

Divergentierapport I

[Report of Divergences I]

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"Strictly confidential"¹

To the Board of the Foundation for Special Chairs in Calvinistic Philosophy [Stichting Bijzondere Leerstoelen Calvinistische Wijsbegeerte]

Introduction

A number of divergences exist among the professors of Calvinistic Philosophy, some of whom are connected to the Foundation. Already in the summer of 1949, these divergences drew the attention of Professor H.J. van der Maas, and since then these differences have repeatedly come up for discussion at the student conferences of the Association [for Calvinistic Philosophy].

It should not be surprising that such differences can appear even in this group. A particular difficulty (or possibility) is not easily seen by everyone at the same time, and even when this does happen, there is a great chance that even the common solution may be reached by different methods. This is due to the differences in the path followed by each person as well as in the task with which he or she has been entrusted. Moreover, these divergences can present objections only if we lose sight of either the tentative [p. 112] character or of the individual determination of the results that have been obtained.

In a decidedly Protestant milieu there is a twofold corrective against such dangers; it is summed up in the adage, "There it is written and there it has happened." In our circle this amounts to the necessity of continually working in the light of the Holy Scriptures and of reflecting on the history of philosophy in general, and on that of our own group in particular.

In the practice of this double demand, intensive mutual discussions are essential. For that purpose, a grateful use is being made of the Coetus Docentium [Meeting of Faculty], set up by the Board of the Foundation.

¹ The document dates from 1953. In it, Vollenhoven outlines some of his disagreements with Dooyeweerd. It seems that Vollenhoven discussed it with Dooyeweerd at the time. It is not clear whether the document was ever sent to the Board. The Divergentierapport was published, together with some valuable notes, in A. Tol and K.A. Bril: *Vollenhoven als Wijsgeer* (Amsterdam: Buijten & Schipperheijn, 1992), 107-117. I have included the original page numbers in square brackets in **bold** typeface.

Certainly the acceptance of this possibility also entails the duty to now and then advise the Board about the state of affairs. Naturally we can here only achieve a general overview. But we have also understood that the Board did not request more than an overview.

In the text below we have limited our remarks to systematic issues. And even here we cannot discuss everything. Among other issues, we must leave to one side those relating to the mutual relation of subject and individuality, as well as the whole question of epistemology. We hope that what has been included here shall prove to be comprehensive and important enough.

Background

If we look at the pre-history of Calvinistic Philosophy, we see that its fathers [Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven] were influenced by the Marburgers [neo-Kantians], Husserl and those who go along with them. Now of course since that time the work of these schools has also been subjected to a fundamental critique within our circle. But the course of affairs that I have just recalled has left its traces here and there. In the teaching concerning being [ontology], too much attention has now and then been focused on the functions. And in epistemology, the importance given to the knowledge of the special sciences is still sometimes given a too one-sided importance; the rest of creation is then too easily called 'mysticism.' But to this remainder [of creation] belong not only the heart but also the Church, the human nature of the Mediator, and the angelic world. So this area still requires a number of distinctions; to decide the proper terminology for it will require extreme care.

Overview

Ordered systematically, the most important difficulties concern the following [p. 113] points: (I) law and subject; (II) the structure of that which is subject and of time and (III). the prefunctional.

I. Law and subject

For some time Professor Dooyeweerd and Professor Vollenhoven stood quite far apart from each other. Professor Dooyeweerd sought both law and subject in the cosmos. He uses the term 'cosmos' to refer to that part of creation that finds its center in man. As a result he distinguishes law-side and subject-side in the cosmos, which according to him then relate mutually to each other as the universal relates to the individual. In contrast to this, Professor Vollenhoven spoke of a triad of God-law-cosmos in this sense, that God exists independently of law and cosmos, and also that He is not a correlate of these two. Rather, God sets the law for the cosmos that he has created, so that law and the cosmos (considered as a whole) are correlative to each other. Therefore Vollenhoven cannot speak of "a law-side and a subject-side in the cosmos." In his view, the law always stands above the cosmos, so that what is subject to the law is identical with the cosmos and not only a side of it.

Since that time, both standpoints have to some extent approached each other. Professor Dooyeweerd wants to distinguish the *ius divinum* [divine law] in its temporal refraction of meaning from the *ius humanum* [human law].² In addition, Professor Vollenhoven now wants to speak of law within the cosmos in the sense of regularity.

Yet there remain differences. Professor Vollenhoven considers that the distinction of *ius divinum* from *ius humanum* is not sufficient. [In addition he has objections to] the “temporal refraction of meaning,” which will be discussed later, as well as the rather juridical tendency in speaking of ‘*ius*.’ In his view, we require here a threefold distinction: 1. the law of God, which as norm stands above the cosmos, and which on earth directly concerns only humans, and for the remaining creatures is only indirectly in force, that is to say via humans; 2. the cosmos, including man, and 3. the positive law, by means of which office-bearers, on the basis of their office, within their modally qualified and regionally bounded societal relations, positivize the law of God primarily for human life in either a correct or an incorrect way.

Regarding point 1. Under ‘norm’ we must understand “the law of the Lord,” summarized by Christ in the double commandment of love. This law holds primarily only for human life; it makes no sense to speak of Christian animals, plants and physical things. But even human life can only be more or less in keeping with this law. So that even when human life does correspond with the law (for example, earlier in Paradise, and presently in the human nature of the Mediator), it does not somehow coincide with the norm, but is [p. 114] obedient to it. Moreover the norm stands as holy over against that which is subject to it, which, since the fall into sin, has continually, at least in part, been not holy but sinful (except for the human nature of the Mediator). That is why the Scriptures can speak of the “curse of the Law” on the subject that transgresses it, and that the cosmos (‘world’), according to Scripture’s religious dialectic³ can be called in turn “God’s handiwork,” “that which dwells within evil” and “that which is saved.”⁴

Regarding point 2. On the other hand, the rules, or if you will, the laws in the cosmos concern the regularity of both that which abides by the norm as well as that which does not. We can just as easily give statistics of the rise and fall in the number of murders committed as we can of its incidence in the birth population. Certainly this area does not stand separate from the opposition between good and evil; the Scriptures speak of “guilt” or the “unrighteousness of sin,” and these are also facts through which the further course

² JGF: But even in his *De Wijsbegeerte der Wetsidee*, Dooyeweerd distinguished God’s law from human positivization of that law in the normative spheres.

³ JGF: Dooyeweerd does not use the term ‘religious dialectic’ in this sense. Dooyeweerd reserves the term for the irreconcilable antithesis arising within non-Christian Ground-Motives. The absolutization of one aspect then necessarily evokes its correlata. See *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* I, 65.

⁴ JGF: Dooyeweerd has a much more thoroughgoing view of sin as having corrupted the whole of humanity as well as the world—a world that moreover has its existence and reality only in humanity, the religious root, redeemed in Christ. See NC I, 100; II, 53.

of events is determined. But the distinction remains: the relation of guilt to norm is something other than rules and exceptions in the structure. That is why those in the special sciences, insofar as they investigate the structures in the cosmos, whenever they see an exception to a previously found rule, they seek a rule that will encompass this breaking through.

At the same time, insight is obtained in this way regarding the mutual distinction of normative and non-normative laws. The fact is that this distinction does not correspond with that between the higher and lower modalities. Even in the psychical and biotic [modalities], healthy stands over against sick in correlation with whether or not the norm has been kept. And we also can speak of physical things as obeying the Mediator. And [this distinction corresponds] even less with the sum total and the temporal refraction of meaning.⁵ For apart from the question of temporality (which will be dealt with), the distinction between the unity in the nucleus and the diversity in its working out are present both in the norms as well as in that which is subject to them. Besides, the diversity among the laws of the second table of the law correlates even less to the modalities in the outward man [the mantle of functions].

Regarding point 3. The distinction between God's law as norm and the positive laws requires less extensive discussion. But it must be mentioned that the office-bearers in various societal relations are themselves subject to the norm; on the one hand, Scripture calls them 'gods,' but at the same time it calls them 'normal humans.' Their work then remains continually liable to being called back to the norm by which they—as well as their subordinates—are bound in their consciences. Their task of positivizing also brings with it the possibility might have to take account of the hardness of the hearts of their subordinates.

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II The structure of the subject and of time

Proceeding from the Scriptural distinction between heart and function, Professor Dooyeweerd considers (A) functions to be temporal and (b) the heart to be supratemporal

A. The connection between time and functions

According to Dooyeweerd, this [connection] is twofold, namely 1. in the temporal order of functions and 2. in each function separately. In the arithmetical, the presence of time is shown by the succession [of numbers]. And in the spatial it is shown by simultaneity.

⁵ JGF: But for Dooyeweerd, the central totality, which is refracted in time, is different than the sum total of functions. The nucleus is in this center. But Vollenhoven, for whom the prefunctional center is within time; seems to identify such a center with the sum of functions.

Regarding point 1. Contrary to the first argument, it must be noted that we can only speak of a temporal order in events. To also speak of temporal order in the functions makes it difficult for opponents [of this philosophy] to distinguish our vision from evolutionism.

Regarding point 2. The same argument holds in relation to time in the arithmetical and the spatial. Einstein's views cannot be viewed as a counterexample. According to him, space and time are both present in physical events, something that is conceded [by Vollenhoven].

Meanwhile there are other objections that can be brought against this point. Professor Dr. C.C. Jonker notes that if it were the case that succession in the arithmetical, and simultaneity in the spatial were indications of the presence of time in all functions, then ontically we should be able to notice a retrocipation when we cross from the arithmetical to the spatial.⁶ And yet, since the spatial always presupposes the arithmetical, one would have expected such a reverse relation [as retrocipation].⁷

A partial explanation can perhaps be found in the course of affairs during the history of the development of Calvinistic Philosophy. Vollenhoven's dissertation (1918) assumed—with Poincaré—that succession in number was the correlate of time. However, Vollenhoven did not really discuss there the question of time within the spatial aspect. That theme is connected with Dooyeweerd's idea that time must be found within all functions.⁸ In connection with the argument that we can only speak of time in events (see under point 1) it is perhaps better to seek indications of time neither in number nor in space. The idea of "succession" is thereby not given up—it can be understood as a non-temporal order of small and large.⁹

⁶ JGF: The text is not clear here, but it is evident from a later article that Prof. Jonker could not find an objectification of the arithmetical in the spatial; such objectification requires a retrocipation. See "Problemen van de tijd in onze kring."

⁷ JGF: Dooyeweerd says in his last article (1975) article that our theoretical investigation of the aspects does not refer to an ontical reality. See "De Kentheoretische Gegenstandsrelatie en de Logische Subject-Objectrelatie," *Philosophia Reformata* (1975) 83-101.

⁸ JGF: In his last article (1975), Dooyeweerd distinguishes between aspects and functions. This corresponds to his very early views on the subject.

⁹ JGF: But in his later speeches, Vollenhoven tried to retreat from this view. In "Problemen van de tijd in onze kring," he says, "I certainly do not say that the functions belong outside of time—time is also in the function." And in "De problemen rondom de tijd," he says, "That does not mean that we must remove the arithmetical and spatial from time in order to make them a priori—as rationalism does—for time is always inherent in (physical) things."

B. The supratemporal character of the heart

Against this theme, objections will be made that are (1) partly terminological [p. 116] and (2) partly essential to the argument. Regarding point 1. Terminologically it must be noted that even from Prof. Dooyeweerd's standpoint it would be better not to speak of 'supratemporal,' but for example of 'outside the temporal.' The term 'supratemporal' always gives the impression that the distinction between functions and heart can be brought under the schema of lower-higher. As a practical consideration, pagan thought repeatedly uses the term in this sense. So for example in monists like Leibniz. But also, and even to a stronger degree, in dualists. According to non-dichotomistic thinkers like African Spir [1837-1890] and Karl Barth [1886-1968], and according to dichotomistic thinkers like Ludwig Klages [1872-1956], as well as purely phrenological thinkers and spiritualists, the transcendent is wholly supratemporal. For others like C.G. Jung [1875-1961] it is partially supratemporal. Because of this, holding on to the term makes it possible that there will be a leveling down of the differences between Calvinistic Philosophy on the one hand, and the synthetist conceptions on the other hand (which must be definitely rejected). This unnecessarily makes our struggle more difficult—one can think here of the members of the younger generation who are forced to take cognizance of both the said conceptions as well as our vision; they will then involuntarily seek what they suppose to be the largest common denominator.

Regarding point 2. Even if the term 'supratemporal' is replaced with 'outside the temporal,' the essential objections against this idea, brought against it from more than one side, will still not disappear. In the view of those writing this report, neither the reproduction of the human race nor its history are to be regarded as supratemporal. And even less so is the conversion of the heart for Christians who are regenerated.

III. The pre-functional.

Finally we would direct your attention to the difficulties in connection with the pre-functional [heart], apart from the question of time. Until now the anthropology of Calvinistic Philosophy has distinguished the heart and the mantle of functions, and therefore sees belief as the highest function.

From various sides, a number of objections have been brought against this vision. They concern in part the place of belief which, taken in the sense of 'faithfulness,' cannot be functional. And their objection partly relates to the understanding of the church as institution, especially its diaconate and discipline insofar as this also has force of law for the Kingdom of Heaven.

These objections, insofar as they do not come from our own circle, do come from Gereformeerde people who should be taken seriously. And to meet these objections would greatly further our work. On the other sides, there must remain a distinction here, if one does not want to end up in the position that [p. 117] the church as institute either must rule the whole of Christian life or else that there can be no separate societal relationship possible. These are both ideas that do not appear correct to us. But serious attention will be devoted to this point in the near future.

