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# THEOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHY WITHIN RADICAL ORTHODOXY (MILBANK) AND REFORMATIONAL PHILOSOPHY (DOOYEWEERD)

## ABSTRACT

This article aims to show that, despite agreeing on some basic issues such as rejecting the dogma of the autonomy of reason and accepting that there is no territory independent of God, *Radical Orthodoxy* and *Reformational Philosophy* nonetheless differ. While both philosophy and theology, according to *Radical Orthodoxy*, investigate being *qua*, being only theology has the task to relate *being* to God. This view still continues the medieval nature-grace split. Alternatively, it is argued that the distinctive feature of scholarly endeavours, namely *modal abstraction*, may enhance an appreciation of the special scientific nature of theology, without advocating a “static division of human life” into “distinct spheres”.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

A key concept in the Christology of Milbank is *methexis* (participation/sharing). It derives from Plato’s theory of ideas where it is employed alongside the notions of *parousia* (presence) and *koinonia* (communion) as applied to the *eidè*, which have an existence in themselves.<sup>1</sup> Milbank explains that the central theological framework of radical orthodoxy is found in the notion of “participation” as “developed by Plato and reworked by Christianity” (Milbank *et al.* 2006:3). However, since Vorster (2012) discusses the notion of participation, alongside others such as *poesis*,

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1 *To auto* – see *Phaedo* 1000 D, where the three terms are used in connection with the *eidòs* beauty. See Hamilton & Huntington (1997:86).

incarnation, the cross, atonement, forgiveness and the relationship between Christ and the *ecclesia*, they will not be explained further.

## 2. A POST-SECULAR REJECTION OF THE DOGMA OF THE AUTONOMY OF REASON

In his work on *Radical Orthodoxy*, Smith (2004) introduces this movement as “post-secular”. This qualification reveals crucial shared concerns operative in the circles of *Radical Orthodoxy* (RO) as well as within *Reformational Philosophy* (RP). One of these concerns is their rejection of the dogma of the *autonomy of reason*.

Milbank (2006b:22) investigates the theological critique of Hamann, Jacobi, Wizenmann and Herder – “of philosophy construed as the autonomy of reason”. In the *Introduction to Radical Orthodoxy*, Milbank *et al.* (2006:1) explain that the essays compiled in this volume attempt “to reclaim the world by situating its concerns and activities within a theological framework”. Speaking theologically should display “a theological *difference*” while mingling “exegesis, cultural reflection and philosophy in a complex but coherently executed collage” (Milbank *et al.* 2006:2). Therefore, they distance themselves from the inclination of Barthianism which assumes “a positive autonomy for theology, which rendered philosophical concerns a matter of indifference” (Milbank *et al.* 2006:2). They remark that *nouvelle théologie* is exceeded by radical orthodoxy that “wishes to reach further [by] recovering and extending a fully Christianised ontology and practical philosophy consonant with authentic Christian doctrine” (Milbank *et al.* 2006:2).

The term ‘orthodox’ is understood “in the most straightforward sense of commitment to creedal Christianity and the exemplarity of its patristic matrix” (Milbank *et al.* 2006:2). The term ‘radical’ indicates a “return to patristic and medieval roots, and especially to the Augustinian vision of all knowledge as divine illumination, [thus transcending] the modern bastard dualisms of faith and reason, grace and nature” (Milbank *et al.* 2006:2). While realising that the tradition should be reconsidered, this orientation intends to deploy its vision by systematically engaging in a critique of “modern society, culture, politics, art, science and philosophy” (Milbank *et al.* 2006:2).

This shows that *Radical Orthodoxy* advocates an integral (in the sense of all-encompassing) view of creation which rejects the idea that any sphere or realm of creation may be withdrawn from the *gift* which creation is. In this view, Christian theology does not surrender to an “alien Hellenistic theme” because it does realize that “for Greek philosophy there

was an uncreated material residue that was not created, and so not a gift, and which therefore limited the sway of *methexis*" (Milbank 2003:xi). Does an integral view of creation challenge the distinction between philosophy and theology?

### 3. SEPARATING PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY

Milbank complains that it was Duns Scotus who

*for the first time* established a radical separation of philosophy from theology by declaring that it was possible to consider being in abstraction from the question of whether one is considering created or creating being. Eventually this generated the notion of an ontology and an epistemology unconstrained by, and transcendently prior to, theology (Milbank *et al.* 2006:23).

This conviction already reveals a key element of the way in which Milbank understands theology.

In his *Foreword* to Smith's work on *Radical Orthodoxy* (2004), Milbank elaborates on his understanding of philosophy and theology. He understands philosophy as "the coordination of all merely natural enquiries" (Milbank 2004:37). He also states that "being" is the "object" of philosophy" (Milbank *et al.* 2006:37, note 49). In addition, he mentions that he finds "Kuyper's understanding of theology (...) bizarre and inadequate". In the context of the "best Catholic tradition", theology for *Radical Orthodoxy* cannot be a "specialism" as for "Kuyper and Dooyeweerd".<sup>2</sup> He adds the following significant remark:

If it were, it would be idolatrous, for theology concerns not one area, not one ontic item among others, but *esse* as such, the ground of all beings, and all in relation to this ground and source. It follows (and this is one point that Smith fails to grasp) that if the Christian contribution to, say, economics, is always a theological contribution, then this is precisely because even the articulation of faith has, in part, to do with the economic realm and the difference faith makes to our consideration of this realm (think of many of the sayings of Jesus). One does not here need overcomplex divisions among types of theology. For Catholic tradition, every Christian is a theologian, because faith is always somewhat reflective, albeit in the mode of symbol, ritual, and narrative (Milbank 2004:14).

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2 In his work on the subject philosophy of the science of faith, Troost explains the critical position assumed by reformational philosophy in respect of Kuyper's view of theology (see Troost 2004:384, 386 ff.).

In his *Theology and Social Theory*, Milbank remarks that the first eleven chapters of this work prelude to the assertion that sociology is “a social science”. For the “inhabitants of the *altera civitas*, on pilgrimage through this temporary world” theology is “the queen of the sciences” (Milbank 2006a:382).

#### 4. MULTIPLE MEANINGS OF THE TERM ‘THEOLOGY’ IN RADICAL ORTHODOXY

Although this statement acknowledges the *scientific* character of theology, Milbank’s use of the term *theology* also includes other meaning-nuances. According to Smith, *Radical Orthodoxy* harbours “a fundamental ambiguity” (similar to what Dooyeweerd discerns in the thought of Augustine), asking for a clarification of the term ‘theology’. Smith distinguishes four different meanings attached to the term ‘theology’ within *Radical Orthodoxy*:

- It leaves the term ‘theology’ undefined.
- Theology “is clearly equated with a science, a mode of theoretical discourse, analysis, and reflection”.
- Theology is linked to confession and even practice.
- Theology is linked to revelation and Scripture (Smith 2004:168).

In this instance, Smith asks several key questions and then quotes Dooyeweerd on the dangers of dogmatic theology:

Is Christian faith to be equated with Christian theology? Is Christian revelation to be equated with theology? Is Christian confession theological in a scientific sense? How are we to do justice to the ‘sense of the faithful’ if Christian faith is collapsed with Christian theology? Must every Christian be a scientist in this respect? (Smith 2004:168).

Smith is quoting from Dooyeweerd’s lecture series in the United States (1959), which was published under the title *In the twilight of Western thought*. In it, Dooyeweerd (2012) dedicates Chapters 5, 6 and 7 to the relationship between philosophy and theology:

- Chapter 5. *Philosophy, theology, and religion* (pages 79-90).
- Chapter 6. *The object and task of theology* (pages 91-106).
- Chapter 7. *Reformation and scholasticism in theology* (pages 107-116).

The context from which he quotes contains Dooyeweerd's concern that theology is a scholarly discipline as well as his plea that theology should not be confused with the Word of God. At stake is not "the divine Word-revelation", but "exclusively the scientific character and bounds of a theological dogmatics and exegesis" (Dooyeweerd 2012:93). Dooyeweerd approaches "these difficulties in a serious way" and even warns:

For dogmatic theology is a very dangerous science. Its elevation to a necessary mediator between God's Word and the believer amounts to idolatry and testifies to a fundamental misconception concerning its real character and position. If our salvation be dependent on theological dogmatics and exegesis, we are lost. For both of them are a human work, liable to all kinds of error, disagreement in opinion, and heresy (Dooyeweerd 2012:93).

Clearly, an assessment of the nature of theology touches upon a sensitive theme. Whoever wants to view theology as a "specialism" engages in something "idolatrous", for, according to Milbank,

theology concerns not one area, not one ontic item among others, but *esse* as such, the ground of all beings, and all in relation to this ground and source.

In an equally serious tone Dooyeweerd warns that "dogmatic theology is a very dangerous science"!

Since no "neutral, rational and universal" fundamental account of "society or history" is available elsewhere,

theology will have to provide its own account of the final causes at work in human history, on the basis of its own particular, and historically specific faith (Milbank 2006a:382).

Formulated in this way, it appears that theology has its "own faith", although another interpretation may be that there is a *pre-theological* (or *non-theological*) faith at the "basis" of theology. In order to find a circumscription of theology, it will also be necessary to explain what "faith" means. However, we should first investigate the problem of defining theology.

## 5. DELINEATING THEOLOGY

As a rule, it is simply stated that "theology is ..." – and then something *specific* or *distinctive* is added. As noted earlier, Milbank holds that *theology is concerned with esse as such*. Faculties of Theology, operating

within the reformed tradition, incorporate a discipline designated as the “Encyclopedia of Theology”, with the task to explicate what theology is and which subdisciplines it embraces. For example, many Faculties of Theology classify theology by distinguishing between subdisciplines known as the *bibliological group*, *church history*, *practical theology* and the *dogmatological group*.

This practice goes back to Kuyper who notes that the following view is “held, almost universally”, namely “that a first group centres itself about the Holy Scripture, a second group has Church history for its centre, a third group has Christian doctrine for its object, and Homiletics, together with what belongs to it, forms the fourth group” (Kuyper 1898:628). Kuyper also points out that “the custom has become almost universal to distinguish these four groups as exegetical, historical, systematic and practical” (Kuyper 1898:629).<sup>3</sup> Yet subdividing theology in the fields of the “exegetical, historical, systematic and technical (...) locates the principium of division in the subject”. The problem is that, since “the human mind is the subject of all science, there is no proper division of theology obtained thus at all”, for “what is applicable to all sciences can never disclose to us the proper organic character of theology”.

There is a clear difference between the views of Milbank and Kuyper, for Milbank stated: “*theology is concerned with esse as such*”. The question directed to both of them is whether their respective definitions are included in what they define. The statement that theology embraces the exegetical, historical, systematic and practical as subdivisions does not belong to any of these subdisciplines. It is, therefore, correct that the discipline “Encyclopedia of Theology” does not classify itself as a *theological* subdiscipline!

It is striking to note that, although the subject “Encyclopedia of Theology” is taught at Faculties of Theology, this discipline does not classify itself as one of the theological subdisciplines! Thus it acknowledges that the task of defining theology is not theological in nature.

The position assumed by Milbank in this regard appears to lead to a confusion of the structure-direction distinction, resulting in a fusion of philosophy and theology.

In the above statement where Milbank *et al.* mention “being” as the “object” of philosophy, they add the remark that “a philosophical treatment of being on its own, or the search simply to know being by reason, will reach aporetic and nihilistic consequences.” Yet, according to Milbank, “reason *cannot* ground the attempted purely rational disclosure of being,

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3 Later on, some added the *missionary group*.

and rationally the disclosure by faith remains possible. Theology *can* evaluate philosophy: moreover, this allows one to surpass the aporetic, as alluded to earlier. Therefore, theology saves reason and *fulfils* and *preserves* philosophy, whereas philosophy, left to itself, brings itself, as Heidegger noted, “to its own end” (Milbank *et al.* 2006:37, note 49).

The first problem is that *both* philosophy and theology are defined as directed at “being”. Then it is claimed that philosophy, on its own, inherently leads to aporetic and nihilistic conclusions. This means that, if theology does not perform a saving role, at once *preserving* and *fulfilling* philosophy, philosophy will bring itself to its own end. In fact, this position derives from the classical dualistic view of Thomas Aquinas regarding the relationship between *nature* and *grace*.

## 6. GRACE DOES NOT ELIMINATE NATURE, BUT PERFECTS IT

This entire mode of thinking goes back to the well-known (nature-grace) statement of Thomas Aquinas captured in the phrase: *gratia naturam non tollit, sed perficit* (“grace does not eliminate nature, but perfects it” – see Von Hippel 1955:309). “Preserve” is the equivalent of “does not eliminate” whereas *sed perficit* is equivalent to *fulfilling*. Note the similarities between this view of philosophy and what Milbank mentions in the attempt of the *nouvelle théologique* to arrive at a synthesis “between theology and philosophy (understood as the coordination of all merely natural enquiries)” (Milbank 2004:13). The “merely natural enquiries” remind us of the above-mentioned “philosophy left to itself” and the qualification that “reason *cannot* ground the attempted purely rational disclosure of being” (Milbank *et al.* 2006:47).

Instead of contemplating the distinction between Christian and non-Christian philosophy, Milbank opts for a “theological salvation” of philosophy, which entails that the only way in which philosophy can be Christian would be to “surrender” itself to theology.

Compare Milbank’s position with Dooyeweerd’s explanation of *Reformed Scholasticism*:

Reformed Scholasticism always binds the natural light of reason to the light of Scripture. In so doing, moreover, it falls into the same misconception regarding the relationship of theology and philosophy that I pointed out earlier in connection with the great church father [Augustine]. Theology is supposed to take the non-Reformed philosophy of the schools under its wing, in order

to accommodate it to orthodox Reformed doctrine and to keep its latent dangerous tendencies under control. It will be very suspicious of a Reformed philosophy that does not bind itself to theology, for it is theology, as the “queen of the sciences” (*regina scientiarum*) [according to *Reformed Scholasticism*], that is supposed to come up with the Scriptural principles to which the other sciences must conform (Dooyeweerd 2012a:38).

Apart from the obvious differences between *Reformed Scholasticism* and *Radical Orthodoxy*, the above quote highlights remarkable similarities. As long as theology is appreciated as the “queen of the sciences”, its scientific character is at least acknowledged. But then the conviction that for the

Catholic tradition, every Christian is a theologian, because faith is always somewhat reflective, albeit in the mode of symbol, ritual, and narrative (Milbank 2004:14)

becomes highly problematic.

The crucial question is whether “faith” could be equated with “theology”? Because having faith entails that we are sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see (Hebr. 11:1), one cannot replace or identify faith with the calling of being a theologian. If faith ought not to be identified with being a theologian, then the reason for the claim that every Christian is a theologian is insufficient. The reason given for this view simply states that “faith is always somewhat reflective”. But let us first *reflect somewhat* on the meaning of faith.

## 7. THE MEANING OF FAITH IS EXPRESSED IN THE COHERENCE OF THE FAITH ASPECT WITH ALL THE OTHER ASPECTS OF REALITY

Indeed, (Christian) faith always incorporates *analysis* (identification and distinguishing) without which “the mode of symbol, ritual, and narrative” cannot function. This remark also applies to *creedal* or *confessional* issues, for an element of reflection or thinking will always be found in *identifying* what is considered to be the appropriate faith *distinctions*. Likewise, in our everyday (non-scientific) experience, anyone involved in legal, economic or cultural practices must also proceed on the basis of *identifying* relevant legal, economic or cultural *distinctions*. But no everyday jurial practice, economic endeavour or cultural activity could be transformed into a scholarly discipline, such as the science of law, the science of economics

or cultural studies, solely on the basis of the fact that all these practices incorporate a “reflective” (analytical) element!

This state of affairs has been subjected to a thorough analysis by the *Philosophy of the Cosmonomic Idea* in its theory of modal aspects. These aspects are not only unique, but are also fitted in an inter-modal coherence, exhibiting the scope of the principles of sphere-sovereignty and sphere-universality. According to this theory, every modal (functional) aspect has backward-pointing and forward-pointing analogies reflecting the inter-modal coherence present between them.<sup>4</sup> These *moments of coherence* are also designated as retrocipatory and anticipatory analogies (retroicipations and anticipations). Identifying a sphere or realm is, therefore, not a “cordonning-off of certain domains – for example the economic” – as Milbank alleges in reaction to Kuyper’s idea of sphere-sovereignty (Milbank 2004:13). The idea of *enkapsis*<sup>5</sup> embodies the intertwinement of (natural and social) entities, whereas the principle of sphere-universality illustrates the coherence between the various aspects.

For example, *certitudinal integrity* reflects an ethical (retroicipatory) analogy within the faith or fiduciary aspect, whereas *certitudinal vitality*, *sensitivity* and *frugality* reflect biotic, sensitive-psychic and economic analogies within the modal structure of the faith aspect. Anticipatory analogies, pointing from pre-fiduciary aspects towards the certitudinal mode, are, for example, *credit* (economic trust), representing an anticipation from the economic aspect to the faith aspect;<sup>6</sup> an axiom in mathematics (logical certainty – an anticipation from the logical-analytical mode to the certitudinal aspect), and *bona fides* (jural certainty – an anticipation from the legal aspect to the faith aspect).

Perhaps the most basic feature of the ontic dimension of modal aspects is that all concrete (natural and social) entities and processes in principle function within all aspects. This feature is decisive for a fitting understanding of the distinctive characteristic of scientific thinking.

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4 An *analogy* entails not only similarities and differences, but also differences evinced in the similarities and vice versa. Whereas mathematical space is both *continuous* and *infinitely divisible*, physical space is neither continuous nor infinitely divisible.

5 *Enkapsis* concerns the interlacement of differently natured structures such that retains their inner spheres of operation. None of the atoms, molecules or macromolecules found within living entities are alive as such. However, without these (enkaptically bounded) “building blocks”, the organic functioning of living entities will be impossible.

6 When Derrida affirms that faith is *absolutely universal*, he uses *credit* (*economic trust*), a fiduciary anticipation within the economic aspect, as his example (Derrida 1997:22).

## 8. THE DISTINCTIVE FEATURE OF SCIENTIFIC THINKING

Properties such as being *systematic*, being involved in *verification* or *falsification*, *method*, and the *subject-object relation* are all *shared* characteristics, embracing both non-scientific and scholarly activities.<sup>7</sup> The argument developed in Strauss' Chapter 2 concludes that *modal abstraction* should be appreciated as the distinctive feature of scholarly activities. This is supported by the philosopher Coleto and the theologian Troost.

Coleto investigates the distinction between "science and non-science" in his "search for a demarcation criterion in the 20th century" (Coleto 2011). He addresses positivism; falsification and deduction (Popper); science, universals and laws; demarcation and tacit knowing (Polanyi); puzzle-solving as criterion (Kuhn); the dialogue with Kuhn and Lakatos by Feyerabend; postmodern voices, and modal abstraction (Strauss).

Coleto explains the way in which Strauss differentiates between two kinds of abstraction, the first one (also present in non-theoretical experience) is directed at concrete entities and the second at lifting out particular modal aspects by distinguishing them from others. He writes:

Strauss, however, has identified, I believe, the correct criterion. Scientific and non-scientific thinking adopt two different types of abstraction: *entitary abstraction* (in the case of naive thinking) and *modal abstraction* in the case of scientific thinking (Coleto 2011:76).

Earlier in his analysis, he anticipated this conclusion: "I will present this criterion in the version elaborated by D.F.M. Strauss, (...) This seems to me, at present, the best proposal available on the demarcation problem" (Coleto 2011:65).

In his extensive work on "the discipline investigating the philosophical foundations of the science of faith", Troost also supports the notion of *modal abstraction* as the distinctive feature of scholarly endeavours (Troost 2004:307). He explains that he distinguishes (with Vollenhoven and Strauss)

two kinds of abstraction, namely concrete and theoretical abstractions. (...) Theoretical abstractions are not primarily directed toward (sub)divisions, but focused on modal aspects; on modes of being or points of view of concrete entities. They are concerned with the differences between 'such or so'; not with those between 'this and that'.

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<sup>7</sup> See Strauss (2009:31-66) for an extensive treatment of the distinctive feature of scholarly thinking.

He considers this “distinction of diverse abstracted aspects” as being “indispensable in epistemology” for the “latter is related to faith within theology via its subject-philosophical prolegomena” while it is also significant for “theology as a science as such”. Of course, modal abstraction is a logical-analytical activity. Within our everyday experience, we are also active in a logical-analytical sense. Moreover, it should be borne in mind that the logical-analytical aspect is characterized by the mutual presence of *identification* and *distinction*. Conversely, Troost also recognizes the knowledge-elements present in both faith and theology:

In this way, the analytical aspect is qualifying for the knowledge-elements within faith and theology; therefore for the activities of distinguishing and identifying (D.F.M. Strauss), but also for elements from the depth-structure of knowing, such as intuition, association, memory, fading of knowledge, and the like (Troost 2004:307).

The sociologist Peter Berger, briefly discussed by Milbank in his work *Theology and Social Theory*, provides an account approximating the theory of modal aspects and the notion of modal abstraction:

The sociologist finds his subject matter present in all human activities, but not all aspects of those activities constitute this subject matter. Social interaction is not some specialized sector of what men do with each other. It is rather a certain aspect of all these doings. Another way of putting this is by saying that the sociologist carries a special sort of abstraction (Berger 1982:39-40).

This argument also requires a reference to two other theologians, namely Popma and Kuitert. Popma comes from the tradition of Reformational Philosophy and Kuitert from a broader Dutch background. Kuitert poses the question: What are the criteria for the discipline of theology in order to be accepted as a science? Then he becomes more specific by stating that, considering the field of investigation of theology leads to the question, from which angle of approach does it approach reality?<sup>8</sup>

Popma dedicated a monograph to the question as to what theology is. He opposes the idea that every Christian should be a scholar. Moreover, he is correct in realizing that theology has to orient itself to the aspect of faith and “that the question regarding the place of theology is itself not theological in nature” (Popma 1946:12). But he is mistaken in his view that the certitudinal aspect as such constitutes the field of investigation of theology (Popma 1946:13).

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8 “welke is de invalshoek waaronder zij de werkelijkheid benadert?” (Kuitert 1988:18-19).

Because everything within the universe functions in all aspects of reality, this modal universality of the aspects opens up a scope embracing everything within reality. When aspects are abstracted from the inter-modal coherence of the horizon of our experience, the existence of diverse special sciences (natural and social sciences) are enabled. In this instance, abstracting intends lifting out a specific (identified) aspect by at once disregarding the other aspects from which it is distinguished. When a physicist investigates reality from the gateway of the physical aspect of energy-operation, s/he only views the material side of things. A biologist, in turn, examines everything from the perspective of the *biotic* mode of reality. Similarly, every other unique and irreducible aspect of reality may serve as a special scientific point of entry to a scholarly investigation of the world.

The crucial point to observe is that the modal structure of an aspect does not as such form the field of investigation of any special science, as it merely provides the various academic disciplines (special sciences) with their distinct angle of approach to all of reality. Therefore, Popma is mistaken in holding that an aspect as such forms the field of investigation of a special science (Popma 1946:13).

Compare the above-mentioned views with Dooyeweerd's perspective on the modal structure of an aspect and the phenomena actually functioning within that structure:

Every scientific discipline does this when it seeks to investigate empirical reality from a specific point of view. But in this investigation it does not focus its theoretical attention upon the modal structure of such an aspect itself; rather, it focuses on the coherence of the actual phenomena which function within that structure. Where they are grasped only in certain specific, abstract aspects, these phenomena no longer come into view in their integral reality but only in terms of specific modal functions (Dooyeweerd 2014:11).

Once the special scientific nature of theology is acknowledged, as argued earlier, without "dividing" reality, it follows that one must always bear in mind that there is a difference between the task of *defining* theology and who is *doing* theology. When a special scientist identifies a modal aspect as its point of entry (to the *whole* of reality!), s/he must distinguish it from other modal points of entry, which require a totality view of reality. One may compare a special science, viewing reality through the gateway of a specific modal aspect, with a person wearing glasses. The special scientist is looking *through* the glasses, not *at* them. The optometrist takes a step back by looking *at* these glasses. Likewise, within the domain of philosophy of science, philosophy acts as the optometrist, looking at the glasses.

Unfortunately, Milbank has not mastered these basic distinctions in Dooyeweerd's thought.

## 9. MILBANK REJECTS AN "AHISTORICIST AND STATIC DIVISION OF HUMAN LIFE INTO DISTINCT 'SPHERES'"

Without showing that he is familiar with Dooyeweerd's theory of modal aspects, Milbank rejects the idea of distinct "spheres":

RO [*Radical Orthodoxy*] would not subscribe to the rather ahistoricist and static division of human life into distinct 'spheres'. For RO, they are more shifting and contingent, and the question of their validity and their boundaries is more uncertain (Milbank 2004:13).

This remark requires a reference both to an article entitled "The best known but least understood part of Dooyeweerd's philosophy" (see Strauss 2006) and to the nature of, and criteria for the recognition of a modal aspect (see Strauss 2009:77-79, where 10 criteria are stipulated).

Milbank's remark that "RO would not subscribe to the rather ahistoricist and static division of human life into distinct 'spheres'" raises several questions. First, the term "ahistoricist" is misplaced – Milbank should have said *a-historical*. Secondly, the suggestion that modal aspects "divide" human life in distinctive *spheres* merely shows that Milbank does not comprehend the meaning of a *modal aspect*. Dooyeweerd understands reality (including human life) by distinguishing between *modes* in which everything (including a human being) functions, on the one hand, and the concrete many-sided entitary structure of concrete things and events (to which the complex bodily existence of the human being belongs), on the other. Modal aspects concern the *how*, not the concrete *what*. Every aspect is, therefore, a *modus quo*, a *way of existence*, indicating that as *modes of existence* the various aspects do not "divide" anything. The notion of modal aspects merely underscores the *many-sidedness* of human life by identifying and distinguishing the multiple modes in which human beings (and everything else within the universe) function.

Viewed from their legal side, modal laws co-condition the existence of whatever there is, since they hold for all classes or types of entities. Modal laws, therefore, display an *unspecified* universality. By contrast, type laws hold only for a *limited* class of entities. Modal physical laws, such as the law of energy-constancy, non-decreasing entropy or gravity, hold for all material entities and processes. Conversely, the law for being an atom (or a human being) solely holds for the limited class of atoms (or human

beings). Type laws, therefore, display a *specified universality*. The type law for being an atom (or a human being) applies universally to all atoms (or human beings), but since not everything in the universe is an atom (or a human being), the implied universality is *limited, restricted* or *specified* merely to atoms or human beings only, since not *everything* is an atom or a human being.

For example, owing to the modal universality of all the modal aspects, human beings also function within the numerical aspect of reality – explaining why all human beings have *quantitative* properties: every single (*one*) person is related to *many* others. Likewise, every person functions within the spatial aspect – just consider the *size* and *shape* of human beings or the space they occupy. In addition, human beings function in the kinematic aspect of uniform motion, within the physical aspect of energy-operation, the biotic aspect of organic life, the sensitive mode, the logical-analytical aspect (being capable of identification and distinguishing), the cultural-historical aspect (formative control), the sign mode (verbal and non-verbal language), the social aspect, the economic mode, the aesthetic, as well as the jural, moral and certitudinal aspects.

Clearly, identifying the arithmetical aspect by distinguishing it from the other aspects of reality does not “divide” “human life” in any way – it solely focuses on an irreducible dimension of human existence and experience, namely the dimension of *modal aspects*. All the aspects of reality form the constant framework within which we experience and know the world.

## 10. ARE LAW-SPHERES A-HISTORICAL?

Milbank’s objection that the notion of modal law spheres reflects something *a-historical* and *static* reveals another shortcoming in his approach, namely the absence of a meaningful account of the relationship between *constancy* and *change*. In this instance, the basic distinctions flowing from a non-reductionist ontology are required. An integral part of such an ontology is found in Dooyeweerd’s theory of modal aspects. It opens up the way to investigate within which aspect of reality certain terms “reside”, have their “modal seat” or unique meaning. That the numerical aspect concerns discrete quantity, i.e. our awareness of the one and the many, entails that these terms have their modal seat within the *arithmetical* aspect. Similarly, the phrase *continuous dimensional extension* (entailing infinite divisibility, connectedness, coherence and, therefore, also the whole-parts relation) reflects the core meaning of the aspect of space. The term *constancy* captures the *kinematic* meaning of *uniform rectilinear movement*. The term *change*, in turn, in its original modal sense, reflects

the core meaning of *energy-operation* found within the physical aspect. When energy operates, changes occur, showing that energy-operation entails the cause-effect relation (causality). Moreover, *change* can only be detected on the basis of *persistence* or *constancy*.

Plato already discovered this insight, but gave a misdirected account thereof in terms of his speculative conception of a supra-sensory realm of eternal static ontic forms. He was confronted with the Heraclitean view that everything changes and he realized that, if this is true, nothing could be grasped in knowledge, because the moment something is known, it has already changed into something else (not yet known). For this reason, Plato postulates something *enduring*, something *constant*, which he designated as the essential being (*auto to eidos*) of things. He struggles with this issue already in his dialogue *Cratylus* (439 c-440) and then elaborates on his view in *Phaedo*, particularly in connection with the distinction between body and soul. The soul “exhibits the greatest similarity to the divine, immortal, conceivable, simple, indissoluble, constant and ‘self-identical’” (*Phaedo* 79d), whereas “the body bears the greatest similarity to the human, mortal, multifarious, non-conceivable, dissoluble and never-constant” (*Phaedo* 80b: 1-6).

The term ‘static’ has its original modal seat in the spatial aspect which is determined by the time order of static simultaneity, because all the parts of every factually extended spatial figure (line, triangle, cube) must be present *at once, simultaneously*. Space presupposes number, because within space there are multiple dimensions (a line represents *one-dimensional* extension, a surface *two-dimensional* extension, and so on). The natural numbers 1, 2, and so on are, therefore, analogically reflected within the spatial aspect. Motion, in turn, presupposes a path (space) and speed (expressible in a number), while *dynamic changes* presuppose the three aspects that are foundational to the physical aspect within the order of aspects. All the other aspects reflect the kinematic and physical aspects within their own modal structure. For example, textbooks on sociology frequently contain sections on *social constancy* and *social change*. Within the discipline of law, a revolution (a radical change) only takes full effect when it is followed by a *constant* jurisprudence.

## 11. THE PROBLEM OF RELATIVITY: AVOIDING THE PITFALL OF RELATIVISM

When theologians and philosophers struggle with the problem of relativity, they easily forget that every emphasis on *change* is always accompanied by an underlying element of *constancy*. Consider the well-known statement:

things are *constantly changing* (equivalent to the phrase that things are *always changing* and the reference to the *ever-changing* state of things). De Saussure wrestled with the problem that “we can speak of both the immutability and the mutability of the sign” (De Saussure 1966:74). Yet he did arrive at a formulation in which the foundational role of the kinematic aspect in respect of the physical aspect surfaces:

In the last analysis, the two facts are interdependent: the sign is exposed to alteration because it perpetuates itself. What predominates in all change is the persistence of the old substance; disregard for the past is only relative. That is why the principle of change is based on the principle of continuity (De Saussure 1966:74).

Traditionally, the substance concept incorporated the intimate connection between constancy and change. In the second edition of his *Critique of pure reason*, Kant states: “amidst all changes within the world substance persists, only its properties change” (Kant 1787:227). Similar to what De Saussure holds already Kant acknowledged the *law of the continuity of all change* (“das Gesetz der Kontinuität aller Veränderung” [Kant 1787:254]).

However, when historicism emphasizes change at the cost of constancy, it generates an antinomy, which is clear in the following contradictory implications. If everything *is* history (historical change), then there is nothing left that can *have* a history. Only what itself *is* not history can *have* a history. The only option left to the idea of “everything is history” is the equally problematic and self-contradictory construction of “a history of history”.

The objection raised by Milbank against the idea of law spheres also claims that this idea entails a “static division of human life into distinct ‘spheres’. For RO, they are more shifting and contingent, and the question of their validity and their boundaries is more uncertain” (Milbank 2004:13). As pointed out earlier, the modal spheres do not *divide* reality in any way, since they form an *ontic condition* for the functioning of (natural and social) entities. Their ontic universality provides the constant (not *static*) framework necessary for those specific kinds of entities subject to their peculiar type laws. Since the meaning of modal aspects may be deepened or disclosed, they are not *static*. For example, when the primitive meaning of number, manifest in the order of numerical succession, i.e., one, another one, yet another and so on indefinitely, endlessly, is deepened by the meaning of space where the whole-parts relation is original, then we may exceed the primitive meaning of infinity (as endlessness) by introducing the deepened idea of infinite totalities, that is, the idea of the at once infinite (traditionally

designated as the actual infinite).<sup>9</sup> This shows that, although the modal aspects are constant modes of being, their meaning may be deepened or disclosed as they participate in the dynamics of the disclosure process. Within living entities, macromolecular chemical constituents, investigated by organic chemistry, display a deepened, biotically directed functioning, an opened up functioning in principle studied by biochemistry (in practice, biochemistry partially conquered the field of investigation of organic chemistry). When the structure of the logical-analytical mode is opened up, we encounter first, the analytical mastery of a given knowledge-material (field of investigation). The forward-pointing (anticipatory) coherence between the logical-analytical aspect and the sign mode may be disclosed in a unique analytical technical language peculiar to a special science. Now the anticipation to the economic aspect could be opened up – in the principle of *thought-economy*. These examples suffice to illustrate the *dynamics* intrinsic to the inter-modal coherence between the various aspects of reality.

## 12. MODAL ABSTRACTION ENTAILS THAT EVERY SPECIAL SCIENCE HAS A PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATION

Modal abstraction, as a distinctive feature of scholarly thinking, involves the lifting out (identification) of an aspect by disregarding the other aspects. To accomplish this, more than one aspect is needed. Yet, by being limited to the perspective of one aspect only, no single science can consider more than one aspect in a purely special scientific way. Moreover, if reality did not display many aspects, modal analysis would have been impossible. One can only identify an aspect by simultaneously distinguishing it from other aspects.

The upshot of these considerations is that modal abstraction implies that all the academic disciplines that observe reality in its totality from the perspective of one or another modal aspect always operate on the basis of a philosophical orientation. This amounts to the fact that theoretical thinking requires an idea of the *cohering diversity of aspects* (and entities) within reality. This entails the necessity and inevitability of a theoretical total view of the universe. But, since a special science is delimited by the angle of approach of one modal aspect only, it stands to reason that such a totality view of reality exceeds every special science, even though

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9 In this context, I cannot show how the successive infinite became related to eternity as endless duration and how the at once infinite served the idea of eternity as the timeless present.

concrete reality in its fullness features within the purview of a special science. A special science is not restricted merely to a “part sliced off from reality”, because every academic discipline observes the entire universe, albeit from a modally distinct perspective.

Since God transcends creation, it is not meaningful to advance the idea that God is the “study-object” of theology. Therefore, Ouweneel is justified in his acknowledgement of the certitudinal or pistical point of view explored by theology: “I have argued extensively that theology is the special science that investigates empirical reality from the pistical viewpoint” (Ouweneel 2014:107; see also page 44 and Chapter 3).

Interestingly, Milbank (2004:14) does not hesitate to speak of the “economic realm”. Of course, the way in which we account for the various modal aspects of reality is subject to continuous reconsideration, but alterations in our understanding do not imply that the given modal aspects of reality in an ontic sense are not *constant*. The connections between various aspects are equally striking, even though the (retrociatory and anticipatory) analogies between them may be accounted for in different ways. Consider how Derrida articulates the coherence between the economic aspect and the faith aspect of reality, despite the fact that he does not know the theory of modal aspects. He emphasizes that “faith is absolutely universal” (Derrida 1997:22). When he elaborates on his claim, by referring to credit as *economic trust*, he not only distinguishes between the economic sphere and the certitudinal sphere (faith), but also clearly states that the faith entailed in *economic trust*

should not be reduced or defined by religion as such. (..) There is no society without faith, without trust in the other. Even if I abuse this, if I lie or if I commit perjury, if I am violent because of this faith, even on the economic level, there is no society without this faith, this minimal act of faith. What one calls credit in capitalism, in economics, has to do with faith, and the economists know that. But this faith is not and should not be reduced or defined by religion as such (Derrida 1997:23).

To summarize: Derrida discerns the undeniable state of affairs that on the “economic level” of a society *credit* embodies *economic trust*. Obviously, his own peculiar interpretation of this state of affairs differs from the way in which I interpret it within the context of the theory of modal aspects.

In societies where the meaning of economic life is not yet opened up through anticipatory analogies, no *economic trust*, in the sense of credit, is found. Such societies are rather oriented to an *exchange economy*. Similarly, the meaning of the jural aspect is not yet disclosed in the practice of a *tooth for a tooth* and an *eye for an eye* (*lex talionis*), for only when the

jural aspect is deepened by the ethical and fiduciary aspects do we find within legal systems legal ethical principles, or principles of jural morality, such as the principle of *fault*, in both its forms, *intent* and *negligence (dolus and culpa)*, *equity*, and *bona fides*.

Likewise, the meaning of the faith aspect also entails retrocipatory analogies, such as certitudinal integrity (moral retrocipation), certitudinal fairness (jural analogy), certitudinal harmony (aesthetic analogy), and certitudinal identification and distinguishing (logical-analytical retrocipation). The latter analogy reveals that faith entails an element of reflection, a point made by Milbank in an earlier quote: "For Catholic tradition, every Christian is a theologian, because faith is always *somewhat* reflective, albeit in the mode of symbol, ritual, and narrative" (Milbank 2004:14).

Having transformed every Christian into a theologian, it is a matter of consistency to defend the view that any Christian contribution to something like economics has to be *theological* in nature: "... the Christian contribution to, say, economics, is always a theological contribution" (Milbank 2004:14).

### 13. CONCLUDING REMARK

Within the approach of *Radical Orthodoxy*, philosophy and theology both share a concern for being *qua* being. According to this view, "all merely natural enquiries" are assigned to philosophy, although theology also investigates *esse* (being) as such. However, the focus of theology is on "the ground of all beings", and, in particular, how all beings stand "in relation to this ground and source". The difference between theology and philosophy is, therefore, that the former observes being in relation to God. By contrast, *Reformational Philosophy* has shown that reality as a whole falls within the scope of every special science, albeit the case that every special science has a distinct angle of approach. From the perspective of modal abstraction, a special science does not "divide" reality into segmented parts, because the various aspects of reality merely serve as "spectacles" through which reality is viewed and investigated. An analysis of the structure of the aspects themselves belongs to philosophy and the latter also has the task both to give an account of the foundations of the various special sciences and to investigate the question as to what a special science is – in this case what theology is. Philosophy and theology ought to proceed from the same *root-commitment* (the biblical basic motive of creation, fall and redemption), for both a Christian philosophy and a Christian theology to be possible at all. However, the theoretical view of reality underlying all scholarly endeavours still remains *philosophical* in nature.

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