinga.

²⁶¹ For a general impression see Agnes Amelink, *Gereformeerden overzee. Protestants-christelijke landverhuizers in Noord-Amerika*, Amsterdam: Bert Bakker 2006.

1978), William K. Frankena (1908-1994), Nicholas Wolterstorff and Alvin Plantinga.²⁶² Other influential philosophers at Calvin College were Henry Stob (1908-1996) and H. Evan Runner (1916-2002). Stob was a student of Jellema. Runner was a student of Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven.²⁶³ His characteristic Kuyperian statement was “Life is religion”, i.e. there is no ‘neutral’ terrain. Plantinga and Wolterstorff were students of Jellema, Stob and Runner.

Other important Reformed colleges were founded, that are centres for the study of the neo-Calvinistic philosophical legacy: Dordt College (Iowa, 1955) and Trinity Christian College (Illinois, 1959) in the United States and The King’s University College (Edmonton, 1979) and Redeemer University College (Ontario, 1982) in Canada.

In 1956, the Association for Reformed Scientific Studies (ARSS) was founded by Dutch immigrants in Ontario, Canada. In 1967, the ARSS changed its name in Association for the Advancement of Christian Scholarship (AACS) and founded the Institute for Christian Studies (ICS) in Toronto, Canada. Runner was one of the driving forces. The ICS became a centre for the study of Dooyeweerd’s philosophy. There are close connection with the Free University in Amsterdam and a lot of ICS’s faculty have earned their PhD’s in Amsterdam.

The contemporary ‘Dutch’ Reformed philosophy in North America can be distinguished in three varieties.²⁶⁴ The first variety consists of (mainly) philosophers and theologians working in the legacy of Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven, the neo-Calvinistic philosophy of the cosmonomic idea. The main lines of this philosophy have been set out in the previous chapter of this book. Representatives of this line are, among others: Bernard Zylstra (philosopher, 1934-1986), Calvin S. Seerveld (aesthete), Peter J. Steen (theologian, 1935-1984), Gordon Spykman (theologian, 1926-1993), Hendrik Hart (philosopher), Arnold de Graaff (psychologist), Roy Clouser (philosopher), James H. Olthuis (philosopher/psychotherapist), Lambert P. Zuidervaat (philosopher) and Albert M. Wolters (philosopher/classicist).²⁶⁵ Most of these men earned their PhD’s at the Free University of Amsterdam.

The second variety is the ‘presuppositionalism’ or ‘(Reformed) transcendentalism’ of Cornelius van Til (1895-1987) and his students. Van Til was heavily influenced by Herman Dooyeweerd, Dirk Vollenhoven, Abraham Kuyper and, especially, Herman Bavinck.²⁶⁶ He was an editor (1936-1977) of the journal *Philosophia Reformata*. Presuppositionalism claims, shortly stated, that (knowledge of) the existence of God is the transcendental condition of any knowledge, but also of any communication. If we take Kant – the key Western epistemologist – seriously, we cannot know anything or

²⁶² Richard J. Mouw, ‘Dutch Calvinist Philosophical Influences in North America’, *Calvin Theological Journal* 24 (1989), No. 1, 93-120: p. 95.

²⁶³ Henry Vander Goot, *Life is Religion. Essays in Honor of H. Evan Runner*, St. Catharines: Paideia Press 1981.

²⁶⁴ Thomas K. Johnson, ‘Dutch Reformed Philosophy in North America: Three Varieties in the Late Twentieth Century’, *MBS Texte* 81 (2007).

²⁶⁵ Peter Steen, *The Structure of Dooyeweerd’s Thought*, Toronto: Wedge Publication Foundation 1983; Roy Clouser, *The Myth of Religious Neutrality: An Essay on the Hidden Role of Religious Beliefs*, University of Notre Dame Press: Notre Dame 1991; Roy Clouser, *Knowing with the Heart: Religious Experience and Belief in God*, Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press 1999.

²⁶⁶ Cf. Herman Bavinck, *The Philosophy of Revelation*, Grand Rapids: Baker 1979, Ch. 3.

communicate about it, according to Van Til. Instead, Van Til claims that the human noetic structure and the structure of the world (creation) are correlated. Knowledge is not a construction of the human mind, but analogical thinking (i.e. thinking after God), even for atheists.²⁶⁷ Students of Van Til are the philosophers and theologians Francis Schaeffer (1912-1984), Rousas J. Rushdoony (1916-2001), Greg L. Bahnsen (1948-1995), K. Scott Oliphant and John M. Frame. I will not explore this variety any further, in the first place because I have to limit myself, but also because Van Til's thought, although of philosophical significance, is more theological than philosophical in nature.

The third variety is the (New) Reformed Epistemology, with Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff as its main representatives. Other representatives are Ronald H. Nash (1936-2006), Dewey J. Hoitenga and William P. Alston. This perspective will be discussed below on the basis of the work of Alvin Plantinga.

6.2 God's philosopher

In the spring of 1980, *Time* magazine reported: "In a quiet revolution in thought and arguments that hardly anyone could have foreseen only two decades ago, God is making a comeback. Most intriguingly, this is happening not among theologians or ordinary believers (...) but in the crisp, intellectual circles of academic philosophers, where the consensus had long banished the Almighty from fruitful discourse. Now it is more respectable among philosophers than it has been for a generation to talk about the possibility of God's existence."²⁶⁸ The most prominent of the 'revolutionaries' are philosophers like William Alston, Richard Swinburne, George Mavrodes and Nicholas Wolterstorff. The leader of this revolution however is the metaphysician, epistemologist and philosopher of religion Alvin Plantinga.²⁶⁹ Plantinga was labelled by *Time* magazine "the world's leading Protestant philosopher of God". An important event in this 'revolution' was the formation of the Society of Christian Philosophers (1978). The Society, with its journal *Faith and Philosophy*, has about 1000 members (being 10% of the North-American professional philosophers). Plantinga's work to a certain extent changed the intellectual climate in the United States by making theistic belief a serious position in philosophical debate again. The interesting thing is that Plantinga succeeds in restating thoughts of Augustine and Calvin in the language of contemporary philosophy.²⁷⁰ He also knows the work of Dooyeweerd very well. His first serious article was about Dooyeweerd.²⁷¹

Plantinga has the honour to occupy two entrances ('alvinize' and 'planting') in Daniel Dennett's *Philosophical Lexicon*, a humorous dictionary coined from the names of philosophers:

alvinize, v. To stimulate protracted discussion by making a bizarre claim. "His contention that natural evil is due to Satanic agency alvinized his listeners."

²⁶⁷ Johnson, 'Dutch Reformed Philosophy in North America', p. 12-13.

²⁶⁸ Cited in K.J. Clark, 'Introduction', in: K.J. Clark (Ed.), *Philosophers Who Believe*, Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 7-21: p. 7; also cited in Philip Blosser, 'God among the philosophers', *New Oxford Review* 66:9 (October 1999), p. 39 <www.newoxfordreview.org>, visited November 6, 2009.

²⁶⁹ Clark, 'Introduction'

²⁷⁰ Dewey Hoitenga, *Faith and Reason from Plato to Plantinga: An Introduction to Reformed Epistemology*, New York: State University of New York Press 1991, p. 175.

²⁷¹ Alvin Plantinga, 'Dooyeweerd on Meaning and Being', *Reformed Journal* 8 (Oct. 1958), 10-15.

planting, v. To use twentieth-century fertilizer to encourage new shoots from eleventh-century ideas which everyone thought had gone to seed; hence planter, n. one who plantings.²⁷²

Plantinga has written about a wide range of topics in the Anglo-American analytical tradition in philosophy. In discussing his work I will have to substantially limit myself, not only because of the limited amount of space in this book, but especially because some of these topics go far beyond my competence, such as those requiring advanced knowledge about the metaphysics of modality and modal logic, introducing the categories of possibility and necessity.²⁷³ I will discuss the topics that are most relevant in reformed epistemology, namely properly basic and warranted belief, properly functioning cognitive faculties and natural theology. I will not extensively discuss Plantinga's thoughts about possible worlds, the nature of necessity, the free will defense, the evolutionary argument against naturalism, Quine/Duhem-issues and – last but not least – the problem of evil. I am convinced however that the issues I do discuss are sufficient for the objectives of this book.

6.3 Intellectual influences

No need to say that Plantinga, through his environment and teachers, was influenced by Augustine, Calvin, Kuyper and Dooyeweerd. Two other interesting sources for Plantinga's thought can be mentioned here: the American Calvinist and puritan theologian and revivalist Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) and the Scottish puritan and 'common sense' philosopher Thomas Reid (1710-1796).

Leaving the general intellectual influences now, I want to investigate into more detail what Plantinga – following his own words – learned from his teachers and colleague's during the philosophical journey that lead him from the philosophy department of Harvard (1950) to that of Calvin College (1951), Michigan (1954), Yale (1955), Wayne (1958), again to Calvin College (1963) and finally to the University of Notre Dame (1982), where he will 'retire' in may 2010 and be followed up by Robert Audi as the John E. O'Brien Professor of Philosophy. He gives a clear insight in his intellectual development in a 'self-profile' he has written for a book that is devoted to his work.²⁷⁴ This insight is important, because it shows, in my opinion, what according to Plantinga is at stake when philosophizing and what his philosophical intentions are.

Plantinga started his philosophy studies at Harvard. Among others, he followed classes in logic from W.V.O. Quine. However, in the second semester, after following some classes at Calvin College during Harvard's spring recess, he moved to the small college in Michigan. There was one special reason for this rather unusual move: the philosophy professor William Harry Jellema. Jellema was, according to Plantinga, "by all odds, I think, the most gifted teacher of philosophy I have ever encountered." He "lectured in magisterial style, with the entire history of Western philosophy obviously at his fingertips." Plantinga writes: "I found Jellema so impressive that I decided then

²⁷² *The Philosophical Lexicon*, <www.philosophicallexicon.com>, visited November 6, 2009, originally edited (from 1969 on) by Daniel Dennett, now by Asbjørn Steglich-Petersen.

²⁷³ See for example Alvin Plantinga, *Essays in the Metaphysics of Modality*, Edited by Matthew Davidson, New York: Oxford University Press 2003.

²⁷⁴ James E. Tomberlin & Peter van Inwagen (Eds.), *Alvin Plantinga*, Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company 1985.

and there to leave Harvard, return to Calvin, and study philosophy with him. That was a decision I have never regretted; and Calvin College has been perhaps the major intellectual influence in my life.”²⁷⁵ Besides Jellema there was Henry Stob, “a gifted and powerful teacher in philosophy in his own right”.²⁷⁶

What did Plantinga learn from Jellema and Stob? The most important thing is that “serious intellectual work and religious allegiance (...) are inevitably intertwined.”²⁷⁷ Philosophy is not a neutral area, but “an arena for the articulation and interplay of commitments and allegiances fundamentally religious in nature.”²⁷⁸ Religiously neutral intellectual endeavour does not exist, or rather “there is no such thing as serious substantial and relatively complete intellectual endeavour that is religiously neutral.” Plantinga endorses this claim, although he admits “it isn’t easy to see how to establish it, or how to develop and articulate it in detail.”²⁷⁹ For Jellema and Stob “the history of philosophy was at bottom an arena in which conflicting religious visions compete for human allegiance.”²⁸⁰ Plantinga learned from Jellema and Stob that philosophy was “a matter of the greatest moment”, because it was “both a struggle for man’s souls and a fundamental expression of basic religious motives.”²⁸¹

One of Stob’s characteristic statements is: “Let it be said that I share with Kuyper, Herman Dooyeweerd, Van Til, and many other Christian thinkers the view that all knowledge is embraced at its edges by an all-encompassing *Weltanschauung*. This means that all apprehension and reflection takes place within a global perspective in terms of which the data of experience are thought-molded and fitted into a frame.”²⁸² The second sentence is a noteworthy Kantian-Dooyeweerdian line of thought. It is this philosophical camp that Plantinga explicitly left. Instead of Kantian idealism he became a philosopher in the line of Platonic realism. Instead of the human subject his starting point is the real-existing and objectively knowable reality outside us. Stob continues: “I also agree that the shape of the philosophical perspective or totality-view is determined by what one regards or evaluates as crucially significant or most real. I further agree that this judgement and evaluation is made before the cognitive process properly begins. The point of view from which the world is surveyed is not theoretically determined: it is chosen. And, what is more, the choice reflects a religious decision. It is an echo of faith.”²⁸³ From this philosophical position with both Kuyperian and Kantian-Dooyeweerdian elements Plantinga only accepts the element of the fundamentally religious starting point.

After Calvin College Plantinga moved to the University of Michigan where he studied with William P. Alston, Richard Cartwright and William K. Frankena. While studying at Yale’s philosophy department Plantinga noticed that in studying philosophy “it is

²⁷⁵ Alvin Plantinga, ‘Self-profile’, in: James E. Tomberlin & Peter van Inwagen (Eds.), *Alvin Plantinga*, Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company 1985, 3-97: p. 9.

²⁷⁶ Alvin Plantinga, ‘Self-profile’, p. 11.

²⁷⁷ Plantinga, ‘Self-profile’, p. 13.

²⁷⁸ Plantinga, ‘Self-profile’, p. 13.

²⁷⁹ Plantinga, ‘Self-profile’, p. 13.

²⁸⁰ Plantinga, ‘Self-profile’, p. 13.

²⁸¹ Plantinga, ‘Self-profile’, p. 13.

²⁸² Henry Stob, ‘Observations on the Concept of Antithesis’, in: Peter DeKlerk & Richard R. DeRidder (Eds.), *Perspectives on the Christian Reformed Church: Studies in Its History, Theology, and Ecumenicity*, Grand Rapids: Baker 1983, 241-258: p. 252.

²⁸³ Stob, ‘Observations on the Concept of Antithesis’, p. 252.

crucially important to remember that the philosopher in question was aiming to get at the *truth* about the matter”.²⁸⁴ Different philosophies are not just ‘interesting options’; one has to follow a thinker in his enterprise and examine the truth of what he says.

After Michigan Plantinga went to Yale to earn his PhD. He discovered two problems there. The first was that “no one seemed prepared to show a neophyte philosopher how to go about the subject – what to *do*, how to think about a problem to some effect.” There was too much generality and too little attention to “the level of particularity at which most important philosophical work takes place.”²⁸⁵ The second problem, according to Plantinga, was that if anyone raised a philosophical question “the typical response would be to catalogue some of the various different answers the world has seen: there is the Aristotelian answer, the existentialist answer, the Cartesian answer, Heidegger’s answer, and so on; perhaps there would be a codicil as to what the Mahayana Buddhists thought about the matter.” Just like at Michigan, Plantinga however wanted to ask the most important question – in his opinion – namely: “What is the truth about this matter?” That question was often answered with disdain as “unduly naïve”. The philosophical answers that had been given were only regarded as “intellectual tidbits – glorified cocktail conversation”. According to Plantinga however, the great philosophers were not “trying to say something interesting or provocative or titillating; they were trying to tell the sober metaphysical truth.”²⁸⁶

After Yale, Plantinga went to Wayne State University. There he learned “the importance of genuine clarity and rigor in the subject, and something about how to achieve them.” He learned about philosophical criticism: “Finding counterexamples, refuting arguments, detecting unacknowledged assumptions, discovering ambiguities”.²⁸⁷ One could say that Plantinga here learned how to *do* philosophy, i.e. how to do *analytical* philosophy. “Of course there is more to philosophy than counterexamples and criticism”, but “searching and powerful criticism, high standards for clarity, rigor, and argumentative cogency – these form a necessary condition of high philosophical endeavour and an excellent first step towards it.”²⁸⁸

There was however another influence at Wayne regarding theism. Plantinga states: “I was never able to get beyond a sort of defensive posture. I concentrated at arguing (contrary to my colleague’s claims) that theism was not wholly irrational (...). I often felt beleaguered and, with respect to my Christianity, alone, isolated, non-standard, a bit peculiar or weird, a somewhat strange specimen in which my colleagues displayed an interest that was friendly, and for the most part uncensorious, but also incredulous and uncomprehending.” There was a heavily influence of logical positivism at American universities in those years. One can argue that this had a significant impact on Plantinga’s way of philosophizing. For example, the need for a negative apologetics – arguing that theism was not *wholly irrational* – tempered Plantinga’s clear interest in natural theology.²⁸⁹ Only later in his career he picked up this interest

²⁸⁴ Plantinga, ‘Self-profile’, p. 17.

²⁸⁵ Plantinga, ‘Self-profile’, p. 20.

²⁸⁶ Plantinga, ‘Self-profile’, p. 21.

²⁸⁷ Plantinga, ‘Self-profile’, p. 28.

²⁸⁸ Plantinga, ‘Self-profile’, p. 29.

²⁸⁹ James Beilby, ‘Plantinga’s Model of Warranted Christian Belief’, in: Deane-Peter Baker, *Alvin Plantinga*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2007, 125-165: p. 139.

again. “It wasn’t that this atmosphere induced doubt about the central elements of Christianity; it was more that my philosophical horizons were heavily formed by my colleagues and friends at Wayne.”²⁹⁰

In 1963 Plantinga became Jellema’s successor at Calvin College. It was there that he published his first two important books: *God and Other Minds* (1967) and *The Nature of Necessity* (1974).

6.4 Reformed epistemology

The term ‘Reformed epistemology’ was first used by Plantinga in a paper read for the American Catholic Philosophical Association in 1980.²⁹¹ It is called so “because its advocates are self-consciously working in the Reformed tradition stemming from John Calvin.”²⁹² Sometimes Plantinga simply speaks about ‘Calvinist epistemology’.²⁹³ The central Calvinian basis of this movement can be found in the following words of Calvin: “[The] conviction (...) that there is some God, is naturally inborn in all, and is fixed deep within, as it were in the very marrow. (...) It is not a doctrine that must be learned in school, but one of which each of us is master from his mother’s womb and which nature itself permits no one to forget, although many strive with every nerve to this end.”²⁹⁴ The immediacy of our knowledge of God can be regarded as the central claim of the Reformed epistemologists. This theological doctrine has become a philosophical claim.²⁹⁵

According to William P. Alston Reformed epistemology is the most prominent position in contemporary philosophy of religion.²⁹⁶ It has caused a whole library of literature.²⁹⁷ Reformed epistemologist could for the first time clearly be identified as a

²⁹⁰ Plantinga, ‘Self-profile’, p. 55.

²⁹¹ Alvin Plantinga, ‘The Reformed Objection to Natural Theology’, *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 54 (1980), 49-62: p. 58.

²⁹² William P. Alston, ‘History of the Philosophy of Religion’, in: Edward Graig (Ed.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, volume 8, London: Routledge 1998, 238-248: p. 246.

²⁹³ Plantinga, ‘Self-profile’, p. 55.

²⁹⁴ Calvin, *Institutes*, I.3.1

²⁹⁵ Dewey J. Hoitenga, *Faith and Reason from Plato to Plantinga. An Introduction to Reformed Epistemology*, Albany: State University of New York Press 1991, p. ix.

²⁹⁶ Alston, ‘History of the Philosophy of Religion’, p. 246.

²⁹⁷ To mention only some books: Nicholas Woltstorff, Hendrik Hart & Johan van der Hoeven (Eds.), *Rationality in the Calvinian Tradition*, Lanham: University Press of America 1983; Ronald Nash, *Faith and Reason: Searching for a Rational Faith*, Grand Rapids: Academie Books 1988; Kelly Clark, *Return to Reason*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1990; Dewey Hoitenga, *Faith and Reason from Plato to Plantinga: An Introduction to Reformed Epistemology*, New York: State University of New York Press 1991; James Sennett, *Modality, Rationality, and Probability: A Critical Examination of Alvin Plantinga’s Philosophy*, New York: Peter Lang 1992; Douglas Geivett & Brendan Sweetman (Eds.), *Contemporary Perspectives on Religious Epistemology*, New York: Oxford University Press 1992; Anthony Kenny, *What is Faith? Essays in the Philosophy of Religion*, New York: Oxford University Press 1992; Mark McLeod, *Rationality and Theistic Belief: An Essay on Reformed Epistemology*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1993; Linda Zagzebski (Ed.), *Rational Faith: Catholic Responses to Reformed Epistemology*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press 1995; Stephen Evans, *The Historical Christ and the Jesus of Faith: The Incarnational Narrative as History*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1996; Jonathan Kvanvig (Ed.), *Warrant in Contemporary Epistemology: Essays in Honor of Alvin Plantinga*, Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers 1996; James Sennett (Ed.), *The Analytic Theist: Alvin Plantinga*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1998.

group of philosophers when the book *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God* (1983) appeared, edited by Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff.²⁹⁸

Plantinga himself gives an excellent summary of his central article *Reason and Belief in God* that can also be regarded as a summary of his recent work in general. He writes: “I have argued that the evidentialist objection to theistic belief is rooted in classical foundationalism; the same can be said for the Thomistic conception of faith and reason. Classical foundationalism is attractive and seductive; in the final analyses, however, it turns out to be both false and self-referentially incoherent.” Evidentialism is the epistemological doctrine stating that a person who claims that God exists needs to deliver evidence for this thesis (which has not been done so far). Evidentialism is an application of classical foundationalism on religious beliefs. Classical foundationalism, dating back to Descartes and Locke, is the doctrine stating that a belief can only be knowledge when it is either ‘properly basic’, i.e. a starting point for thought, a fundamental proposition that doesn’t need any further argumentation (evident for the senses, self-evident or incorrigible), or when it is a proposition that is correctly based on basic beliefs. Thus, knowledge has a vertical structure: a foundation and a building based on it. Classical foundationalism however is regarded as ‘self-referentially inconsistent’ by Plantinga, because it demands evidence and argumentation for any belief, although it does not demand this for the foundation of this doctrine itself. Plantinga himself actually accepts foundationalism, but in a version that is focusing on what is a rational noetic structure. This version includes religious beliefs as properly basic (see par. 6.6 and 6.7).

In *God and Other Minds* (1967) Plantinga shows that several standard proofs for the existence of God are not conclusive. He argues however that it is not irrational to believe in God, even without such proofs. His argument is quite simple – though formulated in advanced modal logic. No one can prove the existence of other minds (other people’s minds, other consciousnesses), but still no one thinks it is irrational to believe in their existence. The same is true for memory’s, testimony of others and moral principles. Therefore, Plantinga concludes: “If my belief in other minds is rational, so is my belief in God. But obviously the former is rational; so, therefore, is the latter.”²⁹⁹ Belief in God and belief in other minds are “in the same epistemological boat”. There is no epistemological duty to prove the existence of God.

Plantinga continues his summary of his article as follows: “Furthermore, the Reformed objection to natural theology, unformed and inchoate as it is, may best be seen as a rejection of classical foundationalism.” According to Plantinga, the Reformed theologians that rejected natural theology *implicitly* also rejected evidentialism concerning theistic belief.³⁰⁰ “As the Reformed thinker sees things, being self-evident, or incorrigible, or evident to the senses is not a necessary condition of proper basicity. He goes on to add that belief in God is properly basic.” As has been said, Plantinga includes religious beliefs in the domain of ‘proper basicity’. When belief in God is ‘properly basic’, the believer uses it as a starting point for his

²⁹⁸ Alvin Plantinga & Nicholas Wolterstorff (Eds.), *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press 1983.

²⁹⁹ Alvin Plantinga, *God and Other Minds. A Study of the Rational Justification of Belief in God*, New York: Cornell University Press 1990 (1967), p. 272.

³⁰⁰ Nicholas Wolterstorff, ‘The Reformed Tradition’, in: Philip L. Quinn & Charles Taliferro, *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, Malden/Oxford: Blackwell Publishers 2000, 165-170: p. 166.

thought. However, this does not mean that any belief, whatever irrational it may be, is properly basic. A Reformed thinker “is not thereby committed to the idea that just any or nearly any belief is properly basic, even if he lacks a criterion for proper basicity. Nor is he committed to the view that argument is irrelevant to belief in God if such belief is properly basic.” Plantinga has labeled the standard objection to this approach in epistemology the ‘Great Pumpkin Objection’, i.e. the vision that because of the possibility to leave religious basic beliefs unargued he also has to accept absurd beliefs like “the Great Pumpkin will return to the pumpkin patch tonight”.³⁰¹ The proper basicity of a religious belief however is not an excuse to leave it unargued, according to Plantinga. It only means that religious belief cannot be rejected as properly basic *in advance*. “Furthermore, belief in God, like other properly basic beliefs, is not groundless or arbitrary; it is grounded in justification-conferring conditions. Finally, the Reformed view that belief in God is properly basic is not felicitously thought of as a version of fideism.”³⁰² This summary is the program of Reformed epistemology in a nutshell.

Plantinga distinguishes between the *de jure* and the *de facto* question about theistic belief. The first question is aimed at the warrant to accept theistic belief; the second question is aimed at the truth of theistic belief. The first question is an epistemological one, the second a metaphysical one.³⁰³ It is noteworthy, that Plantinga mostly discusses *de jure* questions, hardly the *de facto* one. For example, in his book *Warranted Christian Belief* he argues that, specifically, the Christian belief has warrant (*de jure*), however he does not discuss whether the Christian belief actually is true (*de facto*).

6.5 Warrant

Reformed epistemologists go beyond questions of justification, that take a central position in classical foundationalism and evidentialism. They turn toward (other) questions of “positive epistemic status”, like internal rationality and warrant.³⁰⁴ A doxastic response to evidence – i.e. experience, including moral experience, memory, self-knowledge etc. – is appropriate or right when the response you make is rational, i.e. healthy, sane, produced by properly functioning cognitive faculties.³⁰⁵ Plantinga has also extensively written about warrant, for example in his epistemological trilogy *Warrant: The Current Debate* (1993), *Warrant and Proper Function* (1993), and *Warranted Christian Belief* (2000).³⁰⁶ Warrant is “what separates knowledge from mere true belief.” A belief has warrant only “when it is produced by cognitive faculties that are functioning properly (...), in the sort of cognitive environment for which they have been designed.”³⁰⁷ Warrant has to be “produced by cognitive

³⁰¹ Beilby, ‘Plantinga’s Model of Warranted Christian Belief’, p. 143.

³⁰² Plantinga, ‘Reason and Belief in God’, in: Alvin Plantinga & Nicholas Wolterstorff (Eds.), *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press 1983, 16-93: p. 90-91.

³⁰³ William P. Alston, ‘Epistemology and Metaphysics’, in: Thomas M. Crisp, Matthew Davidson & David Vander Laan (Eds.), *Knowledge and Reality. Essays in Honor of Alvin Plantinga*, Dordrecht: Springer 2006, 81-109, p. 83.

³⁰⁴ Plantinga, ‘Reformed epistemology’, p. 386.

³⁰⁵ Plantinga, ‘Reformed epistemology’, p. 387.

³⁰⁶ Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant: The Current Debate*, New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press 1993; Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press 1993; Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press 2000.

³⁰⁷ Plantinga, ‘Reformed epistemology’, p. 387.

faculties or believe-producing processes that are aimed at the production of true belief.”³⁰⁸ Finally, these faculties must be successfully aimed at that production, i.e. function properly, in the right environment. A belief that fulfils these conditions has warrant and can be called knowledge.³⁰⁹ The general discussion about warrant can especially be found in *Warrant and Proper Function*. According to Plantinga, his concept of warrant is naturalistic, i.e. it doesn’t presume any normativity that can’t also be found in the natural sciences. Furthermore, “naturalism in epistemology can flourish only in the context of supernaturalism in metaphysics”, and there cannot be a good theory of warrant that is not “set in the context of a broadly theistic view of the nature of human beings.”³¹⁰ Proper function cannot be explained by naturalistic means only.

6.6 Warranted Christian Belief

In his book *Warranted Christian Belief*, often regarded as Plantinga’s *magnum opus*, he restates orthodox Reformed theology into the language of contemporary epistemology. Different from the other volumes of his trilogy this book is specifically aimed at the warrant of Christian theism. According to Plantinga, “a belief has warrant for a person *S* only if that belief is produced in *S* by cognitive faculties functioning properly (subject to no dysfunction) in a cognitive environment that is appropriate for *S*’s kind of cognitive faculties, according to a design plan that is successfully aimed at truth.”³¹¹ From this general statement Plantinga makes an interesting move, claiming that “here we see the ontological or metaphysical or ultimately religious roots of the question as to the rationality or warrant or lack thereof for belief in God. What you properly take to be rational, at least in the sense of warranted, depends of what sort of metaphysical and religious stance you adopt.” Plantinga specifies this claim as follows: “It depends on what kind of beings you think human beings are, what sorts of beliefs you think their noetic faculties produce when they are functioning properly, and which of their faculties or cognitive mechanisms are aimed at truth.” The conclusion is that “the dispute as to whether theistic belief is rational (warranted) can’t be settled just by attending to epistemological considerations; it is at bottom not merely an epistemological dispute, but an ontological or theological dispute.”³¹²

Plantinga constructs an “Aquinas-Calvin model” of theistic belief formation. He describes the model as follows: “[T]here is a kind of faculty or a cognitive mechanism, what Calvin calls a *sensus divinitatis* or sense of divinity, which in a wide variety of circumstances produces in us beliefs about God. These circumstances, we might say, trigger the disposition to form beliefs in question; they form the occasion on which those beliefs arise.” It seems that Plantinga understands the *sensus divinitatis* not so much as an actual perception of God, but as a faculty or disposition to know God, i.e. to have the belief that God exists. Plantinga shows himself a good student of Calvin when he continues: “Under these circumstances we develop or form theistic beliefs – or rather, these beliefs are formed in us; in the typical case we don’t consciously choose to have those beliefs. Instead, we find ourselves with them, just as

³⁰⁸ Plantinga, ‘Reformed epistemology’, p. 388.

³⁰⁹ Plantinga, ‘Reformed epistemology’, p. 388.

³¹⁰ Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, p. 194.

³¹¹ Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, p. 156.

³¹² Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, p. 190.

we find ourselves with perceptual and memory beliefs.”³¹³ An essential part of this model is the divine design and creation of the cognitive faculties: “[T]he design plan (...) is a design plan in the literal and paradigmatic sense. It is a blueprint or plan for our ways of functioning, and it has been developed and instituted by a conscious, intelligent agent.” Then Plantinga connects his notion of the design plan with the Calvinian concept of the *sensus divinitatis*: “The purpose of the *sensus divinitatis* is to enable us to have true beliefs about God; when it functions properly, it ordinarily *does* produce true beliefs about God. These beliefs therefore meet the conditions for warrant; if the beliefs produced are strong enough, then they constitute knowledge.”³¹⁴ A noteworthy account of proper functioning in Plantinga’s epistemology is that our cognitive faculties function properly when they function according to God’s design plan.

On this basis Plantinga then develops an “extended Aquinas-Calvin model”. This model is extended to cover not only theistic belief in general, but specifically Christian belief.³¹⁵ It includes both the noetic effects of sin – both affective and cognitive – and salvation. The model “adds that we human beings have fallen into sin, a calamitous condition from which we require salvation – a salvation we are unable to accomplish by our own efforts (...). Our fall into sin has had cataclysmic consequences, both affective and cognitive.” First the affective consequences: “our affections are skewed and our hearts now harbor deep and radical evil: we love ourselves above all, rather than God.” Regarding the cognitive consequences Plantinga writes: “Our original knowledge of God and of his marvelous beauty, glory, and loveliness has been severely compromised (...). In particular, the *sensus divinitatis* has been damaged and deformed (...). Still further, sin induces in us a *resistance* to the deliverances of the *sensus divinitatis*, muted as they are by the first factor; we don’t want to pay attention to its deliverances.” After this sketch of the affective and cognitive consequences of sin Plantinga shows a way out: “We are unable by our own efforts to extricate ourselves from this quagmire; God himself, however, has provided a remedy for sin and its ruinous effects (...). This remedy is made available in the life, atoning, suffering and death, and resurrection of his divine Son, Jesus Christ. Salvation involves among other things rebirth and regeneration, a process (beginning in the present life and reaching fruition in the next) that involves a restoration and repair of the image of God in us.”³¹⁶ It is interesting to note how Plantinga connects the religious act of faith with the proper functioning of men’s cognitive faculties and a repair of our cognitive disfunctioning through sin.

According to Plantinga the possibility of salvation is communicated in two ways: through God-inspired Scripture and through the Holy Spirit. “A principal work of the Holy Spirit with respect to us human beings is the gift of *faith* (...). By virtue of the internal instigation of the Holy Spirit, we come to see the truth of the central Christian affirmations. Now faith is not just a cognitive affair (...). [I]t is a repair of the madness of the will that is at the heart of sin. Still, it is *at least* a cognitive matter. In giving us faith, the Holy Spirit enables us to see the truth of the main lines of the Christian gospel as set forth in Scripture (...).” Finally Plantinga connects these thoughts with his prior thoughts about warranted beliefs, stating that “the beliefs thus

³¹³ Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, p. 178-179.

³¹⁴ Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, p. 179.

³¹⁵ Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, p. 241.

³¹⁶ Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, p. 205.

produced in us meet the conditions necessary and sufficient for warrant; they are produced by cognitive processes functioning properly (in accord with their design plan) in an appropriate epistemic environment (...) according to a design plan successfully aimed at truth; if they are held with sufficient firmness, these beliefs quality as *knowledge* (...).³¹⁷ According to this extended Aquinas-Calvin model the “central truths of the Gospel are self-authenticating”, i.e. no other propositions are needed as evidence or warrant in order to belief these truths.³¹⁸ Possible defeaters of our belief can be defeated themselves through the power of the warrant produced by the *sensus divinitatis* and the testimony of the Holy Spirit.

6.7 Philosophy

Compared to Dooyeweerd Plantinga has written not much about philosophy as a discipline. In the foreword to *God, Nature and Evil* he loosely speaks about “[p]hilosophical reflection (which is not much different from just thinking hard)”. As far as I have discovered, this is the only place in his books. The most explicit discussion about philosophy can be found in two of his articles: *Augustinian Christian Philosophy* (1992) and *Advice to Christian Philosophers* (1984), in a response to an article about his philosophy and in a couple of interviews.³¹⁹

In *Advice to Christian Philosophers*, delivered as the author’s inaugural address as a professor of philosophy at the University of Notre Dame (1983), Plantinga gives a first description of his conception of philosophy. He writes: ““Philosophy,” as Hegel once exclaimed in a rare fit of lucidity, “is thinking things over.” Philosophy is in large part a clarification, systematization, articulation, relating and deepening of pre-philosophical opinion.” Philosophy is analysis (clarification, systematization, articulation). This can roughly be regarded as the method of the Anglo-American tradition of analytical philosophy. In the words of Wittgenstein philosophy is an activity that aims at the “logical clarification of thoughts”.³²⁰ Plantinga goes one step further: “We come to philosophy with a range of opinions about the world and humankind and the place of the latter in the former; and in philosophy we think about these matters, systematically articulate our views, put together and relate our views on diverse topics, and deepen our views by finding unexpected interconnections and by discovering and answering unanticipated questions. Of course we may come to change our minds by virtue of philosophical endeavour; we may discover incompatibilities or other infelicities. But we come to philosophy with pre-philosophical opinions; we can do no other.”³²¹ Philosophy is closely connected to and preceded by pre-philosophical opinion. This is an important element in Plantinga’s thought, because of his conception of belief as ‘properly basic’. He continues: “[T]he Christian has as much right to his pre-philosophical opinions, as others have to theirs. He needn’t try first to ‘prove’ them from propositions accepted by, say, the bulk of the non-Christian philosophical community; and if they are widely rejected as naive, or pre-scientific, or primitive, or unworthy of “man come of age,”

³¹⁷ Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, p. 205-206.

³¹⁸ Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, p. 261-262.

³¹⁹ Alvin Plantinga, ‘Augustinian Christian Philosophy’, *The Monist* 75:3 (1992), 291-320; Alvin Plantinga, ‘Advice to Christian Philosophers’, *Faith and Philosophy* 1: 3 (1984), 253-271; Alvin Plantinga, ‘On Christian philosophy’, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 57 (1989), No. 3, 617-612: p. 618.

³²⁰ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1961, 4.111-112

³²¹ Plantinga, ‘Advice to Christian Philosophers’, p. 267.

that is nothing whatever against them.” That does not mean that there is given room to all beliefs, whatever irrational they may be. “Of course if there were genuine and substantial arguments against them from premises that have some legitimate claim on the Christian philosopher, then he would have a problem; he would have to make some kind of change somewhere. But in the absence of such arguments – and the absence of such arguments is evident – the Christian philosophical community, quite properly starts, in philosophy, from what it believes.”³²²

Because no one can philosophize without pre-philosophical opinions, a Christian philosopher cannot do so without his Christian beliefs. He also legitimately enters philosophy with his beliefs. Philosophy is indeed an arena for our ‘commitments’, as Plantinga writes: “Philosophy is many things. I said earlier that it is a matter of systematizing, developing and deepening one’s pre-philosophical opinions. It is that; but it is also an arena for the articulation and interplay of commitments and allegiances fundamentally religious in nature; it is an expression of deep and fundamental perspectives, ways of viewing ourselves and the world and God. Among its most important and pressing projects are systematizing, deepening, exploring, articulating this perspective, and exploring its bearing on the rest of what we think and do.”³²³ Philosophy is analysis (clarification, systematization, articulation), that is also closely connected to and preceded by pre-philosophical opinion.

It is noteworthy that Plantinga almost always speaks of a ‘Christian philosopher’, not for example of a ‘Reformed philosopher’ or a ‘Calvinistic Philosopher’. On some occasions he speaks of ‘theistic philosophy’. When writing about belief in God he writes about God as he is conceived in the “Hebrew-Christian tradition” or about God as he is conceived in traditional Christianity, Judaism, and Islam: “an almighty, all-knowing wholly good and living person who has created the world and presently upholds it in being.”³²⁴ These differences sometimes are relevant, for example, when Plantinga is trying to argue for the rationality of belief in God – in general theistic sense – or specifically, for the Christian God as he is conceived in the Reformed tradition.

6.8 Christian philosophy

According to Plantinga, a Christian philosopher will consider all the philosophical problems that exist. He – or ‘she’, as Plantinga prefers – will sometimes appeal to what she knows or beliefs as a Christian and she is fully justified in doing so. “She is under no obligation to appeal only to beliefs shared by nearly everyone – what common sense and contemporary science dictate, for example. Nor is she obliged first to try to prove to the satisfaction of other philosophers that Christianity is true before setting out on this enterprise of Christian philosophy. Instead, she is entirely within her rights in starting from her Christian beliefs in addressing the philosophical problems in question.”³²⁵ This does not mean however that Christian faith itself defines what is truth in a specific inquiry, because “Christianity does not contain a

³²² Plantinga, ‘Advice to Christian Philosophers’, p. 267-268.

³²³ Plantinga, ‘Advice to Christian Philosophers’, p. 271.

³²⁴ Plantinga, *God and Other Minds*, p. xv; Alvin Plantinga, ‘Reformed Epistemology’, in: Philip L. Quinn & Charles Taliferro, *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, Malden/Oxford: Blackwell Publishers 2000, 383-389: p. 385.

³²⁵ Plantinga, ‘On Christian philosophy’, p. 618.

philosophical account of truth”.³²⁶ Neither does it mean that Christian philosophers have the aim to reject any belief, procedure or technique that is used by non-Christians.³²⁷ “Where the Christian philosopher will want to differ from her non-Christian counterpart is with respect to assumptions that guide philosophical inquiry, where those assumptions run counter to Christianity – are either directly inconsistent with some tenet of Christianity, or inconsistent with some broader set of propositions that includes both tenets of Christianity and other propositions that seem very probable.”³²⁸ A Christian philosopher, according to Plantinga, will not for example reduce mind states to only material processes or belief that properties or states of affairs only exist when they’re thought of by human minds or belief that love, morality or beauty can only be understood in evolutionary terms.³²⁹ Finally, “[A] Christian philosopher is first of all a Christian and only secondarily a philosopher. Her philosophy is her specific way of working out her vocation as a Christian (...).”³³⁰

6.9 Augustinian Christian Philosophy

In the article *Augustinian Christian Philosophy* Plantinga wants to “make a suggestion as to how we should think about Christian philosophy now; but this way of thinking of the matter grows out of Augustinian roots.”³³¹ According to Plantinga “there are at present three main competitors vying for spiritual supremacy in the West: three fundamental perspectives or ways of thought about what the world is like, what we ourselves are like, what is most important about the world, what our place in it is, and what we must do to live the good life.” These three dominant *Weltanschauungen* or world views of our time are perennial naturalism, creative antirealism and Christian theism. Perennial naturalism, ranging from Epicurus and Democritus to Russell and Quine, claims that there is only nature, i.e. there is no reality outside natural (material) reality; morality, faith and aesthetics can be reduced to material states and only ‘scientific’ knowledge is true knowledge. Creative antirealism (with its attendant relativism) views humans as ‘architects of the universe’. It can also be called Enlightenment humanism or subjectivism. Antirealism breeds relativism and nihilism.

These perspectives – explicitly or implicitly – play a central role in all of Plantinga’s work. Regarding the three world views he writes that “it is wholly clear that philosophy is not neutral with respect to the struggle between these three *Weltanschauungen*. Indeed, from one point of view, philosophy just is at bottom an effort to understand the world and ourselves from the vantage point or perspective of one or another of these ways of looking at the world.” There is no philosophy without a world view, nor is philosophy neutral concerning world views, because it springs itself from a world view. Plantinga goes one step further: “Philosophy – philosophy that is clear and deep at any rate – is fundamentally an effort to work out the implications of a world view – one of these or another – with respect to the sorts of questions philosophers ask and answer. This is what philosophers do, though with varying degrees of selfconsciousness and clarity.” What is the consequence of this? “Vast stretches of contemporary philosophy, therefore, will have spiritual or religious

³²⁶ Plantinga, ‘On Christian philosophy’, p. 619.

³²⁷ Plantinga, ‘On Christian philosophy’, p. 620.

³²⁸ Plantinga, ‘On Christian philosophy’, p. 621.

³²⁹ Plantinga, ‘On Christian philosophy’, p. 621.

³³⁰ Alvin Plantinga, ‘Christian Philosophy at the End of the 20th Century’, in: Sander Griffioen & Bert M. Balk (Eds.), *Christian Philosophy at the Close of the Twentieth Century: Assessment and Perspective*, Kampen: Kok 1995, 29-53; p. 53.

³³¹ Plantinga, ‘Augustinian Christian Philosophy’, p. 291-320.

roots – and spiritual and religious fruits.”³³² Plantinga himself draws the unavoidable historical lines when, in another article, he states that an idea of Augustine “flowered much later in the work of Kuyper, Dooyeweerd, Harry Jellema and others: scholarship, intellectual endeavor, science in the sense of *Wetenschap* is inevitably involved in these perspectives. Intellectual activity has religious roots.”³³³

Christian philosophy has four tasks. The first is philosophical theology: reflecting on the Christian teaching and dogma’s (God, man, incarnation, reconciliation etc.). The second is apologetics, to be distinguished in positive and negative apologetics: developing arguments in favour of the Christian faith and defending the faith against intellectual attacks. The third is positive Christian philosophy: thinking about philosophical questions from a Christian point of view. The fourth is Christian philosophical criticism. Here the Augustinian element emerges most clearly.

Plantinga adopts the Augustinian distinction between two opposing forces in human history, namely the City of God (*Civitas Dei*) and the Earthly City or City of the World (*Civitas Mundi*). As I sketched earlier, Abraham Kuyper called this distinction an *antithesis* between belief and unbelief. Plantinga writes: “Augustine and Kuyper are right; and the contemporary Western intellectual world, like the worlds of their times, is a battleground or arena in which rages a battle for men’s souls.”³³⁴ Christian philosophers have to battle against naturalism, subjectivism, nihilism and relativism. In this battles “the Christian philosophical community has its own agenda; it need not and should not automatically take its projects from the list of those currently in favor at the leading contemporary centers of philosophy.”³³⁵

6.10 Philosophy and theology

Plantinga distinguishes the Augustinian approach to philosophy from the Thomist one.³³⁶ Thomists think that philosophy (like other non-theological sciences) is the province of natural reason, unaided by faith or special revelation. When a scholar starts from what he knows by faith, the result will be theology. In Plantinga’s words: “Theology in, theology out, as the computer *literati* say.”³³⁷ In the Augustinian approach the fundamentally religious nature of philosophical activity is recognized.

There is no neutral domain for the natural reason, not in theology, not in philosophy, not in any science. Therefore a fundamental difference between theology and philosophy does not exist. In an interview Plantinga makes this clear. First he sketches the position of theistic philosophy: “We think of theistic philosophy as asking questions that philosophers think about and then asking, ‘How should we think about this area from the perspective of theism? Given that I believe in God, how should I think about the past, or mathematics, causality or whatever?’ When you start to think philosophically about some topic, of course, you always start by assuming a number of things in that inquiry. So you might take God’s existence for granted in asking about causality or about whether materialism with respect to human beings is true. And very often you’ll wind up with some interesting things, things you might not

³³² Plantinga, ‘Augustinian Christian Philosophy’, p. 291-320.

³³³ Plantinga, ‘Christian Philosophy at the End of the 20th Century’, p. 42.

³³⁴ Plantinga, ‘Augustinian Christian Philosophy’, p. 295.

³³⁵ Plantinga, ‘Advice to Christian Philosophers’, p. 271.

³³⁶ Plantinga, ‘Augustinian Christian Philosophy’, p. 313.

³³⁷ Plantinga, ‘Augustinian Christian Philosophy’, p. 313.

have thought of at all, otherwise.” When the interviewer asks him “And how would that be different from theology?” he answers: “Well, I would say that there isn’t any – in principle – difference between theology and philosophy. It’s rather that theology addresses one set of questions and philosophy addresses another set of questions, [such as] the nature of causality, or the nature of numbers or the nature of time. Theologians don’t typically ask those questions; they ask questions more directly about the nature of God and about what the Bible teaches. But, as I say, there’s no difference in principle between Christian philosophy and theology.”³³⁸ (I will explicate my position on this point in par. 8.3.)

It is noteworthy that Plantinga wants to use the same analytical methodology in both philosophy and theology. Modal logic is of a central importance for his way of philosophizing. He writes: “I think, that a working knowledge of these modal matters is absolutely essential to clear thinking on most philosophical topics; nearly all philosophical topics, if pushed far enough, wind up crucially involving matters of modality. What is less obvious but equally true is that the same goes for theology; a certain amount of modal logic and of the lore and distinctions that go with it is essential for decent work on many of the main topics of theology.”³³⁹ An interesting application of this methodology can be found in Plantinga’s book *God, Freedom, and Evil* (1974) in which he discusses the claim that the existence of a good, omnipotent and all-knowing God can not go together with the existence of evil in the world.³⁴⁰ Using modal logic he shows that this claim is not sustainable. In *The Nature of Necessity* (1974) Plantinga also discusses, at a more technical level, the ‘metaphysics of freedom’ in connection with evil and God’s being omnipotent, omniscient and wholly good (chapter 9) and the ontological argument concerning the necessary existence of God (chapter 10).³⁴¹ Another interesting application is his lecture *Does God Have a Nature?* (1980), which will be discussed below.

6.11 Metaphysics

In apparent deviation from the mainstream of the Reformed tradition Plantinga is involved with metaphysics, especially in the aforementioned books (this point will be further discussed in the next chapter). In his lecture *Does God Have a Nature?* Plantinga discusses the possibility of knowledge of God.³⁴² According to Plantinga a lot of theologians and philosophers after Kant – including Dooyeweerd, I suppose – have said that our concepts do not apply to God because God transcends human experience. However, the person who uses this argument supposes to know first, that God transcends human experience, and second, what it is to transcend human experience. Even the concept “being such that none of our concepts applies to it” is a concept that – apparently – applies to God.³⁴³ Plantinga quite strongly reacts against the post-Kantian line of thought: “This way of thinking begins in a pious and commendable concern for God’s greatness and majesty and augustness; but it ends in agnosticism and in incoherence.” Plantinga does not want to follow Kant in his distinction between the *Ding an Sich* (the *noumenal*) and the realm of appearances.

³³⁸ Ashleigh Draft, ‘A conversation with philosopher Alvin Plantinga’, July 7, 2008, <<http://www.calvin.edu/news/2008-09/alvin-plantinga>>, visited November 6, 2009.

³³⁹ Plantinga, ‘Self-profile’, p. 25.

³⁴⁰ Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1974.

³⁴¹ Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1974.

³⁴² Alvin Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?*, Milwaukee: Marquette University Press 2007 (1980).

³⁴³ Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?*, p. 24.

According to Kant, when we try to transcend our ‘temporal horizon’ we fall victim to *Tranzendentaler Schein*. This is also the distinction made by the (post-Kantian) theologian Gordon D. Kaufman who distinguishes between God as “the real referent” and God as “the available referent”.³⁴⁴ According to Plantinga however this leads to incoherence and absurdity, because “if none of our concepts apply to God, then there is nothing we know or truly believe of him – not even what is affirmed in the creeds or affirmed in the Scriptures. And if there is nothing we can know or truly believe of him, then, of course, we cannot know or truly believe that none of our concepts apply to him. The view that our concepts don’t apply to God is fatally ensnarled in self-referential absurdity.”³⁴⁵

According to Plantinga God *has* a nature that is not identical with him. He has at least the following properties: he does not know that he does not exist, he has existence essentially, he cannot fail to exist, he has necessary existence and he is such that he exists in every possible world. Actually, as Plantinga shows, the question whether God has a nature is the same as whether there are any necessary truths. Plantinga goes even further when stating that “each possible world is such that God affirms its existence” and “exploring the realm of abstract objects can be seen as exploring the nature of God” and “each theorem of logic (...) is such that affirming it is part of God’s nature.”³⁴⁶ When we regard a proposition A equivalent to B we actually regard God’s nature such as believing both A and B or neither A nor B.³⁴⁷

According to Plantinga we cannot know how God knows, although there are analogies and similarities between God’s knowledge and ours. Still, we know “that his knowledge doesn’t proceed via the causal channels by which our knowledge proceeds; we know further that it doesn’t proceed by way of any other causal channel either.”³⁴⁸ He is however omniscient and necessarily existent. We can further say that necessarily, “for any proposition *p*, *p* is true if and only if God believes it.”³⁴⁹

6.12 Realism

Plantinga’s ontology and metaphysics stand in the tradition that can roughly be characterized as ‘Platonic realism’ or ‘modal realism’, though in a version that can be called ‘Augustinian realism’, although Plantinga himself gives it still another name. I will try to explain this. When he was president of the American Philosophical Association (1982) he devoted his Presidential Address *How to be an anti-realist* to this theme. He describes Platonism (i.e. Platonic realism) as “the view that among the furniture of the universe there are such abstract objects as propositions, possible worlds, numbers and properties”, and further that these objects “exist *independently* of everything else”, i.e. “independently of minds and their noetic activity; they aren’t in any way dependent upon the mind.”³⁵⁰ Anti-realism, specifically in the version of creative anti-realism, is “the claim that truth is not independent of mind.”³⁵¹ Plantinga argues that both realism (Plato, Frege) and anti-realism (Kant, Rorty, Putnam) are

³⁴⁴ Gordon D. Kaufman, *God the Problem*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1972.

³⁴⁵ Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?*, p. 26.

³⁴⁶ Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?*, p. 143-144.

³⁴⁷ Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?*, p. 145.

³⁴⁸ Alvin Plantinga, ‘Divine knowledge’, in: C. Stephen Evans & Merold Westphal (Eds.), *Christian Perspectives on Religious Knowledge*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1993, 40-65: p. 63.

³⁴⁹ Alvin Plantinga, ‘Divine knowledge’, p. 65.

³⁵⁰ Alvin Plantinga, ‘How to be an Anti-Realist’, *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, Vol. 56, No. 1 (1982), 47-70: p. 68.

³⁵¹ Plantinga, ‘How to be an Anti-Realist’, p. 69.

incoherent or otherwise objectionable. To escape from this antinomy he turns to a synthesis suggested by Augustine. According to Augustine, on the one side, there cannot be truth independent of noetic activity. On the other side, there can be truth independent of *our* noetic activity. The synthesis is, according to Augustine, that there is no truth outside God's intellect. This was stated by Thomas Aquinas as follows: "Even if there were no human intellects, there could be truths because of their relation to the divine intellect. But if, *per impossibile*, there were no intellects at all, but things continued to exist, then there would be no such reality as truth."³⁵² Therefore, according to Plantinga, a proposition *p* can be true if and only if it is believed by God.³⁵³ He calls this thesis 'divine creative anti-realism', i.e. "the view that truth is not independent of God's noetic activity."³⁵⁴ Plantinga further rejects the views that being true *just is* being believed by God or that something is true *because* God believes it. "It is thus not the case that a proposition is true because God believes it. On the other hand it is the case, I think, that a proposition *exists* because God thinks or conceives it. For propositions, as I see it, are best thought of as the thoughts of God." This does not mean that propositions therefore exist necessarily, because "God is a necessary being who has essentially the property of thinking just the thoughts he does think; these thoughts, then are conceived or thought by God in every possible world and hence exist necessarily." Plantinga concludes: "So how can we sensibly be anti-realists? Easily enough: by being theists."³⁵⁵ I think this position can best be characterized as 'Augustinian realism'.

Concerning religious language Plantinga is also a realist. The proposition "God exists" means that there is a being 'God' outside of us and outside of our language. This is the common sense meaning of existence. Religious beliefs, like "God exists" are cognitive claims that are either true or false.

6.13 Natural theology

Plantinga distinguishes natural theology from natural *atheology*. Natural theology is the enterprise to try to "give successful arguments or proofs for the existence of God", while natural atheology is the attempt to show that "belief in God is demonstrably irrational or unreasonable."³⁵⁶ Neither the projects of natural theology nor natural atheology can be regarded as successful. The most plausible arguments to support these projects fail. Plantinga's relationship to natural theology however is somewhat diffuse. On the one side he agrees unqualified with the Reformed tradition that natural theology cannot be an independent, self-sufficient source of knowledge about God. Man is dependent on God and faith is a gift, not the conclusion of an argument. On the other side he has increasingly shown interest in natural theology during the years and frequently uses theistic argumentation. Interestingly, he was invited twice to deliver the prestigious Gifford Lectures on natural theology.

In his chapter 'Reason and Belief in God' Plantinga has argued that natural theology is not necessary for rational belief in God's existence.³⁵⁷ In *God, Freedom and Evil*

³⁵² Thomas Aquinas, *De Veritate*, Q. 1, A.6 Respondeo, as cited in Plantinga, 'How to be an Anti-Realist', p. 68.

³⁵³ Plantinga, 'How to be an Anti-Realist', p. 68.

³⁵⁴ Plantinga, 'How to be an Anti-Realist', p. 69.

³⁵⁵ Plantinga, 'How to be an Anti-Realist', p. 70.

³⁵⁶ Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, p. 2.

³⁵⁷ Plantinga, 'Reason and Belief in God'

and *The Nature of Necessity* however Plantinga has developed a ‘triumphant’ ontological argument for the existence of God, in order to show the ‘rational acceptability’ of such a belief. “What I claim for this argument (...) is that it establishes, not the truth of theism, but its rational acceptability. And hence it accomplishes at least one of the aims of the tradition of natural theology.”³⁵⁸ Belief in God may be properly basic, this doesn’t mean it is groundless.³⁵⁹ The problem with traditional theistic arguments however is that they don’t meet the standards that are applied to them, such as the demand for self-evident premisses or a self-evident argument leading to the conclusion. There isn’t *any* philosophical argument that meets these standards. That doesn’t mean that there are no philosophical arguments for theistic belief. According to Plantinga there are at least “two dozen (or so)” good theistic arguments.³⁶⁰

Natural theology in Plantinga’s new conception is not a way of proving the existence of God independent from revelation. It rather is an attempt to reasonable articulation of the properly basic beliefs of the believers. His point is that natural theology has to play a different role than it has done before. Even when the arguments of natural theology neither proof the existence of God nor are needed to warrant theistic belief, they can “play the role of *increasing* warrant, and *significantly* increasing warrant.”³⁶¹ To believe in God is not the same as to believe that God exists, but the strengthening of the latter belief can support the former.³⁶²

6.14 Rationality

What are Plantinga’s thoughts about the Calvinistic doctrine of the corruption of reason by sin? Is there any room for philosophy? In an interview Plantinga first states that although reason is affected by evil, it is not destroyed by it. Secondly, there is a distinction between the different disciplines on this point. There is hardly any effect in the disciplines of mathematics, physics or logic, but there is when the questions of ultimate meaning are concerned.³⁶³ Besides, the Holy Spirit repairs the cognitive and affective effects of sin in order to let us have faith.

Although faith is the starting point for a theistic philosopher, this does not make him a fideist. Plantinga notes that fideism can be defined as an “exclusive or basic reliance upon faith alone, accompanied by a consequent disparagement of reason and utilized especially in the pursuit of philosophical or religious truth”.³⁶⁴ Correspondingly, Plantinga writes, a *fideist* is someone who “urges reliance on faith rather than reason, in matters philosophical and religious” and who “may go on to disparage and denigrate reason”.³⁶⁵ Plantinga does not regard faith as an irrational element. He only

³⁵⁸ Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, p. 112.

³⁵⁹ Graham Oppy, ‘Natural theology’, in: Deane-Peter Baker, *Alvin Plantinga*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2007, 15-47: 26.

³⁶⁰ I will not go into detail here, but simply refer to Alvin Plantinga, ‘Appendix: Two Dozen (or so) Theistic Arguments’, in: Deane-Peter Baker, *Alvin Plantinga*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2007, 203-227.

³⁶¹ Alvin Plantinga, ‘The Prospects for Natural Theology’, in: James Tomberlin (Ed.), *Philosophical Perspectives 5: Philosophy of Religion*, Atascadero: Ridgeview Press 1991, 287-316: p. 311.

³⁶² Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, p. 1-2.

³⁶³ Ger Groot, ‘God is Hamlet niet. Gesprek met Alvin Plantinga’, in: *Twee zielen. Gesprekken met hedendaagse filosofen*, Nijmegen: Sun 1999, 176-193: p. 184.

³⁶⁴ Plantinga, ‘Reason and Belief in God’, p. 87.

³⁶⁵ Plantinga, ‘Reason and Belief in God’, p. 87.

states that faith itself is 'properly basic'. The growth and subsistence of faith do not need any additional evidence or argumentation to be reasonable.

More specifically then, what is Plantinga's conception of reason? As has been shown above, he stresses the divine design and creation of the cognitive faculties and their properly functioning (in accord with their design plan) in an appropriate epistemic environment. Important here is the religious dimension, in which Plantinga gives some insight when comparing different conceptions of reason among theists and nontheists. He writes: "A former professor of mine for whom I had and have enormous respect once said that theists and nontheists have different conceptions of reason. At the time I did not know what he meant, but now I think I do."³⁶⁶ This former professor is W.H. Jellema. According to Plantinga the (Reformed) theist and the nontheist disagree about the deliverances of reason, because "[o]n the Reformed view I have been urging, the deliverances of reason include the existence of God just as much as perceptual truths, self-evident truths, memory truths, and the like."³⁶⁷ The theist and nontheist simply do not agree as to what reason delivers. According to the theist the existence of God is a deliverance of reason. This doesn't make him a fideist (see par. 8.3).

³⁶⁶ Plantinga, 'Reason and Belief in God', p. 90.

³⁶⁷ Plantinga, 'Reason and Belief in God', p. 90.

7 Dooyeweerd and Plantinga: A Comparison

After the introduction to different elements in the Reformed tradition (chapters 2, 3 and 4), two of the most important contemporary philosophers in the Reformed tradition have been introduced in chapters 5 and 6. In the present chapter a comparison will be made between these thinkers, in which both similarities and differences will be emphasized.

7.1 Philosophical orientation

The differences in the philosophies of Dooyeweerd and Plantinga cannot be rightly understood when no attention is paid to the differences in intellectual climate in which they developed their philosophy. In the twenties and thirties of the twentieth century in which Dooyeweerd developed his philosophy, philosophy in the Netherlands was characterized by relatively separated schools of thought, like neo-Hegelianism, neo-Kantianism, Spinozism and phenomenology.³⁶⁸ Many philosophy chairs at the universities in the Netherlands were occupied by neo-Kantian philosophers. Dutch philosophy was to a high extent oriented on German philosophy. Besides, philosophy was often closely connected to theology, though the two universities on a religious basis were very young. The neo-Calvinistic Free University in Amsterdam started in 1880 and the Catholic University of Nijmegen in 1923. In the cultural pessimism in the twenties and thirties of the twentieth century intellectuals were searching for new foundations for science and culture. Dooyeweerd intended to contribute to the re-launch of philosophical discussion in the Occident. The books he started to publish in the thirties however, in the first place need to be regarded as a philosophical elaboration of the neo-Calvinistic movement.

The situation in American philosophy in the fifties and sixties of the twentieth century, in which Plantinga developed his philosophy, was very different. The professionalization of American philosophy rose to high levels in the thirties and forties of the twentieth century. These were the heydays of logical positivism and analytical philosophy, with Harvard as its center. In this ‘philosophy for the philosophers’ (Ryle) religion was no topic for philosophy anymore. For example, in 1967 the article ‘American Philosophy’ in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (1967) ended with the characteristic words: “Metaphysics in the sense of speculation about some transcendent reality is no longer fashionable”.³⁶⁹ It was in this climate that Plantinga started to study philosophy at Harvard in 1950 and published his first books in the sixties. It was in the spring of 1980 that *Time* magazine reported the revolutionairy ‘comeback’ of God “in the crisp, intellectual circles of academic

³⁶⁸ See generally Ronald van Raak, Henri Krop, Wiep van Bunge & Hans Blom (Eds.), *Wijsbegeerte in Nederland in de twintigste eeuw*, Best: Damon 1999.

³⁶⁹ Paul Kurtz, ‘American Philosophy’, *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol. I, New York/London: Macmillan 1967, p. 92, as cited in Anthonie Vos Jaczn., ‘Plantinga’s wijsbegeerte tegen de achtergrond van de Amerikaanse filosofie’, in: René van Woudenberg & Bart Cusveller (Red.), *De kentheorie van Alvin Plantinga*, Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum 1998, 17-33: p. 25.

philosophers”.³⁷⁰ Plantinga’s book *God and Other Minds* (1967) characterizes a new phase in the professionalization of *Christian* philosophy.³⁷¹

Dooyeweerd was, especially in the years before WWII, closely connected to one (sub) pillar in the Dutch ‘pillarized’ (*verzuilde*) society, namely neo-Calvinistic subculture. Therefore, his philosophy has for a long time been the philosophy of this specific subculture. Actually it has never completely lost this connection, although after WWII he increasingly looked for the philosophical debate with other schools of thought. He remained at the Free University of Amsterdam. Plantinga’s position is different. Although he was closely connected to the Reformed Calvin College for a long time, he was and is much more a professional philosopher, who publishes in professional journals and is credited by his collegian-philosophers. He has a much larger intellectual arena than Dooyeweerd had.³⁷² He also did what Dooyeweerd, in his times, probably never would have done: he joined the philosophy department of a Catholic university.

The differences in the philosophies of Dooyeweerd and Plantinga can also be explained by their different orientation in philosophy. As previously stated, Dooyeweerd’s philosophical orientation is on Kantian epistemology, focusing on the human, knowing subject (the ‘I’).³⁷³ His philosophy is framed by Continental idealist concepts and terminology. Dooyeweerd’s books are thick and often hard to read because of their terminology. Plantinga’s orientation however is on Plato’s realism, specifically as set forth in his *Theatetus*, seeing knowledge as the mind’s direct touch with reality.³⁷⁴ Plantinga works in the analytical tradition in philosophy. He is interested in analytical details and formalized arguments, and makes extensive use of advanced modal logic. Plantinga’s books are partly highly specialistic and technical, though clearly written and structured. Other books are written for a wider audience, being very clearly written, sometimes somewhat light-footed and humorous. Whoever reads Dooyeweerd’s and Plantinga’s book just seems to enter different ‘symbolic universes’.

7.2 Mutual criticism

It is unknown whether Dooyeweerd, who died in 1977, has read any of Plantinga’s works. Plantinga’s first article (1958) was about Dooyeweerd’s philosophy; his first books appeared in 1967 (*God and Other Minds*) and 1974 (*The Nature of Necessity and God, Freedom, and Evil*). Anyway, Dooyeweerd never published a comment on Plantinga’s thought. Plantinga in turn has commented on a few occasions on Dooyeweerd’s thought. Plantinga criticizes Dooyeweerd’s philosophy because its transcendental orientation is too much indebted to Kant’s philosophy. According to

³⁷⁰ Cited in K.J. Clark, ‘Introduction’, in: K.J. Clark (Ed.), *Philosophers Who Believe*, Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 7-21: p. 7; also cited in Philip Blosser, ‘God among the philosophers’, *New Oxford Review* 66:9 (October 1999), p. 39 <www.newoxfordreview.org>, visited November 6, 2009.

³⁷¹ Anthonie Vos Jaczn., ‘Plantinga’s wijsbegeerte tegen de achtergrond van de Amerikaanse filosofie’, in: René van Woudenberg & Bart Cusveller (Red.), *De kentheorie van Alvin Plantinga*, Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum 1998, 17-33: p. 19, 25.

³⁷² Richard J. Mouw, ‘Dutch Calvinist Philosophical Influences in North America’, *Calvin Theological Journal* 24 (1989), No. 1, 93-120: p. 107.

³⁷³ Jong Doo Kim, *Wissen und Glauben bei I. Kant und H. Dooyeweerd*, p. 12; Cf. the title of *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*.

³⁷⁴ Dewey Hoitenga, *Faith and Reason from Plato to Plantinga: An Introduction to Reformed Epistemology*, New York: State University of New York Press 1991, p. 192.

Plantinga this leads to subjectivism ('creative anti-realism'), because knowledge is regarded as a human construction. Another point of criticism is Dooyeweerd's rejection of the body-soul dualism, which has not been discussed in this book.³⁷⁵

From Dooyeweerd's perspective a few remarks can be made. Dooyeweerd probably would have thought that Plantinga's connection of philosophy to religious commitments stays 'external'. Plantinga does not argue *how* they are connected. Nor does he discuss what makes philosophy possible, or, in Dooyeweerd's terms, he does not offer a transcendental critique of theoretical thought. Plantinga's philosophy is 'uncritical', because it does not criticize theoretical thought as such. Besides, Plantinga runs the risk of absolutizing the logical-analytical function when emphasizing logical-analytical clarity, for example when writing about God's nature. From Plantinga's perspective the argumentation in Dooyeweerd's philosophy frequently remains unclear. Dooyeweerd often – though not always – tries to make his position plausible, but does not use the clear-cut analytical argumentation Plantinga uses.

7.3 Clarity

These differences can perhaps be made clear by using the example of Plantinga's comment on Dooyeweerd in his article 'Dooyeweerd on Meaning and Being'. Although the article is written early in Plantinga's career – 1958, the year he started at Wayne – it already characterizes his later style of thought. The article shows a very close reading of Dooyeweerd's *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*. Plantinga starts with praising Dooyeweerd. "There is much to admire in Professor Dooyeweerd's Philosophy of the Cosmomic Idea. This system is rich and variegated, suggestive and stimulating. Adventurous and bold in the quest for a more profound understanding of the philosophical implications of Christianity, Professor Dooyeweerd does not shrink from criticizing and revising traditional Reformed ways of thinking where it seems to him that they are strayed from the path of truth. And this is as it should be."³⁷⁶

After this praise comes the sharp, though sympathetic criticism. Plantinga sketches Dooyeweerd's thoughts about creation's referring, expressing and meaning. As previously cited (see par. 5.6), Dooyeweerd writes: "This universal character of *referring* and *expressing*, which is proper to our entire created cosmos, stamps created reality as *meaning*, in accordance with its dependent non-self-sufficient nature. *Meaning* is the *being* of all that has been *created* and the nature even of our selfhood. It has a *religious root* and a *divine origin*."³⁷⁷ Plantinga explains that Dooyeweerd wants to state that 'being' is only applicable to God, while dependent creation only has 'meaning'. Referring to created reality as 'being' would be a deification of creation. Plantinga then wants to 'elucidate' this view. He uses the methodology of analytical philosophy by sharply analysing what could be meant by the words 'being' and 'meaning', thereby using examples and counter-examples, and discovering ambiguities. He concludes that Dooyeweerd neither simply means that creation is

³⁷⁵ R. J. A. Doornenbal & R. van Woudenberg, 'Interview met Alvin Plantinga', *Beweging* 58, herfst 1995.

³⁷⁶ Alvin Plantinga, 'Dooyeweerd on Meaning and Being', *Reformed Journal* 8 (Oct. 1958), 10-15: p. 10.

³⁷⁷ Herman Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, Vol. I., Amsterdam/Philadelphia: Paris/Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company 1953-1958, p. 4.

dependent upon God, because that would be a truism for a Christian, nor means that created reality has *both* meaning and being, nor some other possible interpretations. An “intelligible and non-truistic explication” is, according to Plantinga, that Dooyeweerd rejects the philosophical doctrine of substance, because it is a Thomistic-Aristotelian concept, i.e. “a unit of being, a relatively independent and persisting entity which may have attributes but is not itself an attribute of any other being”.³⁷⁸ Plantinga then sketches different arguments that Dooyeweerd might have, such as the argument that the doctrine of substance is, in Dooyeweerd’s terminology, based on the Greek ground-motive of form and matter.

Next, Plantinga argues why these arguments are not convincing. For example, “To chide Thomas for using a concept arising in pagan Greek thought might be like excoriating St. Augustine for writing in a language developed in pagan Rome.”³⁷⁹ Plantinga gives some other counterarguments, such as difficulties with Dooyeweerd’s doctrine when accounting for action, movement, causation, and memory. Finally, the doctrine that meaning is the mode of being of created reality according to Plantinga “seems to jeopardize the doctrine of creation. For it suggests that the relation between God and creation is like the relation between a mind and the meanings it entertains.”³⁸⁰

According to Plantinga, Dooyeweerd “rightly rejects any dictation to philosophy on the part of theology” and rightly suggests revisions of Reformed thinking where necessary. “Still, however, if the total result is to be called a *Christian* philosophy and in particular a *Reformed* philosophy, it must be consistent with the spirit and the main doctrines of the Reformed and Christian tradition.” If Dooyeweerd’s doctrine implies that the relation between God and creation can be compared to the relation between a thinker and the meanings he entertains, then he would significantly depart from the Reformed and Christian tradition. “For then created reality becomes constitutive of God’s mind and thus of God. And this is clearly to controvert the Christian conception of creation with its ontological chasm between God and created reality.” Plantinga then continues to state that this chasm seems to presuppose the being of both God and creation. A meaning, for example, cannot sin; only evil being can. “The Christian philosopher must steer a nice course between the Scylla of giving finite reality too much self-sufficiency and power”, which threatens God’s uniqueness and sovereignty, and “the Charybdis of altogether divesting creation of distinctness and “over-againstness” with respect to God”, which leads to pantheism. Dooyeweerd, by trying to avoid Scylla, comes close to Charybdis, because “the very attempt to emphasize God’s transcendent uniqueness and sovereignty may end by making him the author of evil in a very intimate sense and by denying an ontological distinction between Creator and creation altogether.”³⁸¹

Finally, Plantinga assures that ‘Professor Dooyeweerd’ will be “entirely aware” of the danger. “But in the absence of further elucidation, the dictum that meaning is the mode of being of created reality makes it hard to see how God and creation are to be kept distinct. The difficulty, of course, is with the dictum itself. For so long as we

³⁷⁸ Plantinga, ‘Dooyeweerd on Meaning and Being’, p. 12.

³⁷⁹ Plantinga, ‘Dooyeweerd on Meaning and Being’, p. 14

³⁸⁰ Plantinga, ‘Dooyeweerd on Meaning and Being’, p. 14

³⁸¹ Plantinga, ‘Dooyeweerd on Meaning and Being’, p. 15

cannot discover more precisely what that dictum means, so long we shall remain in the dark about its precise implications for important Christian doctrines.”³⁸²

In my interpretation, especially in the last sentences the difference in philosophical methodology between Dooyeweerd and Plantinga is made clear. Based on the neo-Calvinist theological doctrine of the boundary between Creator and creation, Dooyeweerd is very cautious not to deificate creation. He emphasizes the mystery, other-sidedness and ‘over-againstness’ of the Creator, perhaps at the cost of philosophical clarity. Plantinga on the other side is mainly focused on the clear use of language when speaking about Creator and creation. In his approach this clarity is the basis for further discussion, perhaps at the cost of theological distance and caution. Part of this difference has to do with the difference between Continental and analytical philosophy, but there is also a difference in the conception of reason and metaphysics, as will be discussed below.

7.4 Philosophy

Dooyeweerd’s and Plantinga’s philosophies were not only developed in a different intellectual climate and philosophical orientation, they also tried to answer different questions. While Dooyeweerd’s philosophy is mainly an analysis of the structures of reality, Plantinga’s philosophy is mainly a defence of theistic belief. Dooyeweerd tried to develop a philosophical foundation for (neo-Calvinistic) science, and wanted to build on scientific discoveries in turn. He had to develop his own terminology or adapt existing neo-Kantian and neo-Calvinistic terminology. Plantinga tried (and tries) to be a Christian in philosophy, i.e. he uses philosophical methodology to practice philosophical theology, positive and negative apologetics, positive Christian philosophy and philosophical criticism.³⁸³ In Dooyeweerd’s conception of philosophy there is no place for a philosophical theology, at least not to be practiced by a philosopher. Theology is the scholarship of the faith aspect of reality; philosophy is aimed at the totality of the cosmos. I suppose that Dooyeweerd also would regard apologetics as at least partly a theological doctrine. He probably would regard positive Christian philosophy and philosophical criticism as true philosophical tasks.

In Dooyeweerd’s view it is the task of philosophy to study the totality of meaning. Philosophy must direct the theoretical view of totality over our cosmos and, within the limits of its possibility, answer the question, “Wie alles sich zum Ganzen webt”. In Plantinga’s view philosophy is analysis, clarification, systematization, and articulation. Dooyeweerd would probably agree with Plantinga’s view that, as previously stated, philosophy is a matter of systematizing, developing and deepening one’s pre-philosophical opinions, and an arena for the articulation and interplay of commitments and allegiances fundamentally religious in nature. He would probably also agree that it is an expression of deep and fundamental perspectives, ways of viewing ourselves and the world, and God, and a systematizing, deepening, exploring, articulating of this perspective, and exploring its bearing on the rest of what we think and do.

Both Dooyeweerd and Plantinga claim to have developed a Christian *philosophy*, not a theology, although the distinction between philosophy and theology is more clear in Dooyeweerd’s thought than in Plantinga’s. According to Plantinga there is in

³⁸² Plantinga, ‘Dooyeweerd on Meaning and Being’, p. 15

³⁸³ Alvin Plantinga, ‘Augustinian Christian Philosophy’, *The Monist* 75:3 (1992), 291-320.

principle no difference between theology and philosophy insofar as methodology is concerned. The disciplines just ask different questions. According to Dooyeweerd, the task of philosophy is to study the totality of meaning, while theology is the scholarship of the faith aspect of reality, as stated previously. Both Dooyeweerd and Plantinga want to stay away from Biblicism and fideism. (I will explicate my position on this point in par. 8.3.)

Finally, neither Dooyeweerd nor Plantinga speaks in contempt about the ‘naïve’ experience of everyday reality. In Dooyeweerd’s philosophy this is an important theme in regard to the theoretical attitude of science which is always derived from naïve experience and does not lead to a higher level of knowledge. In Plantinga’s philosophy this theme especially emerges in regard to the proper basicity of belief in God. The philosophical articulation of faith is not a higher level of faith than the direct experience of God. Both philosophers agree that a (Christian) philosopher legitimately enters philosophy with his pre-philosophical and naïve beliefs.

7.5 Rationality

Dooyeweerd and Plantinga agree that reason should not be depreciated. Plantinga stresses the divine design and creation of the cognitive faculties and their properly functioning (in accord with their design plan) in an appropriate epistemic environment. The theist and nontheist though do not agree as to what reason delivers, because according to the theist the existence of God is a deliverance of reason.

An important notion in Dooyeweerd’s philosophy, relevant for his conception of reason, is the non-self-sufficiency of reality. The whole of reality, in all its modal aspects, refers to and is an expression of its origin. This includes the logical-analytical function of man. Reason is not self-complacent, but should be put in its right place. Rationality is limited to creation, i.e. the earthly cosmos. Rationality is regarded as a modal aspect, the logical-analytical one. The logical-analytical function of man is only one function, not the highest one.

I think a crucial difference between Dooyeweerd and Plantinga exists regarding the status of reason. Plantinga seems to regard reason as a more or less ‘neutral’ instrument – though created according to God’s design plan – that is only ‘coloured’ by the pre-philosophical assumptions of the philosopher using his reason. According to Plantinga, Christian philosophers do not aim to reject any belief, procedure or technique that is used by non-Christians, but may differ in assumptions that guide philosophical inquiry. The inquiry *as such* is more or less neutral. This is probably related to Plantinga’s philosophical realism. Reality is accessible for everyone in the same way. This also results in a different view on metaphysics, as will be discussed below.

Dooyeweerd’s emphasis on the *transcendental* condition of theoretical thought and the *transcendent* condition as a starting-point for philosophy’s transcendental direction leads to a completely different conception of the status of reason. In this view no ‘neutral’ reason can exist. Theoretical truth is “in every respect dependent on the full super-temporal Truth”, because “[w]e cannot truthfully know the cosmos outside of the true knowledge of God.”³⁸⁴ Even the proposition “ $2 \times 2 = 4$ ” is only a

³⁸⁴ Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought II*, p. 561.

“partial truth”, because a theoretical interpretation needs to take place regarding the totality of meaning. The proposition is not “true in itself”, but only in the context of logical laws and laws of thought that can only exist in the order of a totality of meaning. Likewise, common grace does not create an autonomous sphere for human thought. For example, the logical laws of thought or the modal structural law of the logical aspect may not *as such* be affected by sin, but that doesn’t mean that reason has a ‘neutral’ access to them. Man wants to set apart the logical aspect from its coherent order with the other modal aspects, thereby not appreciating the boundaries of the modal aspects. Thus meaning is absolutized to the level of God’s Being. This goes further than only a difference in the pre-philosophical assumptions.

In general, Plantinga has been in most of his writings a less overtly neo-Calvinistic philosopher than Dooyeweerd was. Especially the noetic effects of sin were less emphasized in most of Plantinga’s work and perhaps he has a more optimistic conception of reason.³⁸⁵

7.6 Metaphysics

The most noteworthy difference between Dooyeweerd and Plantinga regards their conception of metaphysics. There is no place for metaphysics in Dooyeweerd’s philosophy, because there can be no transgression of the boundary between God and cosmos from the created cosmos. Philosophy is made possible by, but also limited to our temporal horizon. It has to limit itself to this temporal order; otherwise it necessarily falls into speculative metaphysics, thereby absolutizing temporal modal functions such as the theoretical-logical function of thought. Because God is not subjected to creational law, we should not speculate about his characteristics, insofar they have not been revealed to us in Scripture. God has set limits to human reason in his temporal world-order; therefore philosophy can only point beyond and above the boundary between God and cosmos to what it pre-supposes. According to Dooyeweerd, there can be no transgression of the boundary between God and cosmos from the created cosmos. According to Plantinga however it is too easy to state that our concepts do not apply to God because God transcends human experience. As previously cited, Plantinga writes: “This way of thinking begins in a pious and commendable concern for God’s greatness and majesty and augustness; but it ends in agnosticism and in incoherence.”³⁸⁶

According to Dooyeweerd however, a “speculative metaphysical character” belongs to the application of modal laws, like laws of logic or categories of cause, effect and necessity to God.³⁸⁷ Man cannot reach beyond his modal horizon. There is no eternal rational order to which God is bound. The speculative theories are consequently *uncritical* because they cross the immanent limits of philosophical thought, absolutizing modal aspects by abstracting them from the temporal coherence of meaning.³⁸⁸ God has set limits to human reason in his temporal world order, therefore philosophy can only *point* beyond and above the boundary between God and cosmos to what it pre-supposes. We should not “elevate human reason to the throne of God.” Because God is not subjected to the law, we should not speculate about his

³⁸⁵ Mouw, ‘Dutch Calvinist Philosophical Influences in North America’, p. 108.

³⁸⁶ Alvin Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?*, Milwaukee: Marquette University Press 2007 (1980), p. 26

³⁸⁷ Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought I*, p. 92.

³⁸⁸ Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought I*, p. 93.

characteristics, insofar they have not been revealed to us in Scripture. Man as a creature is not capable of rising to God through thinking. Philosophy, like theology, is limited to the created reality. Man should not and cannot intrude upon the “deep mystery” of God’s majesty or the *essentiae Dei*, but should listen to the revelation in the Word of God.³⁸⁹ Calvin rightly warned against *vacua et meteorica speculatio*.³⁹⁰

Plantinga however is convinced that “if none of our concepts apply to God, then there is nothing we know or truly believe of him – not even what is affirmed in the creeds or affirmed in the Scriptures. And if there is nothing we can know or truly believe of him, then, of course, we cannot know or truly believe that none of our concepts apply to him. The view that our concepts don’t apply to God is fatally ensnarled in self-referential absurdity.”³⁹¹

7.7 Natural theology

Dooyeweerd resolutely rejects natural theology. Nature is corrupted by the fall and can only be renewed by grace. In distinction to grace there can be no speculative *philosophia et theologia naturalis*. As previously stated, Plantinga has a more nuanced view. Although natural theology is not necessary for rational belief in God’s existence, arguments can be used to show the ‘rational acceptability’ of such a belief. These arguments do not show the truth of theism, but its rational acceptability, and this was one of the aims of the tradition of natural theology (like it was in Kant’s philosophy of religion). Belief in God may be properly basic, this doesn’t mean it is groundless. According to Plantinga there are at least “two dozen (or so)” good theistic arguments.³⁹² Natural theology in Plantinga’s new conception is not a way of proving the existence of God independent from revelation, but an attempt to reasonable articulation of the properly basic beliefs of the believers.

7.8 The law-theme

As previously stated, the law-theme is important in the neo-Calvinistic tradition. Against ‘creative anti-realism’ (as Plantinga calls it), including Nietzschean and postmodern perspectivism and constructivism, Reformed thinkers place a law-like structure of reality. Although neo-Calvinism also knows a religious perspectivism, it differs from the postmodern or Nietzschean ones, because God is a law-giver and creation is structured by his temporal laws. In Dooyeweerd’s philosophy the law-theme gets emphasized in the law-spheres of the modal aspects and in the boundary between Creator and creation. Interestingly, the law-theme gets a different emphasis in Plantinga’s philosophy than it had in Dooyeweerd’s. Plantinga does not study the cosmos as Dooyeweerd understands it, i.e. with its different modal aspects and law spheres. Plantinga emphasizes the laws of logic and logical order. It is noteworthy that he applies them also to God, for example regarding the problem of evil. According to Plantinga God could have wanted a certain amount of evil in the world in order to make possible certain good states of affairs that need evil as a prerequisite. When this evil is indeed a *logically* necessary condition for the existence of the good, even God could not will the ends without willing the means.³⁹³ This metaphysical use of the law

³⁸⁹ Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* I, p. 517.

³⁹⁰ Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* I, p. 517.

³⁹¹ Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?*, p. 26

³⁹² Alvin Plantinga, ‘Appendix: Two Dozen (or so) Theistic Arguments’, in: Deane-Peter Baker, *Alvin Plantinga*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2007, 203-227.

³⁹³ Mouw, ‘Dutch Calvinist Philosophical Influences in North America’, p. 109.

may be a new phenomenon in the Reformed tradition; it still is thinking in law-terminology. God is not arbitrary.

8 Conclusions

My aim in this book was to investigate the characteristics of the Reformed tradition in philosophy and its Augustinian-Calvinian roots. Different questions arose, like: How does the thought of Augustine and Calvin influence contemporary philosophers in this tradition? What are its central philosophical claims? What makes this multicoloured tradition one? This comprehensive theme was limited to the central question: *What are the conceptions of philosophy and rationality in the Reformed tradition?* The philosophies of Dooyeweerd and Plantinga were used as examples. In this concluding chapter the book will be summarized, whereby the central question will be answered. Attention will also be paid to the other questions that were asked.

8.1 The Reformed tradition in philosophy: a summary

In chapter 2 some main lines in the work of the fourth- and fifth-century church father Augustine were discussed, because he is often regarded by the sixteenth-century Reformers and their followers as their forerunner on important issues. Special attention was paid to those elements that are picked up in the Reformation by Calvin, and in the neo-Calvinistic movement by Kuyper, Dooyeweerd and Plantinga. In Augustine's thought Christian doctrine, true philosophy and wisdom are one and the same. In Augustine's epistemology faith and reason are in harmony. When knowledge of the highest truth and good are concerned, faith takes an epistemological precedence over understanding, but it also enlightens understanding (*credo ut intelligam*). Other important Augustinian elements from a Reformational perspective are the 'inward turn' (the heart), the knowledge of God and the self, the transformation of philosophy, God's creational laws as a boundary between Creator and creation, and the doctrine of the struggle between the two cities.

In chapter 3 the thought of the sixteenth-century French church-Reformer John Calvin was discussed, because the Reformed tradition in philosophy developed from the Calvinian branch of the Reformation. The focus was on those aspects that significantly influenced Calvin's philosophical legacy in the Reformed tradition. Calvin adopts important elements of Augustine's thought, especially concerning man's heart (the inward turn), the transformation of philosophy, God as creator and lawgiver. He also regards reason as an important human faculty, although it is not the final foundation of knowledge, not a true guide in matters of religion and not self-sufficient. Christian philosophy has to be obedient philosophy and Scripture is the best starting point for a philosopher in order to have a solid foundation for thought. Christian philosophy is humble, renewing, converting, and transformational philosophy. Scripture is the best source of truth concerning what is most important in life, but given this framework of truth, there is certainly a place for philosophy. This doesn't make Scriptural philosophy theology. Christians have to live in the service of the Lord. Therefore they have to 'empty their mind' and direct it to God's Spirit. Believing in God, like believing in the truth of Scripture, is not based on rational proof, but on the 'testimony of the Spirit' in our hearts. Every person has an 'awareness of divinity' (*sensus divinitatis*). Man can experience God within himself, which is the best form of knowledge. Creation is regarded by Calvin as a boundary between God and men. Philosophy cannot and should not go behind God's act of creation in speculation that will only lead to idolatry and superstition. Speculation

about God outside his revelation is unwarranted, irreligious, distracting and impious. There is no place for a metaphysics that goes beyond Scripture.

In chapter 4 the cultural movement of neo-Calvinism in the Netherlands was discussed, being especially the influence of Abraham Kuyper's thought. It was shown how some elements of Calvin's thought were adopted, but also modified. Important elements are God as Creator and law-giver, the doctrine of creation, sin and redemption, and the doctrine of the knowledge of God and knowledge of the self (the heart). A central notion in neo-Calvinism is the law-like character of creation, through which God creates and sustains the cosmos. Within the earthly cosmos there is a developmental potential, a distinction between 'structure' and 'direction'. There is also a distinction between God and creation, between God's creational ordinances and what is subject to these ordinances. However, Neo-Calvinists have a rather optimistic conception of the redeemed mind. Another typical element in neo-Calvinism is the antithesis between belief and unbelief. The Augustinian notion of the heart as a religious point in man where life is still undivided plays a central role in neo-Calvinist thought. Every thought should be brought into captivity to God. All of life is guided by a religious principle, therefore there is no 'neutral' domain that is not influenced by the world view a person has. Likewise, a 'neutral' philosophy does not exist. Rationality is created, therefore it is good as such. It is however subject to the boundary between God and his creation. There is no continuity between God and man on the basis of rationality. Therefore, there is no place for a natural theology. According to the neo-Calvinists an integral Calvinistic philosophy had not been developed until then.

In chapter 5 the thought of Herman Dooyeweerd was introduced as a philosophical elaboration of the neo-Calvinistic world view, building on some elements of Augustine's and Calvin's thought. He develops a Christian philosophy, not a theology. Neither does his philosophy imply Biblicism. An important notion in this philosophy is the non-self-sufficiency of reality. The whole of reality, in all its modal aspects, refers to and is an expression of its origin. This includes the logical-analytical function of man. Dooyeweerd opposes the autonomous self-complacency of human reason, as he finds it among many modern philosophers. With his transcendental critique he wants to reveal the religious starting point of any philosophy. Dooyeweerd agrees with Augustine and Calvin that all knowledge of the cosmos is dependent upon self-knowledge, and our self-knowledge is dependent upon our knowledge of God. It is the task of philosophy to study the totality of meaning. Philosophy must direct the theoretical view of totality over our cosmos and, within the limits of its possibility, answer the question, "Wie alles sich zum Ganzen webt". Philosophy pre-supposes the transcendent condition as a starting-point for its transcendental direction. It cannot find this starting-point in itself. Immanence-philosophy is rejected. Philosophy, although it has a transcendent religious pre-supposition (the Archimedean point), is limited to our temporal horizon. Because God is not subjected to the law, we should not speculate about his characteristics, insofar they have not been revealed to us in Scripture. God has set limits to human reason in his temporal world-order, therefore philosophy can only point beyond and above the boundary between God and cosmos to what it pre-supposes. There is no place for metaphysics in Dooyeweerd's philosophy, because there can be no transgression of the boundary between God and cosmos from the created cosmos. Reason should not be depreciated, but put in its right place. Rationality is limited to creation, i.e. the earthly cosmos. It is not

religiously neutral. Rationality is regarded as a modal aspect, the logical-analytical one. The logical-analytical function of man is only one function, not the highest one.

In chapter 6 the influence of neo-Calvinism and Dooyeweerd's philosophy in North-America was discussed first. After that special attention was given to the work of Alvin Plantinga, one of the leading thinkers in the contemporary philosophy in the Reformed tradition. According to Plantinga, a Christian philosopher legitimately enters philosophy with his beliefs. Philosophy is a matter of systematizing, developing and deepening one's pre-philosophical opinions, but it is also an arena for the articulation and interplay of commitments and allegiances fundamentally religious in nature. It is an expression of deep and fundamental perspectives, ways of viewing ourselves and the world and God. Among its most important and pressing projects are systematizing, deepening, exploring, articulating this perspective, and exploring its bearing on the rest of what we think and do. Philosophy is analysis (clarification, systematization, articulation), that is also closely connected to and preceded by pre-philosophical opinion. Christian philosophers do not aim to reject any belief, procedure or technique that is used by non-Christians, but may differ in assumptions that guide philosophical inquiry. There is no philosophy without a world view, nor is philosophy neutral concerning world views, because it springs itself from a world view. Vast stretches of contemporary philosophy even have spiritual or religious roots and fruits. There is in principle no difference between theology and philosophy insofar as methodology is concerned. The disciplines just ask different questions. In apparent deviation from the mainstream of the Reformed tradition Plantinga is involved with metaphysics. He also has a new conception of natural theology. Concerning rationality Plantinga stresses the divine design and creation of the cognitive faculties and their properly functioning (in accord with their design plan) in an appropriate epistemic environment. There is a religious dimension here, because the theist and nontheist simply do not agree as to what reason delivers. According to the theist the existence of God is a deliverance of reason.

In chapter 7 a comparison was made of central elements in the philosophies of Dooyeweerd and Plantinga. Although Dooyeweerd and Plantinga claim to stand in the same Reformed tradition in philosophy, their philosophies were developed in a different intellectual climate and from a different philosophical orientation. They also asked different questions. This leads to significant differences, for example regarding the place and limits of reason and the possibilities of metaphysics. There is however agreement regarding the religious foundation of every philosophy, the distinction between Creator and creation, the appreciation of naïve experience and the law-theme. Nevertheless, these elements are filled in rather differently.

8.2 Philosophy and rationality in the Reformed tradition: conclusions

What is a philosophy in the Reformed tradition? Before trying to answer this question, some elements of Calvin's conception of philosophy and rationality need to be recalled. Although Calvin is no systematic philosopher himself, he does not reject a systematic use of philosophy at all. He also leaves room for reason, although he regards it as corrupted. Because the Spirit of God is the only source of truth the fruits of the 'natural light' of reason should not be denied. This is also the line of thought of the Reformed tradition. An important first conclusion of this book therefore is: *In Calvin's thought and in the Reformed tradition, philosophy – negatively formulated – is not rejected.* It is possible to *have* a philosophy in the Reformed tradition. However,

reason is not the final foundation of knowledge, not always a true guide and not self-sufficient. Calvin criticizes philosophers who trust in the self-sufficiency of reason. Their thought has to be – and can be – transformed. Therefore, a second conclusion is: *Reformed philosophy is renewing, converting, transformational philosophy*. It is also obedient philosophy. Scripture is the best source of truth concerning what is most important in life, but given this framework of truth, there is certainly a place for philosophy. In this sense – and only in this sense – philosophy is based on faith. This doesn't make Reformed philosophy theology. When faith is concerned, revelation is not auxiliary to reason, but non-speculative and humble reason is auxiliary to faith.³⁹⁴ Here, revelation is indispensable to come to truth. In other, earthly topics reason can be regarded as a valuable gift and an instrument for philosophy. This is also the line of thought of the Reformed tradition. A third conclusion therefore is: *Reason according to Calvin and the Reformed tradition is a natural gift, but should know its proper place in the framework of the truth of revelation*.

Calvin did not develop a philosophical system or a world view. What is now called a Reformed philosophy or a Calvinists world view is evidently a modification of Calvin's thought. Nevertheless, traditions change over time. There is no reason to say that what is not exactly the same as Calvin's thought does not belong to the Reformed tradition. What then is a philosophy in the Reformed tradition? I think this question can be answered as follows: a philosophy in the Reformed tradition is a philosophy – not a theology – which gives a philosophical expression to the religious motives of the Calvinian Reformation.³⁹⁵ This doesn't mean that a Reformed philosophy is a slavish imitation of Calvin's thought. Calvin is not the *pater angelicus* of Reformed philosophy, although his thought is a point of orientation.³⁹⁶ I have introduced the philosophies of Dooyeweerd and Plantinga, who both claim to stand in the Reformed tradition. They both take Calvin's legacy very seriously in their philosophy, including the Augustinian elements, although they lay different emphases. It may be helpful at this point to introduce the difference between world-view and philosophy as two levels. The differences between Plantinga and Dooyeweerd are not differences in (neo-)Calvinistic world-view, but in philosophy.³⁹⁷ Despite their different philosophies, Dooyeweerd and Plantinga both build a philosophy on a Reformed foundation. A philosophy in the Reformed tradition is not only possible, it has also been actualized. Therefore, a fourth conclusion is: *It is possible to formulate and systematically work out a philosophy in the Reformed tradition*.

From a historical perspective Plantinga's metaphysical involvement seems to be a deviation from the mainstream of the Reformed tradition. Still, Plantinga has some good arguments why he does not hesitate to philosophize about God's nature. This can be regarded as an example of a modification in a living tradition, because Plantinga argues that this element is defensible, while still in line with the tradition. Given the fact that the Reformed tradition is not a closed system of thought but a living thing, there is, in my opinion, no reason to doubt both Dooyeweerd's and

³⁹⁴ Partee, *Calvin and Classical Philosophy*, 4.

³⁹⁵ William Young, *Toward a Reformed Philosophy*, Grand Rapids: Piet Hein Publishers 1952, p.11.

³⁹⁶ Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought I*, p. 522.

³⁹⁷ Albert Wolters, 'Dutch Neo-Calvinism: Worldview, Philosophy and Rationality', in: H. Hart, J. van der Hoeven & N. Wolterstorff (Eds.), *Rationality in the Calvinian Tradition*, Toronto: UPA 1983, 113-131, p. 129.

Plantinga's claim to stand in the Reformed tradition. Therefore I have chosen to present their philosophies as they are, simply because of their claim.

From a historical-philosophical perspective there has never been an *integral* Reformed philosophy and there has never been *one* Reformed philosophy. Although Dooyeweerd claimed to develop one, it is clear that his philosophy is heavily influenced by neo-Kantian thought. Historically, Calvinism has been combined with completely different philosophical systems. Contemporary philosophers in the Reformed tradition, like Dooyeweerd and Plantinga, also have presented fairly different philosophies. A fifth conclusion therefore is: *Significantly different philosophies can develop within the Reformed tradition.*

Despite their different emphases, Dooyeweerd and Plantinga agree on important points, as was sketched in chapter 7. One can of course replicate that the philosophies of Dooyeweerd and Plantinga are specifically neo-Calvinistic philosophies and perhaps not representative for the Reformed tradition at large. In my opinion, this is only true in the sense that a part of their intellectual framework – Dooyeweerd's more than Plantinga's – is neo-Calvinistic. However, it can not be denied that large parts of their philosophies are composed of Calvinian (instead of specifically neo-Calvinistic) elements or can be characterized as Christian in general, the most explicitly in Plantinga's case. Central elements of Calvinian thought are the religious roots of thought, the non-self-sufficiency of reality, and the distinction between Creator and creation. A less explicitly Calvinian element is the appreciation of naïve experience, although it is certainly in line with Calvin's approach in the *Institutes*. Important neo-Calvinistic elements are the doctrine of antithesis and the law-theme. Therefore, a sixth conclusion is: *Characteristic elements in contemporary Reformed philosophy are the religious roots of thought, the non-self-sufficiency of reality, the distinction between Creator and creation, the appreciation of naïve experience, the doctrine of antithesis, and the law-theme.*

Finally, it has been emphasized that philosophy in the Reformed tradition is not a dead thing. Especially Plantinga's philosophy today shows that Reformed philosophy still has the potential to deliver a significant contribution to contemporary philosophy. Therefore, a seventh and final conclusion is: *Reformed philosophy is a living thing today.*

Summarizing the conclusions of this book and answering its central question: (1) In Calvin's thought and in the Reformed tradition, philosophy – negatively formulated – is not rejected. It is possible to have one. (2) Further, Reformed philosophy is renewing, converting, transformational philosophy. (3) Reason according to Calvin and the Reformed tradition is a natural gift, but should know its proper place in the framework of the truth of revelation. (4) Furthermore, it is possible to actually formulate and systematically work out a philosophy in the Reformed tradition. (5) Even significantly different philosophies can develop within the Reformed tradition. In Dooyeweerd's view philosophy must direct the theoretical view of totality over our cosmos and, within the limits of its possibility, answer the question, "Wie alles sich zum Ganzen webt", while in Plantinga's view philosophy is analysis (clarification, systematization, articulation), that is also closely connected to and preceded by pre-philosophical opinion.. (6) Shared characteristic elements in contemporary Reformed philosophy are the religious roots of thought, the doctrine of antithesis, the non-self-

sufficiency of reality, the distinction between Creator and creation, the appreciation of naïve experience, and the law-theme. (7) Finally, Reformed philosophy is a living thing.

8.3 A sketch of my preliminary position

An important theme in this book has been the relationship between philosophy and theology. I have emphasized that Dooyeweerd and Plantinga have developed a philosophy, not a theology. The difference between these disciplines is more clear in Dooyeweerd's thought than in Plantinga's. Still, Plantinga too regards himself as a philosopher, not a theologian. At this point in the book I want to sketch my – still very preliminary – position in this debate, focusing on the thought of Dooyeweerd and Plantinga. I have to limit myself significantly, because the discussion about the relationship between philosophy and theology has a very long history (dating back to the first century) and raises a lot of questions. Besides, this book is already voluminous. In order to legitimate the thought of Dooyeweerd and Plantinga as being philosophy, two questions need to be answered. The most important one is whether the fundamental place of their religious world view in their philosophy can be philosophically legitimated. The second question is about the difference between philosophy and theology. An encyclopedical discussion about the exact borders between philosophy and theology doesn't seem fruitful to me. Personally I prefer an Augustinian merging of theology and philosophy, i.e. a merging of natural reason and biblical revelation. However, I will use the contemporary distinction between the two disciplines as a practical starting point.

Dooyeweerd and Plantinga have a different conception of philosophy, as has been sketched (par. 8.1). According to Plantinga philosophy is analysis (clarification, systematization, articulation), that is also closely connected to and preceded by pre-philosophical opinion. There is in principle no difference between theology and philosophy insofar as methodology is concerned. The disciplines just ask different questions. In my view, Plantinga's somewhat inaccurate merging of philosophy and theology is not satisfying. When theologians use philosophical methodology but only ask different questions, there is no independent place for the discipline. When philosophy doesn't have any distinctive features apart from its methodology and when theology doesn't have any distinctive features apart from the questions it asks, then theology is reduced to philosophy, simply because it uses the philosophical methodology. There is however more difference between the (contemporary) disciplines than only asking different questions. For example, theology is oriented and building on Biblical exegesis (and church history), while philosophy is not. Still, it may be certainly true that theologians use natural reason, like philosophers do.

According to Dooyeweerd it is the task of philosophy to study the totality of meaning; philosophy must direct the theoretical view of totality over our cosmos and, within the limits of its possibility, answer the question, "Wie alles sich zum Ganzen webt". In this conception philosophy is not only conceptual analysis, but also tries to answer questions of meaning. I think this conception of philosophy has the potential to become a quasi-theology, especially when meaning becomes closely associated with one interpretation of Christian theology. This is the weak point in Dooyeweerd's thought. Philosophy then can be regarded as – in Karl Barth's words – bad theology. Besides, Dooyeweerd does not reflect on this religious foundation as such. By claiming to have a clear view on the Christian ('biblical') ground motive he rejects

other interpretations of the Christian tradition. Christian philosophy is at risk to become a dogmatic framework for the interpretation of reality. However, even without this theological tendency Dooyeweerd's analysis of reality as a cosmos with modal aspects and his analysis of theoretical thought are valuable as philosophy. Philosophy at this level can be regarded as an analysis of reality, including religious experience, without the need for a specific theology. I also agree with Dooyeweerd that philosophy and theology are both influenced by pre-philosophical opinion of a religious nature. They both study reality and both use natural reason, but they differ in method and scope, although the philosophical methodology of conceptual analysis is sometimes used in both disciplines. Philosophy studies all aspects of reality, including religious experience, while theology is primarily oriented on Biblical revelation.

The interesting thing is that both Dooyeweerd and Plantinga recognize the importance of pre-philosophical opinion which is religious in nature. Dooyeweerd emphasizes the importance of the Christian ground motive (par. 5.8), while Plantinga, when discussing his conception of Augustinian Christian philosophy (par. 6.9-6.10), claims that we (legitimately) come to philosophy with pre-philosophical opinion, fundamentally religious in nature. Maybe Plantinga is not so far away from Dooyeweerd's conception of a (pre-philosophical) religious world view (*Weltanschauung*) and its close connection to philosophy as he seems to be.³⁹⁸ I do not agree with Dooyeweerd's claim that all theoretical thought – whether philosophy or theology – *necessarily* has a religious root. When using natural reason philosophers can do a lot of proper work using the methodology of conceptual analysis. However, when systematically building on these concepts, philosophy very soon becomes – in Plantinga's words – “an arena for the articulation and interplay of commitments and allegiances fundamentally religious in nature; it is an expression of deep and fundamental perspectives, ways of viewing ourselves and the world and God.”³⁹⁹ This is actually what makes philosophy both valuable and fascinating.

A *Weltanschauung* (or: religious world view) is more fundamental than a specific theology or philosophy. Philosophers use their natural reason, but this is not a reason that can be isolated from their system of basic, pre-theoretical beliefs. Of course this fundamental claim is hard – if not impossible – to *proof*. If proofs are necessary for this fundamental starting point, the burden of proof is also on those who claim not to be influenced by a pre-philosophical perspective in their philosophical work.⁴⁰⁰ The fundamental claim can only be made plausible. A religious world view has to do with the existence as a religious person in the world, including judgments about what really matters, about good and evil, about the coherence of the world, and about past and future. Theology (and philosophy) can only be a limited articulation of this existence. For example, the existential feelings of love, coherence, and justice can never be fully articulated in theological (or philosophical) terms. Perhaps they even are the necessary preconditions of theological or philosophical wonder. If the claim that every philosopher has a pre-philosophical perspective (fundamentally religious in

³⁹⁸ I use the concept of *Weltanschauung* meaning a pre-philosophical world view, being fundamentally religious in nature, not as a more or less coherent, articulated, theoretical system of a philosophical or theological nature.

³⁹⁹ Plantinga, 'Advice to Christian Philosophers', p. 271.

⁴⁰⁰ Of course these claims also refer back to the person who formulates them. Besides, when the philosopher has this pre-philosophical perspective, the same is true for the theologian. On this point there is no difference between philosophy and theology.

nature) is true, then a Christian philosopher can be a full-scale philosopher even when theological knowledge functions in his philosophy, preferably formulated in philosophical terminology. In my view Plantinga's epistemological work gives a convincing, purely philosophical legitimation for the functioning of religious knowledge (or *Weltanschauung*) in philosophy. Nonetheless, neither Dooyeweerd nor Plantinga is very clear about the influence of this pre-philosophical opinion on philosophy. Dooyeweerd has a more or less mystical view on the heart as the religious root of our entire existence, including philosophy. Plantinga's epistemological approach 'simply' introduces religious claims as properly basic into philosophy. Both approaches seem unsatisfactory to me as a view on the connection between *Weltanschauung* and philosophy. I think this connection is quite loose. A *Weltanschauung* in my view functions as an orientation for the direction of thought of a philosopher, not as a determining framework.

Dooyeweerd (probably) wouldn't agree with Plantinga's indistinctive conception of theology, because according to Dooyeweerd theology is the scholarship of the faith aspect of reality. Dooyeweerd sharply distinguishes between faith and religion (par. 5.13).⁴⁰¹ According to Dooyeweerd, faith is concerned in the modal aspect of faith and is studied in theology; while religion is the root of all thought. The religious origin of reality works through all modal aspects and therefore in all scientific and scholarly fields, not only in theology. I don't think that Dooyeweerd's distinction is fruitful. Theology more or less becomes the discipline of religious studies, i.e. the study of religion from the perspective of the social sciences (and of philosophy). When faith, as studied by theology, is separated from religion, as found in the heart of man, religion as such stays unreflected. This is unsatisfying for a Christian philosopher. It is certainly true that religion as a psychical process can do without theological reflection. Still, when a Christian philosopher claims to build a Christian philosophy he cannot do without some theological input. However, this theological input has to be translated into philosophical terms and should also be available for conceptual analysis. The philosophical reflection on religion in a Dooyeweerdian sense needs further study. Possible directions can be found in Dooyeweerd's conception of the (necessity of the) religious fullness of truth, which alone makes all truth within the temporal horizon possible, or in Cornelius van Til's presuppositionalism (par. 6.1), or in Martin Heidegger's concept of the *Existenziale*.

Theology in my view is the construction of a coherent account of the Christian faith. It uses natural reason to systematically work out Biblical revelation, which is – in the classical reformed conception – its primary source of knowledge. Still, theology is not the same as revelation. I reject the Thomistic distinction between nature and grace when this means claiming for theology a higher ranking form of knowledge. Theologians use their *deficient* natural reason, like philosophers do. Therefore, their theology is deficient too. Plantinga may be perfectly right in his opinion that “a certain amount of modal logic and of the lore and distinctions that go with it is essential for decent work on many of the main topics of theology.”⁴⁰²

Christian philosophers have no less access to Biblical revelation than theologians have, but philosophers should not directly introduce revelation or theological dogmas into their philosophy. They should at least translate them into philosophical terms,

⁴⁰¹ Dooyeweerd's distinction should not be confused with Barth's.

⁴⁰² Plantinga, 'Self-profile', p. 25.

because philosophy, maybe more than theology, is aimed at discussion and a *choc des opinions*, which needs a common language. Plantinga's use of natural reason in philosophy of religion – a discipline in the border area between theology and philosophy – is a good example. Still, philosophy covers a wider area than what is suitable for conceptual analysis. Therefore, the use of Plantinga's methodology is limited. There are also large areas of philosophy that are not covered by theology, like social and political philosophy, aesthetics, epistemology, and logic. In my view, philosophy has to ask questions about every aspect of reality, although not every question can be answered. Humility is essential for a Christian philosopher. Therefore, a Christian philosophy should not be developed as a metaphysical system. Christian philosophers certainly do not have philosophical truth ready-at-hand, but nonetheless they differ from non-Christian philosophers because Christians know in which direction they can look for truth. The classical-Augustinian notion that the fullness of truth, goodness and beauty can be found in God, is important here. The notion of the illumination of reason by God is also important. For theologians it would be wise if they use philosophical methodology when systematically building on Biblical exegesis, because philosophy has a long tradition in the use of natural reason. For a Christian thinker philosophy and theology are closely connected. They are neither *ancillae* nor *reginae*, but *collegae*.⁴⁰³

Regarding the question about the difference between theology and philosophy I conclude that philosophy can be regarded as an analysis of reality, including religious experience, using natural reason, without the need for a specific theology. (Christian) theology is the construction of a coherent account of the Christian faith, using natural reason to systematically work out Biblical revelation, which is its primary source of knowledge. Besides, philosophy and theology differ not only in method, but also in scope. In these conceptions of philosophy and theology both Plantinga and Dooyeweerd are philosophers, although parts of Dooyeweerd's philosophy have the potential to become a quasi-theology. Regarding the question about the philosophical legitimation for the functioning of religious knowledge in philosophy I refer to Plantinga's epistemological work. Although his work is convincing me from an epistemological point of view, I still don't believe in the direct connection between pre-philosophical religious world view and philosophy that can also be found in Dooyeweerd's work. I prefer to think of this connection as a quite loose one, as an orientation for the direction of thought.

Finally, both Dooyeweerd and Plantinga want to stay away from Biblicism and fideism. Biblicism is the alleged unproblematic 'litteral' reading and application of the Bible. Fideism is, in Plantinga's cited words, the "exclusive or basic reliance upon faith alone, accompanied by a consequent disparagement of reason and utilized especially in the pursuit of philosophical or religious truth".⁴⁰⁴ Thus, staying away from both Biblicism and fideism means neither rejecting natural reason, nor absolutizing our interpretation of Biblical truth. When combining this with the doctrine of *corruptio totalis*, it also means that *the* Christian philosophy or theology do not exist, because they cannot be directly derived from the Bible, nor infallably known by a corrupted reason. Nonetheless, natural reason and (the explanation of)

⁴⁰³ G. van den Brink, 'Communicatie tussen christelijke filosofie en theologie', in: G. van den Brink a.o., *Filosofie en theologie. Een gesprek tussen christen-filosofen en theologen*, Amsterdam Buijten & Schipperheijn 1997, p. 31-47: 44.

⁴⁰⁴ Plantinga, 'Reason and Belief in God', p. 87.

Biblical revelation at least cannot do without each other. Christian philosophy as a metaphysical system cannot exist, although Christian philosophers cannot and should not deny what they know through biblical revelation.

8.4 Concluding remarks

In the introduction to this book Étienne Gilson was introduced, who stated that no philosophy as a substantive discipline can exist in Calvinism, because, according to Gilson, the depraved reason of man as sketched by the Reformers cannot attain truth. He appears to be wrong. Reformed philosophy exists, and it is neither theology, nor fideism, nor Biblicism. Although the whole of life is affected by sin, Reformed thinkers regard reason as a natural gift that is capable of philosophizing. However, reason is not self-sufficient and, when faith is concerned, cannot do without revelation. Gilson writes: “I call Christian, every philosophy which, although keeping the two orders formally distinct, nevertheless considers the Christian revelation as an indispensable auxiliary to reason.”⁴⁰⁵ The Reformed philosophers presented in this book will certainly subscribe this.

⁴⁰⁵ Etienne Gilson, *The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press 1991 (1936), p. 37.

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Appendix

Schematic representation of the Reformed tradition in philosophy

