

Philosophy in the Context of our Time – III

The Quest for an Origin

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Samevatting

Hierdie artikel bespreek enkele aspekte van die bydrae van Johann Visagie tot die Festschrift wat aan D.F.M. Strauss opgedra is (Lategan & Smith, 2006). Die gemengde reformatoriese tradisie toon dat beide ons idees van God en die skepping die nawerkende effek van pagane en skolastiese invloede bly weerspieël, waaronder the drang na die onverganklike, asook die werking van die substansiebegrip op die teo-ontologiese wese-verskyning skema op die idee van God – in die denke van Dooyeweerd val die aspekte van die werklikheid saam in die Oorsprongseenheid van God. 'n Belangrike element in die “Discourse Archaeology” (DA) teorie van Visagie is juis daarop afgestem om rekenskap te gee van die kondisies wat ten grondslag lê aan die wyse waarop 'n mens die idee van 'n Oorsprong kan artikuleer. Aanvanklik het hy tussen die Operatore wat benodig is om die relasie tussen 'n Oorsprongsinstansie en 'n bepaalde domein te beskryf onderskei. Met betrekking tot laasgenoemde blyk dit dat bepaalde pare bepalend is vir die keuses wat in 'n “argeologiese diskoers” gemaak word, soos byvoorbeeld universaliteit en individualiteit, konstansie en verandering, wat kenbaar en onkenbaar is, en so meer. Meer onlangs het hy die gedagte van “key-formulas” ingevoer waar “some aspect of the world like economic relations, or power, or physics/biology, or cultural context, etc. is postulated to play an explanatory role

regarding other domains of reality". Die intellektuele ontwikkeling van Visagie en die outeur het in verskillende rigtings gegaan, hoewel beide 'n voortgesette belangstelling in die "wederkerige vertaling" van dit waarmee hulle besig was behou het. Visagie is tans besig om te werk aan 'n boek oor die hele DA-teorie. Daarom word slegs 'n paar voorlopige oorsigtelike suggesties gemaak, betreffende die effek van die "linguistic turn", die prominensie van metafore in DA-teorie, asook die kwessie van universaliteit en wetenskaplike kommunikasie. Die eintlike globale suggestie is derhalwe om tot 'n sterker integrasie van funderende ontologiese oorwegings in die verdere ontwikkeling van die DA-teorie te kom.

1. Background

In his contribution to the *Festschrift* dedicated to D.F.M. Strauss (Lategan & Smith, 2006), Visagie highlighted various facets of his own intellectual development in which he explored fascinating new avenues of philosophical reflection and analysis. In this continued discussion with those who contributed to the mentioned *Festschrift* some of the issues found in his contribution will be considered.

2. The mixed reformational tradition

From the Protestant Reformation we inherited Calvin's understanding that true knowledge of ourselves is dependent upon true knowledge of God. However, a look at Calvin's view of the human person reveals that he did not escape from the after-effect of the *body-soul dualism* dating back to Greek antiquity. According to this dualistic view the relationship of body and soul is portrayed in terms of liberating the soul from the *prison* of the body (Calvin, 1931-I:173). Calvin calls upon Augustine regarding the view that sin merely robbed humankind of its supernatural gifts of grace, with reference to faith and love (Calvin, 1931-I:271). It therefore appears as if a mere proper idea of God does not necessarily guarantee a proper understanding of God's Law-Word for creation.

What this article highlights is that a closer analysis of the relationship between theoretical thinking and its deepest motivation is worth its while. It is indeed one of the merits of Dooyeweerd's *transcendental critique of theoretical thought* that it penetrates to the deepest moving force at the root of all philosophical thinking. He proceeded from the idea that the *structure* of creation is *foundational* (*transcendental*) in the sense of *making possible* all variable empirical phenomena to be experienced within it. This embodies the *transcendental-empirical method* as it has been developed within the context of the *Philosophy of the cosmonomic*

idea. The term *transcendental* refers to the founding structure of the *creation order*, while the term *empirical* appeals to the variable phenomena of our experience in its integral meaning (that is, not restricted to psychical or sensitive-sensory experience). The implication is that every idea of the origin is structured by the same conditioning order found within creation. For example, when Plato, from the primacy of the Greek form motive, arrives at an idea of the divine Workmaster (*demiourgos*) as origin, finds opposed to it an original *formless matter*, then his idea of origin remains bound to the same basic, given *creational structure* that also makes possible a biblically founded (or any other) idea of origin.

It is therefore that from its inception the tradition of reformational philosophy realized that theoretical thinking is not self-sufficient and therefore cannot escape from one or another idea of the Origin of creation. When Dooyeweerd started to speak about the *idea of law* (*cosmomic idea* as it was called later on), he eventually incorporated within the transcendental ground-idea two other transcendental ideas as well, namely the idea of the *totality* (fulness) of meaning and that of the *meaning diversity* within creation.

Of course the concern to account for an origin surfaced right from the earliest phases of Greek philosophy where it was found in diverse principles of origin, such as water, fire, air or simply the infinite-unbounded (*apeiron*). Although this initial phase of Western philosophy embodied an idea of a fluid origin, the urge towards what is *immutable* amidst a world of *change* soon dominated Greek philosophy. In the attempt to escape from the changefulness of reality it was particularly the *substance concept* that succeeded in obtaining a central position. It entailed the distinction between *essence* and *appearance* which ran parallel to what *endures* and what *changes*. The element of persistency (constancy) was transformed into a *static eternity* – Plato explicitly advanced the view that the supra-sensory *ontic forms* (*eidè*) are unchanging and eternal – and that they allow access only to human understanding. The latter is directed towards what is immutable, while the senses are directed at the temporal world of becoming.

On a purely formal level one may think that Kant later on simply reversed this view by binding human understanding to the (sensory) appearances, leaving behind these appearances the unknowable “thing-in-itself”. Yet, Kant actually explored the distinction between *essence* and *appearance* in order to safe-guard human freedom, because he explicitly call the free will the human soul a “thing-in-itself”. The category of cause and effect (together with all the other categories – representing the deterministic science-ideal) is only applicable to appearances and *not* to things in themselves (such as the free will of the human soul – see Kant, 1787-B:vii- viii).

Another effect of the Greek substance concept is that it provided the basis upon which medieval and subsequent theological speculation accounted for knowledge of God. The entire distinction between a *theologica ectypa* and a *theologica archetypa* reflects the assumptions of the substance concept, for it is supposed to concern the knowledge with which God knows Himself and the way in which He made Himself known to us by accommodating Himself to our creaturely abilities to know.

The two sides of the coin are therefore: either elevates the essence of God into a realm of unknowability (which then needs the idea of accommodation of this unknowable God to creational terms in order to reveal Himself), or projects the creational diversity of “perfections” into the essence of God before they are copied back into creation.

Calvin was still under the influence of this legacy and also Dooyeweerd did not escape from it – as Visagie rightly pointed out:

The metaphors of sovereignty also caused Dooyeweerd to accept a traditional scholastic understanding of God, which was really inspired by Greek metaphysics (!), according to which God as He is “in Himself” is absolutely unknown to us. Only when he freely decides “to be” in a mode that is there “for us”, can he be known in revelation. But notice that this interpretation tends to grant certain attributes of God (such as Fatherly care) a “secondary” status, while it also relativises the whole idea of “revelation” as such (Visagie, 2006:204).

We only have to contemplate the view advanced by Thomas Aquinas: although things by themselves are finite and caused, they exist in God in such a way that they are nothing but God.¹ This view forms part of the legacy in which the idea of an *origin* is combined with the idea of a *unity*. Although Dooyeweerd distinguishes between the *being* of God and the *meaning* of creation, he applies the idea of *unity* to bridge the gap between Creator and creation. Compare the following statement:

God is the *origin and original unity* of all the modal aspects of human experience which are to be distinguished only in the temporal order, but coincide in their religious root and a fortiori in their Divine Origin (Dooyeweerd, 1997-I:521, note 1).

There is a fundamental ambiguity in Dooyeweerd’s view in this regard, for earlier

1 Cf. Kremer, 1966:399: “Alles Seiende ist so in Gott, dass es in Gott nichts anderes als Gott ist. Die Dinge sind nicht so in Gott wie sie in sich selbst sind. In sich selbst gesehen sind sie nämlich verursacht und endlich, in Gott dagegen unendlich, weil sie in Gott zusammenfallen mit dem göttlichen Wesen ... In sich selbst gesehen sind sie Vielheit, in Gott dagegen Einheit.”

in *A new critique of theoretical thought I*, he states: “Sphere-sovereignty of modal aspects and their modal spheres of law make no sense in the fullness and radical unity of meaning” (Dooyeweerd, 1997-I:106). And in the next paragraph on this page we read: “In the religious fullness of meaning love, wisdom, justice, power, beauty, etc. coincide in a radical unity.” Dooyeweerd’s view of the “original unity” and the aspects coinciding in their religious root and “a fortiori in their Divine Origin” indeed reminds us of Thomas Aquinas who held that the “perfections” of creation are *one* in God. The simplicity metaphysics in which this view is embedded actually goes back to the early Greek thinker, Xenophanes (see Visagie, 1982).

Since the early eighties, while Visagie was still working on his Ph.D., he and the author have spent long hours discussing and re-assessing numberless parts of the philosophy of Dooyeweerd. As part of his Ph.D. he then embarked on a very fascinating and, as it eventually turned out, fruitful philosophical path. This new elaboration led to what he now calls *Discourse Archaeology* (DA). Amongst other, it sets out by asking the question:

3. What are the conditions underlying the way in which human beings articulate their quest for an origin?

During the middle of the 1980s, Visagie (1988:52) started to develop an account of what he called the “epistemic deep structures of philosophical discourse”. He points out that Derrida sharply discerned “the foundational role of a class of conceptual deep structures” (Visagie, 1988:55). Bringing these deep structures to light is also designated as “archeological discourse analysis” (Visagie, 1988:59). He speaks of “Governing Instances” (GIs) crucially significant for “knowledge of the self and the way reality is structured” and then mentions examples of GIs such as “matter, reason, God, freedom, sense-impression, system, historical flow” and so on (Visagie, 1988:59).

Against the background of Derrida’s notion of a worded world that is affected by the play of texts or writing (*Ecriture*), Visagie highlights the formal archeological predicates at stake in a systematic way, namely independence, persistence, transcendence, changeability, infinity, complexity, unknowability, causality and universality. A closer analysis reveals certain pairs of archeological analysis, such as the binary attributes of persistence and changeability, finite and the infinite, and so on. Operators are needed to describe the relation of the *Governing Instance* to a particular *domain* (Visagie, 1988:67).

More recently, he employed the idea of “key-formulas”, where “some aspect of the world like economic relations, or power, or physics/biology, or cultural

context, etc. is postulated to play an explanatory role regarding other domains of reality”. A governing relation is established between a key factor – such as power – and its domain – such as knowledge, morality or politics. Similar to the initial idea of a Governing Instance and its operators, the governing involved in the key factor concerns a “causing, preceding, founding, unifying, constituting” of “its domain” (Visagie, 2005:139). Through “key promotion”, something can obtain the status of a “key factor” and then rule a domain by uniting, grounding, structuring, centering or enclosing the elements of the domain concerned.

But it should be kept in mind that certain attributes play a role in such a key, such as pairs that serve “as possible descriptions of the key factor and its domain”: unitary/multiple (or simple/complex); finite/infinite; constant (immutable)/changing; knowable/unknowable; universal/individual; necessary/contingent (Visagie, 2005:143). What is striking is that “these particular attribute pairs have featured as such a constant in philosophical conceptualization from the Greeks until postmodernism” (Visagie, 2005:144).

In addition, Visagie also distinguishes between certain ethical postures (such as meaninglessness; suffering; and guilt – on the dark side – and “ordinary-everyday living amid work and relaxation; contemplative reflection; even ecstatic experiences; giving up things; knowing humility; feeling joy; finding hope; caring for others; and so on”), root metaphors (such as “servant/worker; or a traveler; or a warrior; or a fully matured being; or a child; or a player; or a lover; and so on”), ideological power relations (discourse domination, types of group domination), and macro-themes (such as “nature, power, knowledge, personhood, society, humanity”) (Visagie, 2005:146). He relates rationality to the “two different horizons of experience: the one enclosing structure, law, principle, norm, universality, generality, abstractness, and so on; the other enclosing subjectivity, factuality, process, event, individuality, contextuality, concreteness, and so on” (Visagie, 2005:149) and finally accounts for normative assumptions related to society and its features.

These distinctions expand the scope of a systematic analysis of the conditions underlying scholarly discourse and at once account for problems arising from negative postures, reductive metaphors, distortive ideologies and misguided expectations from rationality.

In his analysis of the basic structure of a *conceptual key* Visagie investigates an XYZ order, where X features as some kind of origin, Y serves as the operation performed by X on reality (such as causing, grounding and so on), while Z is reality (or parts of it) upon which the operations are performed (see Visagie, 2006:207-208). Moreover, in his *grammar of original discourse* Visagie focuses

on the shape of key-expressions displaying a sequential structure: SOD – for example: [S language] [O enclose] [D knowledge, experience].²

4. Parallel developments

In connection with the new developments proceeding from the discussions of the early eighties Visagie remarks:

At that time I began to realize that the focus of Herman Dooyeweerd – a philosopher to whom I owe much, and on whose works Strauss has always been an authority – on the concepts of origin and of totality/unity (in his analysis of philosophical “ground-ideas”) was too limited. I was also inspired to some extent by the “linguistic turn” of philosophy in the latter half of the 20th century, and by Chomsky’s ideal of grammar as a highly explicit (“generative”) analysis of syntactic structures. Thus I was looking for a way to analyse, in formal symbols, the kind of language/discourse (rather than “ideas” as such) which speaks of ultimate origins in the widest possible sense. Also, contra Dooyeweerd, I was not so much interested in analyzing the structure of ground-ideas from the point of view of defending a certain (Christian reformational) worldview. I felt the need to communicate beyond such boundaries – just as I wanted to be able to freely borrow from “humanistic” sources (like Chomsky or Habermas, for instance) if they could be of use to the research I had in mind (Visagie, 2006:201-202).

It is indeed the case that, in spite of partially overlapping interests, Visagie’s and the author’s own concerns parted ways to a certain extent. Yet both of them constantly and consciously knew, by and large, how to “translate” what they were doing into the diverging paths that they pursued. The author’s own *ontological* preferences could benefit from the finesse of that with which Visagie engaged himself and his own articulations can still benefit from serious ontological analyses – just compare his switch from “changeless-changeful” to the inter-modal distinction between the “constant” and the “dynamic” (see Visagie, 2006:210).

In his own recent work on *Philosophy: Discipline of the disciplines (PDD)*, the author therefore suggested that the challenge to a non-reductionist ontology is indeed to generate a theoretical account of reality in which what Visagie designates as *attributes* are understood in such a way that we are not tempted to understand them in an exclusive “either-or” sense. For as soon as this avenue is

² S = subject; O = operator and D = domain.

chosen, it is realized that the one and the many are not in conflict with each other, but co-constitute our experience of reality. Likewise, the finite and the infinite, constancy and change, universality and individuality, as well as necessity and contingency are overall, mutually cohering traits of empirical reality (see Strauss, 2009:369).

The author also pointed out that some of the most basic and influential distortive philosophical schemes of thought discussed in Strauss (2009), derive from elevating just *one element* of the mentioned pairs at the cost of the others. For example, since concepts are always constituted by uniting universal features (through logical objectification), *rationalism* results from the absolutization of conceptual knowledge, whereas *irrationalism* follows from an absolutization of concept-transcending idea-knowledge. In Chapter 2 of *PDD* the influence of another well-known ‘ismic’ opposition is also considered, namely that between *atomism (individualism)* and *holism (universalism)* – concerned with the quest to find a (explanatory) *basic denominator* for the diversity within reality – and an understanding of -isms like these rests upon a more detailed analysis of the meaning of (the arithmetical and spatial) aspects and their mutual interrelations.

Some suggestions

Since Visagie is currently actively involved in working on his theory in a forthcoming book we will have to wait and see how he articulates the more detailed points of his approach. The questions and suggestions made below are very selective and in addition may already be answered or even made redundant in what is forthcoming! Nonetheless, by raising some points, DA theory may incorporate considerations currently not addressed or adjust others to meet the author’s suggestions in advance. Most of what follows intends to enhance his ideas, or to elaborate them in a way true to his own original intentions.

The linguistic turn

Visagie remarked (as quoted above) that he “was also inspired to some extent by the ‘linguistic turn’ of philosophy in the latter half of the 20th century, and by Chomsky’s ideal of grammar as a highly explicit (‘generative’) analysis of syntactic structures”. The linguistic turn represents a switch from logical to linguistic (syntactical, semantic) categories. Its ultimate *source* is found in the limitations of concept-formation, because concepts are blind to what is individual and unique (see Strauss, 2009:377-379). The effect is that logical-analytical considerations are (partially) exchanged for lingual ones – which explains the prominence of the term “discourse” in DA (Discourse Archaeology).

It seems as if DA theory may benefit from considering the conditioning effect of the basic structure of reality which differentiates in the dimensions of aspects and entities. The former is also known as *modes* or *functions* of reality. The latter emphasis on the term *function* reveals the inherently *dynamic* trait of reality – reflected in all languages by the presence of *verbs*. These functional modes serve as gateways through which one talks and communicates about entities, events, societal relationships or origins. But since the dimension of (natural and social) entities also inherently (i.e. *ontically*) belongs to our experiential world, its reality within language is reflected by the presence of *substantives* (*nouns*).

A problem raised by Geckeler has a natural solution in terms of this distinction between functional modes and entities, for the reason why certain lexical items do not have correlates is that this phenomenon only appears within the “such-and-such” (the ‘how’) nature of the aspects (functional modes) of reality (like the biotic contrast: “old-young”). But it does not apply to the dimension of entities (like ‘book’/‘?’).

This state of affairs is obviously also linked to the fact that some languages display the tendency to be structured by “substantives” (such as Persian), whereas others (such as old Greek and German) tend to be dominated by a *verb structure* (with multiple stipulations and derivations on the basis of their verbs – see Coseriu, 1978:43). These two dimensions (of aspects and entities) actually embody the *formal structural conditions* for all lingual activities – not only formally mirrored in the *subject-predicate* structure of (*logical*) propositions, but also in the *noun-verb* structure of sentences.

In addition to this *formal conditioning role*, the modal aspects appear as something non-arbitrary within all languages, namely in the inevitability of articulating multiple words reflecting the modal diversity within reality as such. The other side of the coin lies in the fact that this diversity of ontic aspects may also come to expression within the lingual field of particular words – evinced in their respective connotations (embedded in the particular semantic field of a word) – which also reflect the aspectual diversity within reality.

The upshot of these considerations is that the apparently *formal conditioning role* of the two mentioned dimensions of reality may reveal a structural condition that is even more fundamental than the level on which the XYZ sequences are found. Within philosophical discourse it should therefore not be surprising that the reification of aspects of creation are captured in “all” claims reflecting both the structure of a subject-copula-predicate proposition (which is, viewed from the angle of language, a normal sentence). Think of the Pythagorean view that *everything is number*, or the post-modern stance that *everything is interpretation*.

These basic (reificatory) statements appear to lie at the foundation of the XYZ structures discerned in the DA theory of Visagie. If this is indeed the case, then the question is if this perspective may not be seen as an enrichment of what DA theory actually aims for.

The prominence of metaphors in DA theory

Another question regarding the partial effect of the linguistic turn concerns the prominent place of *metaphors* in the articulation of DA theory. What is striking is that as soon as precision is required, recourse is taken to modal-aspectual categories. This is seen in the pairs of domain-terms (such as individual and universal, constancy and change, and so on). What the author misses in the list is, for example, the pair discreteness-continuity. Just like *constancy* and *change* are derived from the core meaning respectively of the kinematic and physical aspects, the terms *discreteness* and *continuity* are derived from the numerical and spatial aspects. An over-emphasis of the numerical aspect may result in an *atomistic* understanding of reality (explaining whatever there is in terms of the one and the many), while an over-emphasis of the spatial aspect may result in a *holistic* view (in which the spatial whole-parts relation is applied beyond its limits). The universal-individual pair, as well as the knowable-unknowable pair, when one-sidedly accentuated, may give rise to rationalistic or irrationalistic orientations. Similarly, the discreteness-continuity pair may give rise to the above-mentioned opposites of an atomistic (individualistic) or holistic (universalistic) view.

Particularly because modern philosophy regularly witnessed a materialistic (i.e., *physicalistic*) understanding of the universe, currently still actively alive in theories related to the “big bang”, a DA theory may benefit from including the discrete-continuous pair in its arsenal. Matter often serves as *origin*. Just consider the way in which Stegmüller explains the problems attached to an understanding of the nature of matter. The first four aspects of reality prominently feature in this context. In the first place, he distinguishes two global basic conceptions regarding the nature of matter, and points out that these conceptions once again, as previously, occupy a prominent place in current discussions. He calls these two basic conceptions the *atomistic conception* and the *continuity conception*.³ Laugwitz also points out that, insofar as physics subjects itself to auxiliary means from mathematics, it cannot escape the polarity between *continuity* and

3 “Diese beiden Grundkonzepte kann man als die atomistische Auffassung und als die Kontinuumsauffassung der Materie bezeichnen” (Stegmüller, 1987:91).

discreteness.⁴ The same applies to d’Espagnat, who characterizes classical physics “to be a multitudinist worldview” favouring a conception of nature in which reality basically is constituted by “myriad simple elements – essentially localized ‘atoms’ or ‘particles’”. He believes that the more general “quantum field theory is radically at variance with it” with its alternative “notion of a wholeness of some sort”. He states: “But theoretical as well as experimental advances gradually made people realize that it [wholeness] constitutes an inherent part of the very quantum formalism and has quite specific experimental consequences” (d’Espagnat, 2006:17).

It is clear that this distinction between “atomism” and “continuity” is based upon number and space as the two most basic modes of explanation of reality. In addition Stegmüller mentions the following two problems (see Stegmüller, 1987:91):

- (i) The apparent indestructibility of matter, and
- (ii) The apparent or real limitless transformability of matter.

When these two problems are assessed in their coherence, it is immediately clear that they depend upon the third and fourth ontic modes of explanation in reality, namely the meaning of kinematic persistence (‘immutability’) and physical changefulness (‘transformability’).

Universality and meaningful scholarly communication

Although DA theory is sensitive to ontological considerations, including the importance of searching for a non-reductionist ontology, one should expect that it will more explicitly pay attention to the issue of *indefinability* and concomitant issues related to *primitive terms*. It can only strengthen its position if these considerations are incorporated in its theoretical stance.⁵

The last problem complex to which the author briefly wants to pay attention in this discussion is the problem of what is shared between divergent philosophical orientations. The following statement of Visagie was quoted:

Also, contra Dooyeweerd, I was not so much interested in analyzing the structure of ground-ideas from the point of view of defending a certain

4 “Die Physik, insofern sie sich mathematischer Hilfsmittel bedient oder sich gar der Mathematik unterwirft, kann an der Polarität von Kontinuierlichem und Diskretem nicht vorbei” (Laugitz, 1986:9).

5 Because Visagie considers the problem of uniqueness and coherence as one of the perennial issues in philosophy, the further development of DA theory may benefit from considering the significance of axiomatic set theory for his formalizations (see Fraenkel, Bar-Hillel, Levy & Van Dalen, 1973 and Shapiro, 2005).

(Christian reformational) worldview. I felt the need to communicate beyond such boundaries – just as I wanted to be able to freely borrow from “humanistic” sources (like Chomsky or Habermas, for instance) if they could be of use to the research I had in mind (Visagie, 2006:202).

Is it really the case that Dooyeweerd’s interest in the structural conditions of theoretical thinking (ground-ideas) serve the purpose for him to defend a certain “(Christian reformational) worldview”? Why then did he reject Stoker’s proposal of a *creation idea* as substitute to his own preference for the *cosmonomic idea*? Dooyeweerd defended the use of the phrase *cosmonomic idea*: “Nevertheless, there are special reasons for maintaining the first term as a designation for the transcendental basic Idea of philosophy. In the first place, in pointing to the *preliminary questions* of philosophic thought, the basic Idea of philosophy must be so conceived, that it actually catches the eye as a necessary condition for *every philosophic system*. This implies, that the universal term by which this basic Idea is designated may not include special contents derived from the ground-motive of the Christian religion. The determination of the *contents* of the transcendental basic Idea is to be a subject of subsequent discussion” (Dooyeweerd, 1997-I:94-95).

This issue caused considerable debate and differences of opinion amongst adherents of Dooyeweerd’s philosophy. Van Riessen, for example, holds a view opposite to the one advanced by Visagie. He refers to the (quoted) phrase, namely that the transcendental idea of philosophy should actually “catches the eye as a necessary condition for *every philosophic system*” and from that he draws the conclusion that Dooyeweerd not only aimed at the conditions for all scholarship, but also that it should be accepted *by everyone* (Van Riessen, 1970:126).

What apparently is bothering Visagie in this connection is the way in which we can benefit from the insights of other philosophers. We quoted him saying: “I felt the need to communicate beyond such boundaries⁶ – just as I wanted to be able to freely borrow from “humanistic” sources (like Chomsky or Habermas, for instance) if they could be of use to the research I had in mind” (Visagie, 2006:202). Just on the next page he attributes some valuable insights (“truth moments”) to the theologian A.A. van Ruler, but they do need “serious re-interpretation”⁷ – which immediately gives rise to the question: are the insights borrowed from “humanistic” sources also “truth moments” in need of “serious re-interpretation”?

6 “... of defending a certain (Christian reformational) worldview.”

7 “... A.A. van Ruler for example, yield some valuable truth-moments – which, however, call for some serious re-interpretation” (Visagie, 2006:203).

The author thinks that Dooyeweerd (with his transcendental critique) and Visagie (with his DA theory) had the same goal in mind – communication beyond the boundaries of any specific world and life view. Rationality, as one of the prominent “holy cows” of the West did not really help in this respect, for this idea is incapable of explaining why “universal reason” did not succeed in liberating even the most “exact” of all the sciences, mathematics and physics, from diverging standpoints. Bernays, the co-worker of the foremost mathematician of the 20th century, David Hilbert, in the Festschrift to Karl Popper noted that the crux of rationality is found in the *conceptual element* (Bernays, 1974:601). What is therefore at stake in this regard, is the acknowledgement that concept formation and definition ultimately rest upon the acceptance and employment of *primitive terms*. In order to avoid a *regressus in infinitum*, this state of affairs ought to be respected. Cassirer has a clear understanding of this when he writes:

In order not to accept a regressus in infinitum a critical analysis of knowledge has to stop at specific original functions which are not in need of genuine derivation and which are also not capable of it (Cassirer, 1957:73).

The implication is that conceptual knowledge can only be obtained by using *primitive terms* that cannot be grasped in conceptual knowledge. In addition the outcome of the philosophy of science of the mid 20th century is that – as Popper stated it – the faith in the rationality of reason is not itself rational (see Popper, 1966-II:230). And Stegmüller acknowledged that a self-guarantee of human thinking, within whatever domain, does not exist, one already has to believe in something in order to justify something else (Stegmüller, 1969:314).

At this point it might be recollected what was said about the significance of indefinability and primitive terms – and that considering them may enrich the articulation of the DA theory of Visagie. What may briefly be added, is that primitive terms make an appeal to diversity (and irreducibility) and ultimately highlights the connection between *uniqueness* and *coherence*. The crux of a non-reductionist ontology – for theoretical thought and for meaningful scholarly communication between diverging and conflicting theoretical paradigms within philosophy and the special sciences – is therefore given in the exercise of *immanent criticism*. The latter not only makes an appeal to the logical principle of non-contradiction, but to its ontic pre-supposition, the principle of the excluded antinomy (*principium exclusae antinomiae*).

Immanent criticism prevents conversing partners from terminating their intellectual interaction with the proverbial: “I say this and you say that, so what?” An inner contact of thought requires the *intellectual integrity* of immanent criticism. Its aim should always be first to show what is inherently untenable and

only then to proceed with the formulation of an alternative perspective. At that point, in turn, the conversation partner first has to appreciate the inconsistencies pointed out by immanent criticism, then proceed to an appreciation of what is positive in the alternative account before renewed criticism is raised.

However, this kind of intellectual communication implicitly refers to an ontic order that is not the product of *rational human construction* – first of all to be acknowledged within the domain of logical thinking itself, because the conditions for logical thinking (the logical principles of identity, non-contradiction, and so on) cannot coincide with any actual thought process subjected to these principles. And the logical aspect itself can only reveal its meaning in coherence with all the other (ontic) aspects of reality. Acknowledging ontic universality or ontic conditions does not entail that our actual logical understanding should be elevated to the level of *universal validity*. Human insights remain provisional and improvable. Yet, without an implicit or explicit acknowledgement of universality, concepts collapse, communication becomes impossible and truth (or “truth-moments”) are rendered meaningless.

Concluding remark

The author’s suggestion is therefore to pursue a stronger integration of foundational ontological considerations in the further development of DA theory.

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