

Herman Dooyeweerd

II. CORNELIUS VAN TIL AND THE TRANSCENDENTAL CRITIQUE OF THEORETICAL THOUGHT

My good friend,

You have from the beginning expressed your sympathy with the reformatory tendency of the Philosophy of the Cosmonomic Idea. It is no wonder that, as a professor of apologetics, you are especially interested in the transcendental critique of theoretical thought, which this philosophy has laid at the foundation of every further philosophical investigation. No wonder, indeed, since this critique has been presented as the only critical way of communication between a really reformatory Christian philosophy and philosophical schools holding in one sense or another to the supposed autonomy of theoretical thought. It is this very method of communication which could be also of fundamental import for a reformatory apologetics that seeks to avoid any compromise with the traditional scholastic conception of the relative autonomy of human reason with respect to so-called "natural knowledge." You have tried to develop such an apologetics in a consistent way in your book, *The Defense of the Faith*. In your class syllabus on "Biblical Dimensionalism,"¹ which was kindly placed at my disposal, you have dwelled at length on the question about whether my transcendental critique can indeed clear the way for a real communication with philosophical trends that hold to the autonomy of theoretical thought.

From your critical comment on this discussion it appears that you are not satisfied with the way in which I have applied this critique in the dialogue with neo-thomistic and other philosophers. Your main objection is that, in your opinion, I do not carry through my reformatory biblical starting point in such a dialogue in a consistent manner. This failure would already appear from my distinction between a transcendental and a transcendent criticism of philosophical views.

I am afraid that you have misunderstood what I mean by this distinction. You think that by transcendental critique I understand a critique that *starts from* the (transcendent) "fulness and unity of truth accepted on the authority of Scripture."² By my opposing such

a transcendent critique to the transcendental one, as the "dogmatical" to the "critical" method of communication, I am supposed to forget "that the whole point of transcendental criticism is lost unless it is based upon transcendent criticism."

In the syllabus this latter statement is wrongly ascribed to Berkouwer. I suppose it is, in fact, your own as appears from your explanatory addition: "That is to say, the entire transcendental method hangs in the air except for the fact that it rests upon the fullness and unity of truth accepted on the authority of Scripture."

But by a transcendent criticism, as opposed to the transcendental critique of theoretic thought, I understood something quite different from what you suppose. I meant by transcendent criticism, the dogmatic manner of criticizing philosophical theories from a theological or from a different philosophical viewpoint without a critical distinction between *theoretical propositions* and the *supra-theoretical presuppositions* lying at their foundation.

In *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, I have explained in detail why I *reject* such a *transcendent* critique, which in scholastic theology has been repeatedly applied to condemn scientific and philosophical ideas that did not agree with traditional scholastic views. In view of this state of affairs I remarked: "Besides, there is another ever present danger" (viz. in transcendent criticism). "What is actually a complex of philosophical ideas dominated by unbiblical motives, may be accepted by dogmatic theology and accommodated to the doctrine of the church. The danger is that this complex of ideas will be passed off as an article of Christian faith, if it has influenced the terminology of some confessions of faith."³ Among the Reformed confessions I am reminded of that of Westminster, which renders the Christian belief concerning human nature in terms of the dualistic Thomistic-Aristotelian conception, just as the Council of Vienne had done before. To clear the way for a reformatory philosophy it was necessary to subject this traditional scholastic view, inclusive of its whole Greek metaphysical background, to a transcendental critique from the radical biblical standpoint.

This criticism laid bare the unbiblical ground-motive lying at the foundation of this metaphysics. Valentine Hepp, the late professor of dogmatic theology at the Free University of Amsterdam, was of the opinion that rejection of the traditional scholastic view of human nature was a deviation from the Reformed confession; and the theological faculty of that time shared this opinion. We are confronted here with a transcendent critique in *optima forma*.

I guess that you will gladly agree that this kind of criticism is rejectable. But the point at issue is whether, and if so, *how*, the transcendental critique meant in the sense of the Philosophy of the Cosmonomic Idea is able to join issue with philosophical trends which do not share its radical biblical starting point, but rather in one sense or another hold to the autonomy of theoretical human thought.

* * * * *

To understand the true meaning and purport of this transcendental critique, it is necessary to realize that its primary purpose was to institute a radically transcendental inquiry into the inner nature and structure of the theoretical attitude of thought and experience, and into the real nature of the presuppositions lying at the foundation of every possible philosophical reflection.

This inquiry was necessary to answer the question whether the traditional dogma concerning the autonomy of theoretical thought may in some way or another be based upon the inner nature and structure of the latter. This critical investigation was concerned with philosophical problems of a primordial transcendental character, for these problems arise from the inner nature and structure of the theoretical attitude of thought and experience itself.

The task of a transcendental critique, which makes this theoretical attitude as such a critical problem, is quite different from that of a theological apologetics. It does not aim at a "defense of the Christian faith" but at laying bare the central influence of the different religious, basic motives upon the philosophical trends of thought. For that purpose it was necessary to show the *inner point of contact* between theoretical thought and its supra-theoretical presuppositions which relate to the central religious sphere of human existence. This is why this transcendental critique is obliged to *begin* with an inquiry into the inner nature and structure of the theoretical attitude of thought and experience *as such* and *not* with a confession of faith. In this first phase of the critical investigation such a confession would be out of place. Not because the first question raised by our transcendental critique might be answered apart from the central religious starting-point of those who take part in the philosophical dialogue, but because the necessity of such a starting-point has not yet come up for discussion. For, so long as the dogma concerning the autonomy of theoretical thought has not been subjected to a transcendental critique, adherents of this dogma who enter into a dialogue with the Philosophy of the Cosmonomic Idea might rightly confine themselves

to the simple statement that theoretical philosophy has nothing to do with questions of faith and religion. In other words, the dialogue would be cut off before it could start.

The confrontation of the biblical and the non-biblical ground-motives of theoretical thought belongs to the third and last phase of the transcendental critique. Only in this phase the transcendental problem crops up concerning the possibility of a concentric direction of theoretical thinking to the human ego, as its central reference point, and concerning the inner nature of the latter.

This problem, too, arose from the inner nature and structure of the theoretical attitude of thought and experience itself. For, this attitude turned out to be characterized by an intentional antithetical relation between the logical or analytical mode of theoretical thinking and the non-logical modal aspects of human experience within the horizon of cosmic time. Both this theoretical antithesis and the inter-modal theoretical synthesis, necessary to gain a conceptual insight into the modal structures of the non-logical aspects of our temporal horizon of experience, bind theoretical thought to a divergent direction. Nevertheless both of them presuppose the human ego as the central reference point of our consciousness which as such must transcend the modal diversity of the temporal horizon of human experience.

This means that the third problem of the transcendental critique, though it be evoked by the transcendental critical turn of theoretical thought to the thinking ego, cannot be solved within the boundaries of theoretical thought and experience.

* * * * *

Self-knowledge is here at issue and true self-knowledge is, as you so rightly remark, completely dependent upon true knowledge of God, which is to be obtained only from his Word-revelation fulfilled in Jesus Christ. This central knowledge is, however, certainly not of a theoretical conceptual character. In his high priestly prayer Jesus says that this *knowledge is eternal life in the love-communion with the Father and the Son*. In his earthly life in which the Christian is still subject to the consequences of sin, he can have only a principle of this religious knowledge. The latter presupposes the opening up of his "heart," i.e., the religious center of his existence, by the Holy Ghost to the moving power of the Word-revelation. Since man has been created in the image of God, the religious impulse, as Calvin rightly observes, is an innate impulse of the human heart. He calls it

“semen religionis.” It is a natural disposition which in itself is unable to lead man to true self-knowledge and knowledge of God. But it brings about the restless longing for communion with the absolute upon which he may concentrate all the relative, primarily his own self as the creaturely religious concentration-point of his existence. The religious impulse was, from the beginning, thrown on the central motive power of God’s general Word-revelation, which alone could give it true content and a right direction.

By the fall into sin it got an apostate trend. Turning away from the Word of God and lending ear to the temptation to be like God in his self-sufficiency, man directed his innate religious impulse towards idols originating from an absolutization of creaturely meaning-structures of the temporal world.

Hence the necessary ambiguity of the term “religious” in the Philosophy of the Cosmonomic Idea. It always refers here to the central sphere of human existence and consciousness in its active relation to God, and to the central motive power operating in it. But Holy Scripture teaches us that this central *dynamis* may be that of the Word-revelation leading us into the Truth, as well as that of the spirit of apostasy who leads the innate religious impulse of the human heart in a false direction.

Naturally it is possible to eliminate this ambiguity of the terms “religious” and “religion” by ascribing to them only an idolatrous or a Christian sense respectively. Karl Barth did so in the former sense and consequently opposed all religion, including the Christian, as a supposed product of the apostate human nature, to the Word of God and the life out of grace alone. But this arbitrary restriction of the meaning of the term, which is in line with Barth’s antithetical conception of the scholastic basic motive of nature and grace, is unacceptable.

The innate religious impulse of the human heart does not result from man’s apostate nature, but, as we observed above, from his creation in the image of God.

I was therefore really surprised by your comment on the ambiguous use of the term “religious” in my transcendental critique.⁴ “The basic trouble,” you said, “is that the term religious is used by both Dooyeweerd and Berkouwer first in one way and then in another. Basically it means for them the biblical scheme of things. . . . But then they also use the term religious in a general sense of any position that recognizes the need of religious presuppositions in addition to logical thought or theoretical reason.” You apparently view this general use

of the term (that for the rest of this form is not to be found with me) in close connection with (1) the contradistinction between a transcendent and a transcendental critique and my rejection of the former; (2) my supposed idea that the "states of affairs" "have an objectivity" apart from the biblical presuppositions; and, (3) in particular, my supposed view "that irrationalism and subjectivism can be answered without reference to biblical content."

* * * * *

The first point can now be considered settled as resting on a misunderstanding. As to the third point I must remark that I have rejected both rationalism and irrationalism, both subjectivism and objectivism from the biblical view concerning the correlation and mutual irreducibility of law and subject. As to the second point, I wonder how you could ascribe to me the opinion that the "states of affairs" would have an objectivity which gives them a neutral position over against the biblical presuppositions of my transcendental critique. You have apparently deduced this opinion from my explanation of my standpoint with respect to the "states of affairs" in the controversy with van Peursen in the year 1960 of *Philosophia Reformata*. You seem to to have been particularly impressed by van Peursen's question if there does not exist a dialectical tension between my statement that there are undeniable states of affairs which can be discovered by both Christian and non-Christian scholars, and my thesis according to which, for instance, the statement $2 \times 2 = 4$ has no truth in itself, but can function only within the total dynamical meaning-context of our experiential horizon. You understood van Peursen's question as follows: "On the one hand, . . . Dooyeweerd tells us that the truths of arithmetics must be seen as a part of the whole cosmic structure as this in turn is seen in the light of Christian truth, and then again he speaks of it as though it were a truth independent of this Christian scheme."⁵

This was not exactly the point in van Peursen's question. Van Peursen started from the erroneous opinion that I would have conceived the "states of affairs" in the sense of "brute facts" apart from their meaning. If this were true there would naturally exist a striking antinomy between my conception of the "states of affairs" and my fundamental view concerning the meaning-character of creaturely reality. In my reply I gave therefore, once more, an ample exposition of my conception concerning this point. In this exposition I stressed the fact that the "states of affairs" have never been conceived by me as "brute facts" in the sense of a positivistic empiricism.

The "states of affairs" presenting themselves within the temporal order of our experience are, in my opinion, of a dynamic meaning-character, i.e., they refer outside and above themselves to the universal meaning-context in time, to the creaturely unity of root and to the absolute Origin of all meaning. This was the religious presupposition resulting from the biblical ground-motive of my philosophical thought. But it would naturally be a serious error to suppose that this religious presupposition as such would provide us with a philosophical insight into the transcendental meaning-structures of our temporal world.

To acquire such an insight we need, in the first place, a careful investigation of a great number of "states of affairs" which appear to be helpful to a theoretical analysis of these meaning-structures, but which, as such, must be considered independent of our subjective philosophical interpretation. Van Peursen wrongly considered my insistence on this latter point as an indication of an objectivistic view of the "states of affairs."

In fact it was nothing but a result of my biblical conviction that the "states of affairs" in which the transcendental meaning-structures of our temporal horizon of experience reveal themselves are not founded in our subjective consciousness, but in the divine order of creation to which our subjective experience is subject. For this very reason they also cannot be dependent upon the religious conviction of the investigator, so that they may be discovered in a particular context by both Christian and non-Christian thinkers.

It is not so that the discovery of "states of affairs" which turn out to be of great importance for our insight into the modal meaning-structure of a transcendental aspect, is seen by everybody in that way. It may be that they are immediately given a philosophical interpretation which is incompatible with the modal meaning-structure of the aspect concerned.⁶ The "states of affairs" may also be too hastily interpreted in terms of a particular conception of the modal meaning-structure concerned which turns out to be liable to justified criticism. This is why I consider it a critical requirement to suspend our philosophical interpretation of the "states of affairs" at issue until we have so many of them at our disposal, relating to all the modal aspects of our temporal experiential world which until now we have learned to distinguish, that we can try to conceive them in a philosophical total view. In this whole explanation to van Peursen of my standpoint with respect to the "states of affairs" there is not a trace to be found of the ambiguity which you think to have discovered in it.

Nowhere have I said that the "states of affairs," lying at the foundation of my philosophical theory of the modal spheres, have an "objectivity" apart from the "biblical presuppositions." On the contrary, I have stressed the fact that they are founded in the divine order of creation. Nowhere have I claimed "to use a transcendental method that is not directly(?) dependent upon the truths of Scripture," nor have I appealed "to supposedly objective states of affairs that have an objectivity not depending upon the truths of Scripture."⁷

* * * * *

Asking myself what may have induced you to ascribe to the Philosophy of the Cosmonomic Idea such a dialectical dualism, I find myself confronted with, what I fear to be, a typical rationalistic scholastic tendency in your theological thought. This tendency reveals itself first in your objections against my distinction between theoretical conceptual knowledge, and the central religious self-knowledge and knowledge of God. On this point you appear to agree with the neo-scholastic thinkers, Robbers and Mrs. Conradie, and in some degree also with van Peursen. I fear your rationalism may go even further than that of the neo-scholastic thinkers mentioned, for the latter have never claimed that philosophical ideas are to be *derived* from the supra-natural truths of divine revelation, and that is exactly what you seem to defend. In "Biblical Dimensionalism" you mention my rectification of van Peursen's erroneous assertion that according to vol. II, p. 54 of *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* my transcendental idea of cosmic time has been borrowed from revelation.⁸ The passage to which van Peursen refers reads in fact as follows: "It is only the biblical religious basic motive that gives the view of time the ultimate direction to the true fulness of meaning intended by our cosmonomic Idea."

In this context I observed that none of the three transcendental ground-ideas of the Philosophy of the Cosmonomic Idea is to be derived from the biblical basic motive which controls the ultimate direction of its theoretical reflection, since this basic motive is of a supra-theoretical character. Upon this statement you comment as follows: "We would ask Dooyeweerd, however, how he can put an intelligible content into the phrase 'Christian thinking' in terms of control (*beheersen*) rather than in terms of derivation (*afleiding*). If we are to avoid mysticism, then we must do something with the actual revelational content of Scripture. Dooyeweerd needs to borrow nothing from any theologian. But revelation is expressed in thought-

content. And it is this thought-content, unmixed with any interpretation of any man, which controls his own thinking. This being the case, what difference remains between the idea of his thinking being controlled (by) or being derived from Scripture. Control without derivation is an empty mystical phrase." In reply to this comment I can only ask the counter question, how it would be possible to *derive* from the biblical revelation a philosophical idea of cosmic time with its diversity of modal aspects, of which it does not speak in any way.

The Bible does not provide us with philosophical ideas, no more than it gives us natural scientific knowledge or an economic or legal theory. But theoretical thought needs a central starting-point which transcends the modal diversity of our temporal horizon of experience and must consequently be of a supra-theoretical character. It is only by virtue of its supra-theoretical character that this starting-point can give central lead to our theoretical thought. This has been shown by the radical transcendental critique of the theoretical attitude of thought and experience which I have laid at the foundation of all my further philosophical investigations. This critique could be truly radical only because in the three phases of its critical investigation it had its supra-theoretical starting-point in the central ground-motive of the Word-revelation, viz., that of creation, fall into sin, and redemption by Jesus Christ, as the incarnate divine Word, in the communion of the Holy Ghost.

In my various explanations of the transcendental critique both within and outside my work, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, I have always emphasized its biblical starting-point. What, then, so I ask myself again, may have made you think that this critique would be not "directly" dependent upon the transcendent "biblical truths"? It seems to me that it is again a certain rationalistic view of the divine Word-revelation that hinders you from seeing the fundamental difference and the true relation between the central religious and the theoretical-conceptual sphere of knowledge. The difference you apparently deny, and this is why the question concerning their true relation does in fact not come up for discussion in your train of thought.⁹

This appears, in my opinion, from your objections to what I have observed with respect to true self-knowledge and true knowledge of God in their unbreakable coherence, and especially with respect to the central ground-motive of the biblical revelation as moving power or *dunamis* addressing itself primarily to the heart or the religious

center of our existence.¹⁰ As to the first point you ask me (1) how I may avoid falling into the trap of Kant's idea of the primacy of practical reason,¹¹ and (2) how I can avoid placing the self in a vacuum over against all the conceptual knowledge that we have of anything.

"Why not rather say that since a true knowledge of self and the world depends upon a true knowledge of God and since the knowledge of God about himself, about man, and about the world was mediated to man from the beginning through ordinary language, including conceptual terms, we now, as sinners saved by Christ, subordinate all our thinking to the truths of Scripture. . . . Listening to Scripture, obeying the voice of God speaking through Christ in Scripture, means making every human thought subject to divine thought.

"In Christ, says Dooyeweerd, our hearts are enlightened. But who then is Christ? He is what the Bible says he is in thoughts expressed in words, in concepts. Dooyeweerd speaks of the 'central *dunamis*' of the Divine 'Word' as taking hold of us in the depth of our being. If this idea of *dunamis* is not to lead us into a Kantian sort of noumenal, then it must be based upon the spoken Word, full of thought-content. . . . Dooyeweerd's discussion of the *dunamis* of the divine revelation as over against the simple thought-content of Scripture adds still further to the ambiguity contained in what he says about the transcendental method. . . . Why did not Dooyeweerd tell van Peursen that his basic view of objectivity is the normativity of the Scriptural concepts of creation, of sin and of redemption? . . . It is *concepts* that need interpretation, yes, by human concepts based on revealed concepts. The whole attempt at reforming philosophical thought in terms of the modalities of thought as set forth by Dooyeweerd breaks down unless he reforms the concept of *dunamis*."

I guess this ample quotation sheds a clear light on the rationalist tendency in your thought in consequence of which you are unable to escape dilemmas which the Philosophy of the Cosmonomic Idea has unmasked as polarly opposite absolutizations.

Rationalism as absolutization of conceptual thought evokes necessarily irrationalism as its alternative.¹² The objectivism implied in traditional scholastic rationalism evokes as its alternative subjectivism, etc. It is consequently quite understandable that from your standpoint you consider my distinction between conceptual knowledge and central religious knowledge a result of an irrationalist mystical view of the latter. In line with Robbers and van Peursen

you interpret this distinction as a *separation*, so that the central supra-conceptual sphere and the conceptual sphere of knowledge are conceived of as opposite to, and independent of, each other. In this way the distinction is naturally transformed into a dialectical tension, testifying to a dualistic trend in my thought. In my discussion with van Peursen I have dwelled at length on this radical misrepresentation of my view and I have given an ample rectification. You do not go into this rectification, and I fear that so long as you stick to this rationalist standpoint you will not be able to understand what I have written in this context.

In your train of thought the matter seems to be quite simple. The Word-revelation results from divine *thought*. It is mediated to man through ordinary language. Its content is *thought*-content expressed in words (wrongly identified with concepts).¹³ Consequently, listening to Scripture, obeying the voice of God speaking through Christ in Scripture, means making every human *thought* subject to divine *thought* expressed in scriptural *concepts*, so that man has to "think God's thoughts after him."

Is this really a biblical view? I am afraid not. Nowhere does the Bible speak of obeying the voice of God in terms of subjecting every human thought to divine thought. The New Testament understanding of obedience is doing the Father's will revealed in the gospel of Jesus Christ, by believing with all our heart that we belong to him. There is no real obedience to the will of God that does not result from the heart, in the pregnant biblical sense, as the religious center of our existence, which must be regenerated and opened up by the divine moving power of the Holy Ghost. It is exactly this central biblical condition that is lacking in your circumscription of obedience. You do not, of course, at all deny the necessity of rebirth. But I fear that the biblical conception of the religious center of human existence does not fit in with your view of the human nature.¹⁴

That the Word-revelation was from the beginning mediated to man through human language is naturally unquestionable. But that verbal language would necessarily signify conceptual thought-contents is a rationalist prejudice that runs counter to the real states of affairs. By means of language we can signify symbolically not only conceptual thought contents, but all sorts of contents of our consciousness, such as subjective moods and emotional feelings, volitional decisions in a concrete situation, our faith in Jesus Christ, pre-theoretical aesthetical and moral experiences, often expressed in short exclamations such as "How wonderful!" or "Shame on you!"

etc., which certainly do not give expression to conceptual knowledge of the experiential modes concerned.

The transcendental critique of theoretical thought has shown why true self-knowledge in its biblical sense, i.e., in its dependence upon true knowledge of God, cannot be itself of a conceptual character. The reason is that all conceptual knowledge in its analytical and inter-modal synthetical character *presupposes* the human ego as its central reference-point, which consequently must be of a supra-modal nature and is not capable of logical analysis. This does not mean, as you suppose, that the human self is placed in a vacuum over against all the conceptual knowledge that we have of everything. The human ego cannot be theoretically opposed to conceptual knowledge since, as the central reference-point of the latter, it transcends every theoretical antithesis.

It would be placed in a vacuum only if we would try to conceive it apart from the three central (and consequently supra-logical) relations without which it loses all meaning and content. I mean its relation to our multi-modal existence and experience in the temporal world, the I-thou relation to our fellow-men, and the religious I-Thou relation to God, in whose image man has been created. Since the last mentioned relation encompasses the two others, we may say that, according to its positive meaning, the human ego is the religious concentration point or center of man's existence. This is what the Bible, in a pregnant sense, calls the "heart," from which are the issues of life, from which proceed all sins and in which takes place rebirth out of the Holy Ghost.

The Bible does not speak of this religious center in conceptual terms, no more than Jesus in his night conversation with Nicodemus gave a conceptual circumscription of rebirth as the necessary condition of seeing the kingdom of God. The same holds good with respect to the biblical revelation of creation, man's fall into sin, and redemption through Jesus Christ. You often speak of the "scriptural concepts of creation, of sin, and of redemption," as revealed concepts, whose normativity ought to be our basic view of objectivity. But the Word-revelation does not reveal *concepts* of creation, sin, and redemption.

You do not seem to have seen that words and concepts cannot be identical. "Now, to be sure," you say, "when we speak of creation, we use concepts. There is no other way of speaking of God and of his relation to man." What, in my opinion, you *should* have said is that when we speak of creation, we use human *words* varying

with the language of which we avail ourselves, and multivocal in common parlance. But in biblical usage they have got an identical revelational meaning in so far as they relate to God in his self-revelation as the absolute Origin of all that through his Word has been called into being. This revelational meaning transcends every human concept¹⁵ since it is of a supra-rational character. *Supra-rational* should by no means be confused with *irrational*. It is not, like the latter, the opposite, but the presupposition of the rational, just like the human self-hood is presupposed in every human thought and every human concept. God's *self-revelation* in Holy Scripture as Creator and Redeemer concerns the central religious relation of man to his absolute Origin. Its true meaning is therefore to be understood by man only if his *heart* has been opened up to it through the moving power of the Holy Ghost, which is the *dunamis* of the biblical Word-revelation. What is said here about the *dunamis* of the Word-revelation and the central role of the heart in the understanding of its meaning is in complete accordance with the biblical testimony (cf. Isa. 6:10-13; Acts 16:14) and with the opinion of Calvin (cf. the citations from the *Institutes* in *New Critique*, I/516,7). But you place it "over against the simple thought-content of Scripture" and are of the opinion that it adds still further to the ambiguity of my transcendental critique. You think so, however, not on biblical ground, but in consequence of a rationalistic view of the Word-revelation and of the religious relation of man to God, which, you feel, is of a rational-ethical character. This rationalism implies also a relapse into a metaphysical theory of the intrinsic divine being and its attributes, which Calvin called a "*vacua et meteorica speculatio*."¹⁶ That this theological metaphysics is necessarily involved in antinomies is, in your opinion, not a consequence of its vain attempt to exceed the boundaries of conceptual thought. It is only because of the necessary incompleteness of our theoretical knowledge about God and the created universe. The antinomies exist therefore only seemingly, but are nevertheless inevitable.¹⁷

But now you will ask me if I myself am not obliged to use *concepts* of God and the human ego in the threefold transcendental ground-idea whose necessity the transcendental critique has shown. It is true that I used the term limiting idea in this context and you appear to be willing to conceive of the "concept of creation" as a limiting idea. I guess that then the same must hold good with respect to what you call the other revealed concepts. But what is meant by the term "limiting idea" in the transcendental critique of theoretical thought as

developed by the Philosophy of the Cosmonomic Idea? Nothing else is meant but the concentric religious turn of our theoretic conceptual thought, which is bound to the modal diversity of our temporal existence and experience to its supra-conceptual presupposita. This means that the genuine *conceptual* contents of these transcendental limiting ideas do not transcend the modal dimension of our temporal horizon of experience. The same applies to the theological limiting concepts relating to the so-called attributes of God. In *The Defense of the Faith* you deal with these attributes within the traditional framework of a metaphysical theory of being. They are, you say, not to be thought of otherwise than as aspects of the one simple original being;¹⁸ whereas in fact, they are taken from the modal dimension of our temporal horizon of experience and existence in its central relation to God as its absolute Origin. But since they are ascribed to God, such as he has revealed himself to man in Holy Scripture, i.e., within the human horizon of experience and existence, they are to be understood only in the analogical sense of belief as analogies of faith (*analogiae fidei*) whose material content is exclusively determined by God's Word-revelation. For, in their sense-proper, the modal aspects of our temporal horizon cannot be ascribed to God's being as its properties, since they are of a creaturely character. But the analogies of belief, insofar as they relate to God's self-revelation, are preëminently fit to give expression both to God's presence in the temporal world and to his absolute transcendence; to his presence, since they imply the whole temporal order of the modal aspects; to his transcendence, since they refer to God's absoluteness, which transcends every creaturely determination. In any case, they cannot be given a metaphysical interpretation as if they would be determinations of God's absolute being, for they too belong to the modal dimension of the human horizon of experience. Because they refer to God's absoluteness, they are unbreakably bound to the central religious dimension of this horizon. For it is only in the religious center of his consciousness that man is confronted with the absolute, so that even the absolutizations in apostate philosophical views originate in the central religious impulse of the human heart, which has been led in an erroneous direction. Since the analogical moments in the modal structure of the different aspects of our experiential horizon are arranged in an unbreakable order and meaning-context, their meaning is bound to this context. As to the analogies of belief relating to what metaphysical theology called the "attributes of God's being," this implies that they should not be separately called absolute, or

be identified with God's absolute being. This is why I cannot agree with your statement that God's being is exhaustively rational.¹⁹ My objections concern your whole view of God's self-revelation in Holy Scripture according to which it would contain a metaphysical *theory* of the divine being. It is true that it was not your intention to make deductions on the basis of one attribute by itself²⁰ and that, in line with Calvin, you say that no knowledge of God's nature is available to man except such as is voluntarily revealed to him by God. But by interpreting God's self-revelation in Holy Scripture in terms of a metaphysical theory of God's being, you could not stick to this biblical standpoint. Nowhere can you find in the Bible support for your statement²¹ that "logic and reality meet first of all in the mind and being of God," so that God's being would be "exhaustively rational." We are, indeed, confronted here with a metaphysical absolutization of the logical analogy of belief in what the Bible reveals about God's omniscience. This appears from what you observe with respect to Leibniz's distinction between *truths of fact* and *truths of reason*.²² According to you, the Reformed apologist should hold to the truths of fact presented in Scripture only because to him they are truths of reason. It is true that you yourself, as a creaturely human being, are not able to show "the exhaustive logical relationships between the facts of history and nature which are in debate as between believers and unbelievers in Christian theism," but in the plan of God they function, you say, within an absolute system of logical relations which does not detract anything from their individuality. We should, however, realize what Leibniz meant by his distinction between *truths of reason* and *truths of fact*. The former are, according to him, those whose opposite is excluded by the logical principle of contradiction. The latter are those whose opposite is not impossible in a logical sense, because they are of a contingent, i.e., not necessary, character. This does, however, not mean that in Leibniz's opinion the facts would happen by blind chance or that they would lack logical coherence. They happen according to God's will and are subject to the logical *principium rationis sufficientis*, which in Leibniz' logistic view embraces all kinds of causal relationships. Leibniz maintains the distinction between truths of fact and truths of reason even with respect to God's mind: the former depend upon God's will, the latter upon God's reason. I am afraid that you have not realized that a theological reduction of the truths of fact to Leibniz' truths of reason would make even the central facts of creation, fall into sin, and redemption a consequence of logical necessity in virtue of the prin-

ciple of contradiction. This would result in an extreme logicistic view of "God's world-plan" which would leave no room for the sovereign freedom of God's will. For God's will can, in your view only *carry out* the plan of God, not *determine* it.²³ I am sure that in fact the author of *The Defense of the Faith* will never accept this consequence.

* * * * *

In the above I have tried to answer the questions which you have asked me with respect to the transcendental critique. I could not do so without going into the background of the objections you have alleged against my standpoint. This has doubtless brought to light important differences between your view of a Christian philosophy and that of the Philosophy of the Cosmonomic Idea. At least if I have not misunderstood you on essential points, which might occur because, at times, your terminology is not always clear to me. In this case I shall be happy to be corrected by you, if you should wish to do so in your response.

Sincerely,
Herman Dooyeweerd

Response by C. Van Til

Dear Dr. Dooyeweerd:

You have written an enormous amount of material. All of it is profound and penetrating. Much of it I have read and re-read, especially your *De Wysbegeerte der Wetsidee* (1935). Perhaps this accounts for the fact that I have not fully appreciated what you later, in your *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* (1953), speak of as a "second way" by which "to subject philosophic thought to a transcendental criticism."¹

By a truly transcendental criticism of the theoretical attitude of thought, you say, "we understand 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*. In this latter restriction lies the difference in principle between a *transcendent* and a *transcendental* criticism of science and philosophy.

"The former does not really touch the inner character and the immanent structure of the theoretical attitude of thought, but confronts,

- ence" to be taken in a wide sense). The majority of these presuppositions you have elaborated from your *A-P* (or *P-A*) approach.
44. Cf. *B en M*, and *DSM*.
 45. On the one hand because of the dualities mentioned in sections G.5.1 and because of the analogous nature of man's knowledge—as we understand it—it is intelligible that the *P-A* (or *A-P*) and the *P-C* approaches differ (i.e., that they intersect one another at right angles). On the other hand, whereas, for instance, absolute idealism does not accept the dualities mentioned and therefore neither the analogous nature of human knowledge, the relevant distinction between the approaches mentioned falls away.
 46. See note 32.
 47. Cf. *B en M*, and *DSM*.
 48. This is clear if we compare your theory of knowledge with, for instance, that of Dooyeweerd or of what I have ventured to give in the first sections of this letter. To this I should add that not only must philosophic and particular scientific theories of knowledge presuppose the truths of your theory of knowledge, but that the latter should also take into account the results of the former. This is the case because, on the one hand, "theory of knowledge" is an interscience and should be pursued as a unity, and on the other hand, because as soon as you specify what you exactly mean by man's knowledge, thought, and perception as well as by method and by science as such, you are confronted by the problems of philosophy-proper and particular science-proper theories of knowledge.

II. Herman Dooyeweerd

1. This is part 3, ch. 9 of Vol. II of *CC*.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 47.
3. Herman Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, Vol. I (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1953), pp. 37-38.
4. *CC*/II:3.9, p. 51.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 54.
6. I refer, for instance, to the discovery of the principle of logical economy in theoretical thought, which, by the positivistic thinkers Mach and Avenarius, was reduced to what they called the fundamental bio-physical law of labor saving.
7. *CC*/II:3.9, p. 55.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 55-56.
9. In *DF*, 1st ed., p. 235, you speak of the "theory of reality" which the Bible contains, and of the definite philosophy of history involved in the biblical conception of eternity (p. 26).
10. *CC*/II:3.9, pp. 56-57.
11. You do not explain how it might be possible to connect my view of the supra-rational character of the central religious ground-motive of the Word-revelation with Kant's doctrine concerning the primacy of practical reason and with his metaphysical ethical idea of the *homo noumenon*. I fear that you have come to this misconception in consequence of the scholastic framework of your Reformed theological thought. You hold to

a Christian theoretical metaphysics which, according to you, is to be derived from the Bible. This metaphysics contains a "two layer theory of being," i.e., first a concept of the triune God in his aseity, and second a concept of created being. Man's creation in the image of God involves, you say, of necessity, a true metaphysical knowledge of God. Sin and redemption are not of a metaphysical but of an ethical character. In consequence you distinguish the merely theoretical knowledge of God from the ethical which combines this rational knowledge with loving. Only the latter is true in a rational ethical sense. In this way the central religious sphere of human existence and knowledge is reduced to the rational ethical aspect of human behavior, which according to both scholasticism and Kantian criticism is controlled by practical reason. Within this framework of thought, attribution of the central place to the *religious* knowledge of God, not conceived of as a theoretical metaphysics, must seem to be tantamount to accepting the primacy of practical reason.

12. In *DF*, 1st ed., p. 58, you emphatically accept this alternative. Christianity is opposed here to "absolute irrationalism" as an "absolute rationalism." The only restriction is that our rational knowledge of God and the universe is "not comprehensive," such as God's self-knowledge and knowledge of the universe. I do not overlook that by "absolute rationalism" you understand the view that every fact has been pre-determined and pre-interpreted by God according to his rational providential plan, so that no single fact comes about by chance. Nor do I overlook that in another context you seek the origin of both rationalism and irrationalism, viewed in their historical forms, in the apostate belief in the autonomy of man over against God. But why do you speak then of the biblical Christian view as an absolute rationalism? Because you identify God's providential plan with absolute rationality. But "absolute rationality" is an obvious metaphysical absolutization, just like Occam's *potentia Dei absoluta*. I shall return to this point in the text.
13. If this identification were correct, an English translation of Dutch conceptual terms would be impossible, since there would be no identity of concepts for lack of identical words.
14. In your *DF*, 1st ed., p. 93, you seem to join in with Hodge, who identifies the heart in its pregnant biblical sense with "that which thinks, feels, wills and acts," i.e., with "the soul, the self." The soul is apparently conceived here in the traditional metaphysical sense as an immaterial substance embracing the feelings, the intellect, and the will. But this traditional view of the human soul is quite different from the radical biblical revelation of the human "heart" as the religious center of the integral whole of man's existence.
15. The explanatory theological addition of the words *ex nihilo* to the word *creatio*, which, since Augustine, has become usual in theological dogmatics, is naturally not to be considered as a conceptual definition. Augustine availed himself of this addition to prevent confusion with the Platonic idea of the divine *demiourgos* and with the neo-Platonic emanation doctrine. For that purpose it has been useful in a degree. But it is well known that the words *ex nihilo* have turned out to be not entirely harmless in Augustine's theological exposition of the doctrine of creation, since they foster

the idea that nothingness would be a second origin of creaturely being bringing about a metaphysical defect in the latter.

16. Calvin, *Institutes*, I:5.9, joined with I:10.2.
17. *DF.*, 1st ed., p. 62.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 26.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 309.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 227.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 309.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 134.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 38.

Response by C. Van Til

1. Herman Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, Vol. I (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1953), p. 34; hereafter *New Critique*.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 37.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 38.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 34.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*, p. 35.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 37-38.
9. *Philosophia Reformata*, VI (1941), pp. 1-20; hereafter "Trans. Critiek."
10. *Ibid.*, XXIII (1958), pp. 1-22; 49-84.
11. *Ibid.*, XIII (1948), pp. 26-31; 49-58; hereafter "Thom. Phil."
12. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans (1948); hereafter *Problems*.
13. Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co. (1960); hereafter *Twilight*.
14. *New Critique*, p. 37.
15. *Problems*, p. vii.
16. "Trans. Critiek," p. 5.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 18.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
19. H. Dooyeweerd, "De Vier Religieuze Grondthema's in den Ontwikkelingsgang van het Wijsgeerig Denken van het Avondland," *Philosophia Reformata*, VI (1941), p. 172.
20. "Thom. Phil.," p. 26.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 27.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 29.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
24. *New Critique*, p. 34.
25. *Ibid.*
26. *Twilight*, p. 2.
27. *New Critique*, p. 38.
28. *Problems*, p. 29.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 31.
30. "Trans. Critiek," p. 8.
31. *New Critique*, p. 40.
32. *Twilight*, p. 12.
33. *New Critique*, p. 28.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 45.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 18.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
39. *Problems*, p. 54.
40. *Twilight*, pp. 27-28.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 29.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
44. *Ibid.*, pp. 32-33.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 52.
46. *Ibid.*
47. *Ibid.*, pp. 52-53.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 53.
49. *New Critique*, p. 57.
50. *Ibid.*, pp. 34-35.
51. *Twilight*, p. 53.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 54.
53. *Ibid.*
54. *New Critique*, p. 34.
55. "Trans. Critiek," p. 15.
56. *New Critique*, p. 32.