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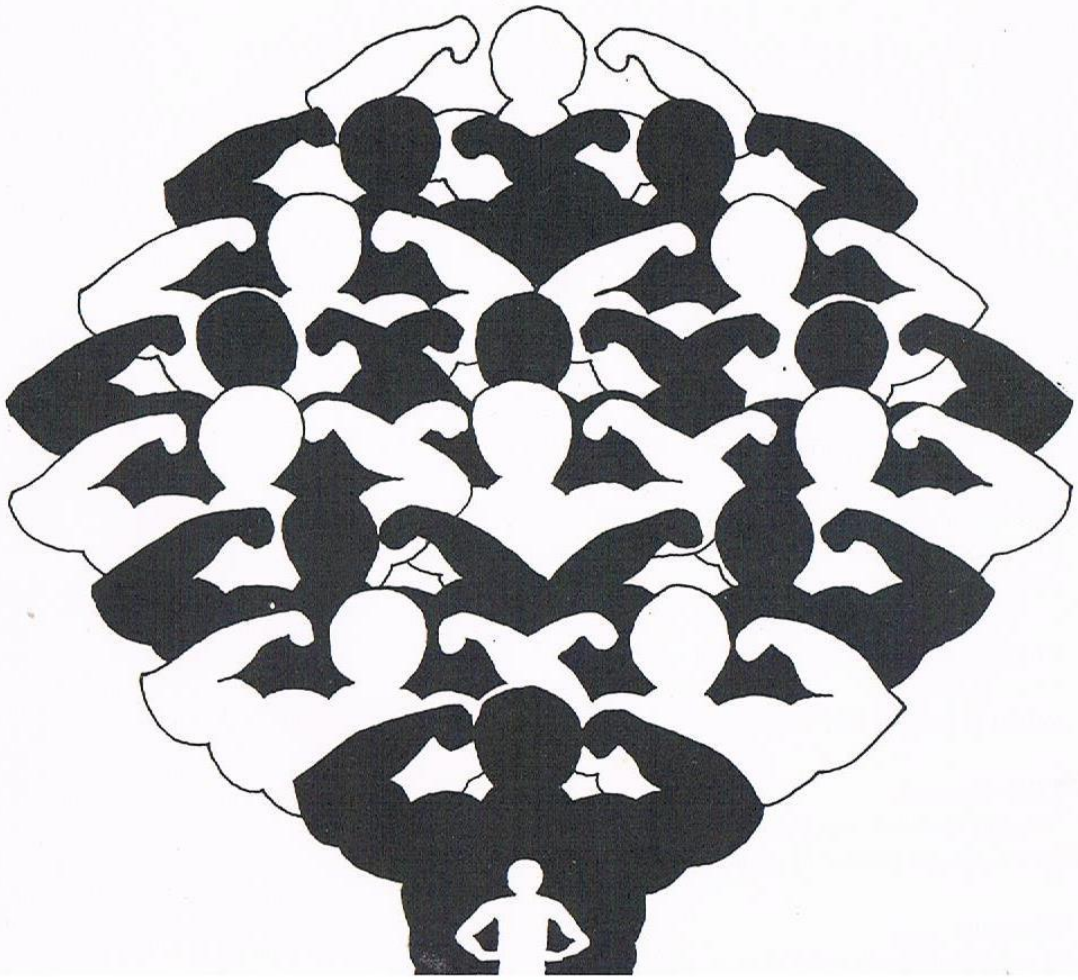
Our Place in the Philosophical Tradition

Dr. Al Wolters



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"And the Philistine said to David, 'Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?' ... Then David said to the Philistine, 'You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin; but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied.'"

I Samuel 17:43,45

Our Place in the Philosophical Tradition[1]

The historiography of philosophy, like historiography generally, tends to be guided by a kind of *methodological determinism.* Just as the French Revolution or the First World War did not just happen, so the philosophy of Kant did not just happen: there are antecedent factors which the historian must seek out, and which go a long way toward "explaining" the philosophy of Kant. Such factors are generally called "influences"; in the case of Kant we generally hear of the influence of the Wolffian school metaphysics, of Newton's physics, of Hume's critique of causality, of Rousseau's vindication of the feelings etc. Now it is the tendency of historical research to want to identify *all* the relevant factors, so that the historical phenomenon, in this case Kant's philosophy, is exhaustively explained. Even though the historian may be very well aware that this is an unattainable ideal, in practice and in principle, he tends nevertheless to proceed *as though it were not.* He is happiest if he can so describe the "influences" on Kant that Kant's critical idealism seems like their inevitable result, like the physicist's resultant of forces.

I believe that there are serious objections to be made, especially from a Christian point of view, against this kind of determinism. Even though it may be termed only "methodological," it effectively removes from the historian's professional sight not only human originality, but also what has been called "the divine mystery in history".[2] Nevertheless, it is not for this negative reason that I am calling attention to this feature of modern historiography. For there is also a *positive* side to it which I think is instructive for the subject which I have proposed to discuss with you this afternoon. It is this: a historical determinism reflects a distorted understanding of the fact that all human cultural activity, specifically including philosophy, is necessarily *tradition-bound* and therefore must be understood in terms of its tradition.

1. The main theses of the following speech (which owes its relatively popular character to the Trustee-established guidelines for inaugural lectures at the Institute for Christian Studies) were presented in early 1971 at a conference organized in Amersfoort, The Netherlands, by the Central Interfaculty of the Free University of Amsterdam.
2. See M.C. Smit, *The Divine Mystery in History.*

Tradition is not a word or concept which is much in favour these days. We smile indulgently at the song extolling tradition in *Fiddler on the Roof,* but as heirs of both the Reformation and the Enlightenment we take a rather dim view of things traditional. We do not like to think of ourselves as being tradition-bound. It is in fact a mark of the modern man that he would rather regard himself as revolutionary than as traditional. It is better in his eyes to break with tradition than to honour it. The result of this has been that he has an inflated notion of his own ability to dispense with tradition and to bring things which are radically new in history.

In philosophy this trait of modern man is perhaps most strikingly illustrated by the first modern philosopher: Descartes. Whereas in Scholasticism it was a philosophical virtue to be in line with the patristic tradition, and even in Renaissance humanism there was an attempt to prolong the ancient philosophical tradition, Descartes consciously and explicitly wants to put all philosophical tradition behind him and to start from scratch. In his *Discourse on Method* he resolutely repudiates all his philosophical education. The only thing which he will accept as self-evidently certain is that he exists: *cogito, ergo sum.*

But a very strange thing happens with Descartes at this point, which makes him look very foolish to the later historian. In order to avoid a solipsism Descartes' next step is to bring forward a version of the medieval "ontological argument," in order to demonstrate the existence of God. Once that is established he reasons that God, being good, would not allow him to be deceived.

What has in fact happened is that Descartes uses a standard instrument out of the medieval philosophical tool-box to provide him with the guarantee for his supposed last certainty. In other words, at his most revolutionary, Descartes is most dependent upon the tradition of Scholastic philosophy which he had learned at school. In spite of himself, he is tradition-bound and the historian does well to ignore his protestations to the contrary and to look for further evidence of his dependence on Scholasticism.

It is in fact impossible to escape the determining influence of the tradition in philosophy: that is the point I am trying to establish. To give another example: Heidegger may speak as much as he pleases about a "destruction of ontology," about a *Seinsvergessenheit* which he has overcome, so that he picks up the thread from the Presocratics, but the historian would be foolish not to look for Heidegger's immediate background in the Neokantianism of Rickert and the phenomenology of Husserl. Heidegger, no more than Descartes, can deny his inescapable position in the philosophical tradition.

There are a number of conclusions to be drawn from this inevitable dependence of philosophers upon their historical background. One of them, as we have already pointed out, is that the

historian of philosophy, like historians generally, has the right — in fact, the obligation — to assume that every new philosopher builds upon insights, formulations, patterns and categories of thought which he has inherited. This is true even when the new philosophy is a violent *reaction* to major features of philosophy thus far, as is in fact the case for all great or significant philosophies. But it is precisely in their reaction *against* the past that they are chained to it. This provides the historian with a methodological *a priori:* in spite of appearances or even explicit denials on the part of a given philosopher, determinative philosophical influences in a thinker's immediate background must be assumed and, where possible, sought out and identified. In the case of some thinkers, for example some of the Presocratics, it is not possible to identify the antecedents upon which they depend. Nevertheless these antecedents must be assumed and perhaps hypothetically reconstructed.

A further conclusion to be drawn from our tradition-dependence is the unity of the philosophical tradition. As each thinker is dependent on his predecessors, so each of his predecessors, in turn, is shaped and molded by those who preceded *him.* Marcuse is heavily influenced by Marx, Marx cannot be understood without Hegel, Hegel presupposes Kant, Kant builds on Hume, Hume is dependent on Locke, Locke on Descartes, Descartes on Aquinas — and so the chain stretches back, in a direct line, through medieval, patristic and hellenistic philosophy to Aristotle, Plato, Socrates and the Presocratics. There is no philosopher who does not have a direct attachment to this Greek-rooted lineage. All have a place in the philosophical tradition.

Yes, I speak advisedly of "*the* philosophical tradition." It can be called *the* philosophical tradition for two reasons: first because it is a historical unity, which, despite the breakup of the polis, despite the Roman conquest, despite the advent of Christianity, despite the medieval eclipse of learning, despite the rise of modern science, remains a single unbroken tradition. Secondly, we can speak of *the* philosophical tradition because, quite simply, there is no other *philosophical* tradition. "Philosophy" is a Greek word, and its meaning is defined by the Greek-rooted Western tradition. Other wisdom traditions, such as those of India and China, can be called "philosophical" only in a derived and analogical sense. To avoid a Europa-centrism, we must reserve the word "philosophy" for the European intellectural heritage which began in Hellas more than two-and-a-half millenia ago. In fact, there is in my opinion much to be said for defining the term "philosophy" in terms of its belonging to this tradition, rather than in terms of its systematic task, scope or object.[3]

3. There is a surprisingly high degree of consensus among philosophers as to which philosphers belong to the "history of philosophy," but no *systematic* definition of philosophy can encompass them all.

What all this leads up to, of course, is that we too stand in the philosophical tradition and are inevitably subject to the influences of the preceding philosophies of this tradition. It is in this sense that I want to speak of "*our* position in the philosophical tradition." We are generally ready enough to admit that *other,* even great and original philosophers like Descartes and Heidegger, in spite of themselves are children of their philosophical times, but somehow we are only too easily persuaded that *we* are independent thinkers, that *we* have it in us to make a clean break with the past, throw overboard the conceptual baggage of our predecessors and start with a clean slate. How many thinkers have not flattered themselves that *the* revolution in philosophy was brought by them or their school? And yet it never takes more than a generation to unmask this as a vain delusion. If this is true of the giants, then surely we must be able to bring ourselves to the point where we admit that *we ourselves* are bound, willy-nilly, to this ancient and powerful tradition.

At this point, before I go on, I want to make the point that the *"we ourselves"* that I am talking about is not just "we philosophers," nor even "we academicians" or "we educated people," but rather "we of the Western world today."

That is to say, it includes all of you present today, whether you are educated or not, whether you are Christian or not, whether you are a carpenter or an executive. It also includes you who come from Japan and Australia and Lebanon and Cyprus, for "Western" is no longer a geographical term. We all, in so far as we are Westerners, stand in *the* philosophical tradition which began in Greece some 2600 years ago. For philosophy is not something that has been, or can be, confined to the ivory towers of academia. Ideas have legs, and the ideas of a Descartes, a Rousseau, or a Nietzche have a way of filtering down, in a generation or two, into the unconsciously assumed mental apparatus of the proverbial "man in the street." "Everybody has a right to his own opinion," he will say, and think it is only common sense or common decency which teaches him such a strange doctrine. Or again: "Majority rules." "All men are equal." "You've got to stand up for your rights." "God helps those who help themselves." "Do your own thing." In these and similar phrases we find the residue of originally philosophical notions, which represent patterns of thought which shape our whole perspective on the world, and so guides our behaviour.[4]

4. See Gerhard Krüger, *Grundfragen der Philosophie. Geschichte. Wahrheit. Wissenschaft.* (Frankfurt/Main, 1958), pp. 39-41 ("Die Macht der philosophischen Tradition"). "Der Gebildete ... wird ... von den Begriffen und Formeln der grossen Denker mitbestimmt, deren Geist selbst bei ganz oberflächlichem Wissen und selbst in der Gestalt des abgegriffenen Schlagworts eine erstaunliche Macht über uns hat; und der Ungebildete, der von den Philosophen selbst nichts weiss, ist doch indirekt, durch die Auswirkungen der höheren geistigen Kultur, davon mitbetroffen. Wenn heute jemand sagt: "Der

My point then, is that *we all* stand in the philosophical tradition and are to a significant extent, whether or not we like or know it, shaped by that tradition.

One of the ways in which tradition exercizes its powerful hold over men's thinking is by means of what one might call its "conceptuality" *(Begrifflichheit)*, i.e. the accumulated arsenal of standard concepts and terms which are the philosopher's stock-in-trade. A single term can carry with it a whole freight of philosophical overtones. Examples are terms like "substance," "potency," "transcendental," "value," "mind," "idealism."

In some ways, the traditional conceptuality of philosophy is like a language: it makes it possible to express oneself, but at the same time necessarily limits that expression. In languages, this becomes obvious when we translate from one language to another. But there is no other philosophical "language," besides that of the existing tradition, which can make us aware of the limitations of the existing one. To think something that has not been thought before is exceedingly difficult. The tradition has made the ruts in the road, it is difficult not to ride in them — or even to realize that there is any other way to travel. To use the term "substance" and stipulate that it exclude the notion of autonomy and independence, is extremely difficult, and one is likely, in an unguarded moment, to allow that element of its traditional meaning to come into play in one's philosophical argument. Another example is "transcendental:" this refers, in the Kantian tradition, to the conditions which make something possible. Yet there are other ideas very closely bound up with it, namely that these conditions are exclusively knowable by human theoretical thought and, moreover, belong to the structure of human subjectivity. These added overtones are, I think, traps for a Christian thinker which it is extremely difficult to avoid.

It is for this reason that a study of the history of philosophical terminology *(Begriffsgeschichte)*, can be an extremely profitable undertaking. Words, phrases and philosophical maxims, unless very critically examined, begin to have a strange magical authority. An example of this is *"Occam's razor,"* the maxim that *principia non sunt multiplicanda praeter necessitatem.* I believe Stoker[5] is right in saying that this principle has only a limited validity, and has had the effect, in the past, of abetting all kinds of philosophical reductionism. An equally valid maxim would be: *principia non sunt minuenda praeter necessitatem.* A further example

Kampf ist der Vater aller Dinge," oder wenn er sagt: "Jeder Mensch hat eben einen anderen Standpunkt," und: "Es ist ja alles relativ," oder wenn er sagt: "Man kann das politische Leben nicht mit den moralischen Massstäben des Privatlebens messen," dann spricht er oberflächlich nach, was einmal tief durchdacht von Heraklit, von Leibnitz, von Hegel gesagt worden ist."

5. See H.G. Stoker, *Beginsels en Metodes in die Wetenskap* (Potchefstroom, 1961), p. 161.

of a philosophical term with an unwelcome freight, this time a term which has filtered down into the common parlance of the man in the street, is the word "value." Today we speak of "middle-class values" or "traditional values" or "Christian values." It is of interest to note that no one spoke of "values" in this sense a hundred years ago. People used to speak about *principles* or *norms*. Now they are "values" — the direct result of the influential terminology of the Neokantian schools, with their implicit relativism and subjectivism. Moreover, via common expressions like "value-judgment" the closely allied disjunction of facts vs. values is subliminally propagated.

Before I go on, I should cut off one possible misunderstanding of what I have said so far. It is not my intention to argue or imply that the philosophical tradition, or tradition in general, is exclusively a bad thing. As I see it, tradition belongs to the created fabric of historical movement, and is, as such, a good thing. Without tradition no advance would be possible in history. But tradition can be a force for both good and evil, and I have emphasized the negative aspects of the philosophical tradition because those are most in danger of being overlooked. But the positive side should be mentioned too: the philosophical tradition carries with it a wealth of insight, distinctions and formulations which are the accumulated fruit of the analytic work of some of the keenest minds in the Western tradition. It is precisely for this reason that the history of philosophy continues to have such a fascinating attraction for each succeeding generation. It is an intellectual goldmine which cannot and should not be ignored. It's the gold-rush that we must be wary of.

Well then, to continue. The realization of our dependence upon the philosophical tradition immediately excites a troubled question: are we then trapped? Are we prisoners of a tradition not of our own making? Do we not have the freedom and the responsibility to be creative and original in our thinking? And the answer, of course, is no, we are not trapped, and yes, we do have a philosophical freedom. But the point is: how can we responsibly exercise that freedom? And my answer is: only when we first realize how profoundly we ourselves are a part of the tradition. For the power of tradition is in some ways like the power of Satan: it is most dangerous when you believe it doesn't exist. It is only by facing it squarely and recognizing what it is and how it operates that one can minimize its influence.

What I am saying, in effect, is that the study of the history of philosophy has an indispensable function to fulfil. By bringing us to a critical self-awareness of the background of our own thinking it helps us to exercise responsibly our freedom both in philosophy and in the other disciplines, since they too of necessity employ philosophical concepts and patterns of thought.[6]

6. I do not see this as the only function of the study of the history of philosophy (another one, on the positive side, is the contribution of insight into the structure of the basic problems of philosophy), but I do think this self critical function is a very important one.

I now want to speak about "our position in the philosophical tradition" in a more specific sense. How do we *Christians* stand in that tradition?

Perhaps one of the strongest arguments for the incredible power of the Greek philosophical tradition is that the advent of Christianity did not break it. Throughout the Middle Ages, both in the Latin and Greek-speaking parts of the Mediterranean world, virtually all philosophers were Christians (most of them clerics), and yet the continuity of the philosophical tradition was not broken.

If we are willing to take seriously the historical reality of the enormously powerful philosophical tradition, we as Christians have every reason to tremble. For we know that this tradition is rooted in pagan Greece, that from the beginning it has sought its strength in reliance upon man's own powers of analysis, and was one of the bitterest foes of the early Church. Moreover, the New Testament Scriptures explicitly warn us against the tradition of φιλοσοφία, underlining the point that it is opposed to the tradition which is according to Christ (Col. 2:9).[7] In addition to that, it is not an uncommon occurrence, today as in times past, that someone loses his faith through the study of philosophy.

Yet a policy of *avoidance* is not a proper reaction to this danger. As we have seen, to turn our backs on the philosophical tradition is simply to make ourselves more vulnerable to its influence. There are striking instances of this in the history of Christian thought. In the early Church, for example, there is the case of Tertullian, famed for his exclamation "What has Jerusalem to do with Athens, or the Academy with the Church?"[8] For him Christianity was best served by ignoring philosophy altogether. And yet, when it comes to developing his own Christian perspective on things, we find that he reverts to the categories and thought patterns of *Stoicism*.[9] We find the same principle illustrated in the anti-intellectualism of many charismatic groups today. Philosophy is something they want nothing to do with. Nevertheless, they defend as Biblical truth such doctrines as the trichotomy of man, an ancient philosophical scheme which goes back to pagan Greece. A simple rejection of philosophy and its tradition cannot save us from its influence.

Rather than avoiding it, many Christians have tried to make philosophy harmless by defining it as something outside theology, which theology uses as its servant. This is the idea of philosophy as

7. On this verse and its context see the excellent comments in Herman Ridderbos, *Aan de Kolossenzen* (Kampen, 1960), pp. 186-176. I find especially illuminating his remarks on παράδοσις and on τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου which he shows to mean "the fundamental principles of the world," and so to be substantially synonymous with "the tradition of men," as opposed to the apostolic tradition.
8. Tertullian, *De praescriptione haereticorum*, 7.
9. See for example J.H. Waszink's commentary on his *De Anima* (Amsterdam, 1947).

the *ancilla theologiae,* the handmaiden of theology — a notion which persists to this day.

This confronts us with the vexed problem of the relationship between philosophy and theology. There can be little doubt that philosophy and theology have, *de facto,* been so closely intertwined in the Western tradition that it is often difficult to see how they can be distinguished. To begin with, we can speak of "theology" before the Christian era; it is a word already used by Plato and Aristotle, and it is legitimate to speak with Werner Jaeger of the *Theology of the Early Greek Philosophers.* On the other hand, "philosophy" was a word which some of the early Christians did not hesitate to use in describing Christianity.[10] The teachings of Christ were comparable, though truer, to the teachings of Plato. In fact, the intermingling between what we today habitually call philosophy and theology was so great that I venture the assertion that it is anachronistic to look for any systematic distinction between them before Thomas Aquinas. At any rate, it seems clear that it was Aquinas who theoretically segregated the two as two distinct theoretical disciplines: philosophy being guided by reason and nature, theology by faith and revelation.

I think it is difficult to underestimate the importance of this distinction and of the manner in which it was made. It is well known that its influence in the Catholic tradition has been enormous — it has in fact become official doctrine — with the result that the whole notion of "Christian philosophy" has become very problematical for Catholic thinkers. But it is not so generally recognized that substantially the same distinction has been adopted almost universally by Protestants. Although for Calvin it was still possible to speak quite untechnically of Christian teaching as the *philosophia Christiana,*[11] the Protestant scholastics of the seventeenth century soon adopted a more technical meaning of *philosophia,* which they contrasted with *theologia* precisely as Aquinas had done: in philosophy only unaided reason properly functions; in theology the additional light of God's revelation can legitimately play a role.[12] Since the seventeenth century, this basically Thomistic position has gained in favour in Protestant circles, until today there is scarcely a Christian intellectual, either Protestant or Catholic, who does not accept some version of the basic correlation of *philosophy* with reason (minus revelation) and *theology* with revelation (plus reason). A tell-tale sign of this is that a Christian philosophy of history is generally called a *theology* of history, a Christian approach to sociology a *theology* of society, and so on.

10. See Anne-Marie Malingrey, *"Philosophia." Étude d'un groupe de mots dans la littérature grecque, des Présocratiques au IVe siècle après J-C.* (Paris, 1961). The patristic writers refer to Christianity as ἡ ἡμετέρα φιλοσοφία (e.g. Tatian, p. 121), ἡ ἀληθὴς φιλοσοφία (e.g. Clement of Alexandria, p. 150), ἡ καθ' ἡμᾶς φιλοσοφία (e.g. Gregory of Nazianze, p. 239), ἡ ἀνωτάτω φιλοσοφία (John Chrysostomos, p. 271).

The trouble with this position, since it makes philosophy a religiously neutral activity, is that it gives great scope to philosophy without subjecting it to a religious critique. As a result, philosophy is considered a harmless handmaiden or housemaid which will do certain necessary tasks about the house of theology, but will never basically distort the organization of this house of revelation. This view of philosophy is very common among Christian intellectuals today, and comes out in the common sentiment that we must use the categories of modern philosophy to translate the gospel into the language of contemporary man. The assumption behind this way of speaking is that philosophical thought-patterns are like neutral molds of varying shapes and sizes into which the content of the gospel can be poured without affecting it. If people today prefer an existentialistic or a language analytical mold, why then we Christians will be only too glad to oblige, and pour our message into the appropriate mold. Doesn't Paul say that we must be all things to all men?

This way of talking represents a version of the "handmaiden" view of philosophy. Philosophy is to be made subservient, like a servant or tool, to the ends of theology. In its extreme form we find this view of philosophy worked out in the thought of a man like Bultmann. But in principle the same thing also goes on in traditional orthodox theology. The re-introduction of Aristotelian categories in seventeenth century Protestant scholasticism is a good example.[13]

The point I want to make is that the philosophical tradition does not allow itself to be domesticated so easily in the house of Dame Theology.[14] Once inside, it is like a Trojan horse which threatens to take over its host. Philosophy is not a thing you can fool with. Again, the astonishing thing is that theologians are generally ready enough to see the distorting influence of philosophy on the thought of *other* theologians — in other centuries or other ecclesiastical traditions — but they make an exception for themselves. Who among evangelical Christians does not agree that Augustine was unduly influenced by Neoplatonism; Aquinas by Aristotle; Schleiermacher by Romanticism; Barth by Kierkegaard? Yet very few have learned the lesson for themselves that the religiously uncritical use of philosophy for the exposition of Christian doctrine is like playing with fire.

11. Cf. F.J.M. Potgieter, *Die Verhouding tussen die Teologie en die Filosofie by Calvyn* (Amsterdam, 1939) p. 264.

12. See H.W. Rossouw, *Klaarheid en Interpretasie. Enkele probleem-historiese gesigspunte in verband met die leer van die duidelikheid van die Heilige Skrif* (Amsterdam, 1963) pp. 312-317.

13. See Rossouw, *op. cit.,* pp. 275-295.

14. I am indebted to professor S.U. Zuidema of the Free University for a clear and powerful exposition of this state of affairs. See his *Communication and Confrontation* (Toronto, 1972), *passim.*

It is at this point that we must begin talking about a Christian task in philosophy and a Christian dealing with the history of philosophy. It will not do to shut the door on the philosophical tradition, in the manner of Tertullian or today's charismatics, for it will come in by the back door. Nor will it do to hire it as a maid and invite it in the front door. In both cases it will subvert the style and character of your household. The thing to do is to recognize its presence already, and attempt, according to the rules of the house (i.e. according to Revelation) to *reform* it. Not adapt it to suit your purposes, but *reform* it. It is no use denying that the Christian intellectual tradition (that is, very largely, theology) is shot through with the false schemes of the philosophical tradition. Think of the Platonic devaluation of the body, the Aristotelian deification of the mind, the Stoic depreciation of the emotions, the Neoplatonic emanation theory — all have been (and still are) grist for the mill of the theologians. It is no use denying this; it has to be *faced* and *dealt* with.

For that to happen, it is my conviction that a different view of the relationship of philosophy and theology must begin to emerge in the evangelical community. I take this to be a crucial point. The basically Thomistic view according to which a philosopher cannot appeal to the Scriptures, and a theologian uses existing philosophies for his own purposes, must be critically understood to be what it is: a dualistic rending of the seamless fabric of our life before the Lord. Christian philosophers are heavily dependent on the work of theology — granted. But Christian theologians are heavily dependent also on their brothers in philosophy — for if they are not dependent on them, they will be dependent, willy-nilly, on pagan and humanistic philosophers. The crucial thing is not this or that precise view of the systematic interrelation of Christian philosophy and theology. The important thing is that it be recognized that Christian philosophy is possible and necessary, and that the dependency-relation between it and Christian theology is not a one-way street. They must be critical servants of each other, bent on cooperative edification of the body of Christ.

To summarise: what I am saying is *first:* that Christians of whatever tradition (not excluding our own tradition at the Institute for Christian Studies) have to recognize in principle the *de facto* influence of the Western philosophical tradition in their own thinking. This means that we are all to some extent *synthesis* thinkers — meaning by that term the intermingling in a single perspective of both biblical and unbiblical patterns of thought. *Secondly,* I am saying that the task of philosophical *reformation,* as opposed to attempted evasion or domestication, is the only alternative for any Christian who wants to fight synthesis for the sake of the purity of the Gospel, that is, for the health of man and the reputation of God. Both of these points follow from what I have said about our place in the philosophical tradition.

We are all synthesis thinkers because we do all stand in the philosophical tradition. The important thing is not whether we are synthesis thinkers, but whether we recognize it and do anything about it. And we can recognize it only if we engage in a long, hard critical study of that tradition in the light of the Scriptures. It is only by this kind of long-term, arduous and scripturally-enlightened study that we can come to increased philosophical self-knowledge and thus to reformation. We must meet our adversary with the armour of *Ephesians* 6, but on *his* battlefield.

Only by knowing the philosophical tradition can we begin to continue the work of reformation. Reformation is a *historical* process, it recognizes that we must begin with what is historically given. No one can start in history with a clean slate. To attempt to do so is like trying to make a sudden turn at high speed in a car. You may end up facing the opposite way, but you'll still be travelling in the same direction. Reformation is working along the grain of history, respecting what is good in the tradition and bending it around to move in another direction. In this sense, in philosophy, too, we must be "anti-revolutionary" and "Christian-historical." Working in this way we will never arrive at a *philosophia* that is *reformata,* but only one that is *semper reformanda.* We should have the wisdom and humility to recognize that "the revolution in philosophy" will not come through us. But at the same time we should have the faith and vision to believe that we *can* contribute to a *reformation* in philosophy.

It is on that note that I want to say a few words finally about "our place in the philosophical tradition" in a narrower sense still. How do we of the Institute for Christian Studies stand in the tradition we have been talking about?

The immediate tradition in which the ICS stands is only about a hundred years old. It is a tradition which dates back to nineteenth-century Holland and is closely associated with the name of Abraham Kuyper and the founding of the Free University of Amsterdam. It is, further, a tradition which, in the twentieth century, has given rise to the distinctively Christian philosophy of Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd, and a philosophical movement which includes in its program a Christian reformation of all scholarly disciplines. The ICS is dedicated to the carrying out of this task.

The unique strength of this heritage is that it is consciously and militantly anti-synthetic. I say advisedly: anti-synthetic, for it is not non-synthetic. Rather than borrow its philosophical tools from a tradition alien to the Gospel, it wants to forge new ones. Working out of that tradition, we at the Institute, in concert with many colleagues both in North America and overseas, have a unique contribution to make.

What the Institute has to offer is not in the first place intellectual brilliance or impressive scholarship. These are things we prize, and for which we strive. But our strength lies elsewhere. Our strength lies

in a heritage and in a vision. We have a heritage of a century's work of penetrating academic study specifically devoted to showing the difference Christian discipleship makes right within the inner workings of the accepted academic disciplines. That heritage itself builds on a long Christian tradition, specifically that of the Reformed churches, which in turn builds on major themes in Augustine. But the Kuyperian tradition, especially as developed around the reformational philosophy of Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd, has something which as far as I can see has no close parallel anywhere in the world. We are not ashamed to acknowledge our debt to that tradition — a debt which so far is almost total. There are riches of scholarship there which we believe can be of service to other Christians the world over — and, indeed, not to Christians only.

But more important than this scholarly heritage is the vision which it embodies, and which we share with a far wider range of Christians. It is the vision of the universal sovereignty of God in Christ, as revealed in the Scriptures. It is this perspective which enables us — against awesome odds — to take the offensive against the Goliath of secularized learning. Too long has the relationship between Christianity and philosophy (and scholarship in general) been dealt with in terms of an apologetic apologetics. We have learned to see anew that Christians, soldiers of a general who is universal Lord, need not be defensive or apologetic about their faith. It is not our task to show that Christianity is intellectually respectable (for by whose standards would that respectability be measured?), for that smacks too much of a me-too'ism. It is our task — and it is to this which the Scriptures have re-opened our eyes — to show that our secular adversary is as religious as we are; that the whole organization of his intellectual apparatus gives expression to a religion: i.e. to an ultimate commitment as to where final certainty and normativity is to be found. We have re-discovered the freedom to apply the simple, unmistakable Scriptural language about idolatry to the great majority of modern philosophies. And with that vision, which would be foolhardiness if it were not undertaken in obedience and faith, we dare cast ourselves in the role of David-with-the-sling-shot. Of course, secular humanism is not Goliath, and we are not Davids — there is a vast historical and cultural chasm which divides us — but the God of David is our God, and the battle we fight for his Name and prestige is still in principle the same.

It is for that reason that we take courage, rejoice in the labour that we have been given to do, and do not lose heart at the fearsome odds which we face.

There was a time, perhaps, when we were dazzled by the brilliance and uniqueness of our own immediate tradition, and were tempted to think that it had brought the revolution in philosophy. But we have learned to see — I personally have learned to see — that Kuyper, too, was in many senses a child of his time, and that Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd in many ways cannot be understood, even in a simple textual sense, without the background of Neokantianism and phenomenology. They too stand in the philosophical tradition. Does that mean they were simply a product of their times? Certainly not. The great question to ask is — what did they do with the tradition, in what direction did they bend it, and how does that bending measure up to the Scriptural demands for obedience and making every thought captive to Christ? When we look at it that way, and compare their work with contemporary Christian thinkers, then their achievement is very great indeed.

It is explicitly in the context of *their* work that I hope to do my work in the history of philosophy at the Institute for Christian Studies. Continuing in the line which they have traced my efforts will be directed *against* synthesis and *for* reformation in philosophy. May God give me the Spirit of Wisdom, for I too stand in the philosophical tradition.

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