DISCUSSION

DOOYEWERD, BOS AND THE GRONDMOTIEF
OF GREEK CULTURE

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For more than one reason it was entirely fitting that the Jubilee Issue of Philosophy Reformata published in 1986 contained an article which gave an evaluation of Dooyeweerd’s doctrine of the grondmotief of Greek philosophy.1 This conception occupies a central place in the view of the history of philosophy developed by the founder and first editor of this journal. Moreover its first elaboration, from which the author scarcely deviated in later accounts, was given in the pages of the same journal in the dark days of World War II.2 But it was not merely antiquarian interest that impelled the article’s author, A. P. Bos, Professor of Ancient and Patristic philosophy at the Free University, to make his contribution. As has become apparent in a large number of other publications, Bos is attracted to the basic ideas of Dooyeweerd’s philosophy. In his article his purpose was not only to give a critique of Dooyeweerd’s views, but also to develop them further in a more persuasive direction.

In this connection the image with which Bos commences his article is not without interest. The teacher ascends the heights and obtains a panoramic view. The pupil left behind at a lower level is carried along with enthusiasm when he hears his master’s report. But when the pupil later ascends to the top himself, he may come to a more nuanced view of what his master thought he saw there. I would not wish to claim that I myself have had the privilege of reaching the heights already scaled by Dooyeweerd and my Doktorvater. But it does seem to me a pity if the latter’s article does not give rise to some discussion. My intention in this brief contribution is to make some comments and suggestions which hopefully will act as a stimulus to further discussion of an interesting and important subject.3

1. Summary

First it will be opportune to give the briefest summary of Bos’ article. It consists basically of three parts. In the first it is shown how Dooyeweerd’s postulation of the religious grondmotief of Greek culture in terms of the dia-


3 In writing this piece I have benefited from notes taken down during an animated discussion in the Werkgroep Rede en Zinperspectief, held at the Free University in early 1986.

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lectical polarity of form and matter was uncritically based on a view of Greek religion now generally regarded as historically unsound. The distinction between a Dionysian nature-religion and an Apolline culture-religion is largely founded on the brilliant intuition underlying Nietzsche's famous book, *Die Geburt der Tragoedie*. But the caesura between pre-Hellenic and Hellenic religion presupposed by that view can no longer be maintained in the light of historical evidence that has been uncovered since then and has given us a rich insight into the continuity of Greek religion with Mycenean, Minoan and even earlier periods.

One subordinate element of Dooyeweerd's account clearly intrigues Bos and he proceeds to develop it in the second part of his essay. Following the interpretation that was then still current, Dooyeweerd had regarded the mythological account of the defeat of the god Kronos and his generation of Titans by Kronos' son Zeus and the Olympian deities as a reflection of the subjugation of the pre-Hellenic population of Greece by the Hellenic invaders. The source of the story is the *Theogony* of the poet Hesiod. In his other great poem *Works and Days* Hesiod tells a quite different story about the god Kronos, namely how he ruled over gods and men during the Golden Age, which was brought to an end by the Iron Age of Zeus. Bos, having shown that Dooyeweerd's interpretation of the succession of the gods is untenable, proceeds to ask what the meaning of the motif can be, and how it is related to the seemingly quite contrary notion of Kronos as eponym of the Golden Age. For his solution he turns to mythical ideas drawn from the Near East, in which gods represent the changing of the seasons. Kronos thus represents the fertility of the rain-bearing autumn clouds, which allow nature to bring about the sprouting of seeds and the growth of crops. Zeus, on the other hand, represents the period when the sky is clear and the sun beats down on the earth, when man must resume the hard labour of cultivation and culture. If this background were to explain the connection between Hesiod's two stories, then Dooyeweerd's polarity between nature gods and culture gods would return in a more acceptable form.

In the third part of the article Bos places the myth of Kronos and the Titans in a wider context and makes the claim that it can be seen as a kind of archetypal story that reveals the *zin-perspectief* of Greek culture and philosophy.4 Kronos is a fallen god who through his own fault5 has lost his divine status and glory. This theme is not only found in the mythical tradition of Hesiod, but also in Orphism and the Greek mysteries of Eleusis, which both had a strong influence on Greek philosophy. In the philosophical tradition developed by Parmenides, Plato and Aristotle, a consistent picture is given of man fallen and captive in the darkness of ignorance, from which he can be rescued through deliverance of his 'supra-earthly' and divine part, i.e. his

4 Translated as 'meaning perspective' in the English version. I prefer to retain the Dutch word (also in the case of *grondmotief*) because it is a peculiarly Dutch coinage. Renderings such as 'meaning perspective' (and 'ground-motive') are only intelligible to the initiated, who will know the original Dutch term anyway.

5 Because he killed his own father Ouranos and swallowed his own children so that they could not overthrow him. Ouranos, according to Bos, is the sky, which is split asunder by the thunder that announces the coming of Kronos.