BEING HUMAN IN THE COSMOS

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Introduction

In recent years philosophical anthropology has been the subject of an extensive discussion within the circle of Calvinian philosophy. Among other things, this has resulted in an issue of Philosophia Reformata with contributions by Dengerink, Glas, Ouweneel and Troost.¹ The discussion has left me with a feeling of dissatisfaction. The profoundness and the quality of the publications are beyond doubt, but I cannot suppress the impression that little progress is achieved. This is sad, because Dooyeweerd himself considered his anthropology to be unfinished, like a beginning that ought to be elaborated with the help of the special sciences. It may be wondered what could be wrong with the approach of anthropology up till now. I mention a few possibilities.

1. Most striking in the discussion during the past years is the absence of the theory of evolution. For the participants in the international conference on anthropology at Zeist in 1986² and for the contributors to the above-mentioned issue of Philosophia Reformata it seems as if Darwin never existed, and as if no progress has been made in biological and astrophysical insights concerning the development of the cosmos.

The participants in the discussion seem to take no interest in the natural scientific contribution to anthropology. For my part, I am convinced that anthropology is in need of all sciences, and is doomed to sterility if an important segment is neglected. In particular the development of anthropology within the context of the Philosophy of the Cosmonic Idea badly needs the study of the evolution of mankind in the universe, and the position of humanity with respect to the kingdoms of plants and animals.

Verburg recalls that Dooyeweerd did not finish his anthropological work³ because he did not see a solution to the problem of evolution.⁴ Evidently, Dooyeweerd attributed the study of evolution a key position. With a few

¹ Phil. Ref. 54 (1989) nr. 1. See also W. J. Ouweneel, De leer van de mens (Amsterdam 1986); J. D. Dengerink (a), De zin van de werkelijkheid (Amsterdam 1986) chapter 6.
² An exception is a paper by D. F. M. Strauss. (The proceedings of the conference have not been published as yet.)
³ H. Dooyeweerd (a), Reformatie en scholastiek in de wijsbegeerte, volume 1 (Baarn 1949); volumes 2 and 3 were never published. On Dooyeweerd's anthropology, see Ouweneel, op. cit. From Ouweneel's 'Nabeschouwing' (Conclusion) I cite (p. 418): "Als we de balans opmaken van ruim vijftig jaar christelijk-wijsgerige transcendentiaal-antropologie, dan is het resultaat eigenlijk teleurstellend." ('If we make the balance of more than fifty years of christian-philosophical transcendent anthropology, the result is rather disappointing'.)
⁴ M. E. Verburg, Herman Dooyeweerd, Leven en werk van een Nederlands christen-wijsgeer (Baarn 1989) 350–360.

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exceptions his followers did not make conspicuous attempts to fill in this hiatus.\(^5\)

Contrary to his intention, Dooyeweerd’s careful and deliberate reaction to Lever’s epoch-making work\(^6\) appears to have blockaded rather than advanced the development of anthropology. Probably it prevented many natural scientists from contributing positively to the systematic analysis of the Philosophy of the Cosmonomic Idea.

2. It is generally recognized that Dooyeweerd’s theory of *enkaptic structural interlacements* should be one of the starting points of anthropology.\(^7\) But then it is surprising that so little attention is paid to a necessary elaboration of this theory. No author discussing Dooyeweerd’s so-called “anthropological theses”\(^8\) fails to mention his recognition of three basic substructures in the structure of the human body, to wit the physical-chemical, the biotic, and the psychic ones. Should one not consider a spatial and/or a kinematic substructure?\(^9\) Is it not the case that besides a *primary* qualification of substructures (characterized by the “leading” or “qualifying” modal sphere) a *secondary* characteristic also exists (determined by the “founding” aspect)? As a consequence, the number of substructures to be found in the human body would amount to 1 (spatial) + 2 (kinematic, i.e., spatially and numerically founded, respectively) + 3 (physical) + 4 (biotic) + 5 (psychic) = 15.\(^10\) This makes things rather complicated, but to ignore this state of affairs implies neglecting a fruitful application of the systematic part of the Philosophy of the Cosmonomic Idea to anthropology.

Moreover, these structures of the human body have mostly a *retrodictory* character, albeit that anticipations are already operative. Still, should one not explore the possibility that the human *spirit* is determined by *anticipating* structures?

3. In my opinion too little attention is paid to the *relations* of every human being with his or her fellow creatures, in particular his or her fellow women or men (which are, of course, not entirely neglected) and the worlds of

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\(^7\) So it appears that the theory of the enkaptic structural whole forms the necessary connective link between the theory of the individuality-structures and their temporal interweavings, and what is called a philosophical anthropology’: H. Dooyeweerd (c), *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* (Amsterdam 1953–1957) vol. 3, 781.

\(^8\) H. Dooyeweerd (d), ‘De leer van de mens in de wijsbegeerte der wetsidee’, *Correspondentiebladen* (1942), *Sola Fide* (febr. 1954), 8–18. Most (but not all) theses can also be found in Ouweneel op. cit.


\(^10\) Cf. Stafleu op.cit. (b), and with respect to psychically qualified structures, M. D. Stafleu (c), ‘Criteria for a law sphere’, *Phil.Rev.* 53 (1988) 171–186. Accepting Ouweneel’s suggestion to divide the psychic aspect into a perceptive one and a sensitive one would make the number of substructures 21. 15 or 21 substructures may seem abundant, but it presents an interesting possibility to map the extremely complicated structure of the human body.