

# I

## INTRODUCTION

### INITIAL SURVEY OF THE RELIGIOUS GROUND-MOTIVES AND THE CONFLICT THEY PRODUCE BETWEEN THE REFORMATIONAL AND SCHOLASTIC SPIRITS IN PHILOSOPHY

#### 1. The Four Religious Ground-Motives Underlying the History of Western Philosophic Thought

Beginning with the last decades of the nineteenth century, there appeared within Western philosophy three phenomena whose significance and mutual interconnectedness have become clearer to us as the twentieth century has progressed. First, we are struck by the gradual decay of humanistic philosophy. Beginning with the Renaissance, this philosophy had captured the leading role in Western thought. It had found its culmination in German idealism. After the collapse of the latter, however, it became more and more involved in a crisis of foundations which, to the present, it has been unable to surmount. Second, there appeared at the same time within Roman Catholic circles a great Renaissance of scholastic philosophy, more particularly of Thomism. This renewal was introduced by the encyclical *Aeterni Patris*, issued by Pope Leo XIII in 1879. Third, this same period witnessed the rise of independent philosophical reflection within the Protestant circles that had remained faithful to the basic principles of the Reformation. Here there has been an endeavor to bring about a true reformation of philosophical thought. At this point, however, this endeavor has remained limited to the modern Calvinistic movement inseparably connected to the name of Abraham Kuyper. Most recently, this movement has borne fruit in the appearance of an independent reformational philosophy, called the Philosophy of the Law-Idea. That these three phenomena are closely related cannot be denied. Behind all of them, without doubt, lies the crisis which has shaken modern Western civilization to its foundations.

The spiritual mainsprings of this civilization have been classical culture, Christianity, and humanism. Far from being homogeneous, these spiritual forces have remained in continual tension with one another. Now, such a tension cannot be removed by means of some artificial “balance of powers”; for if cultural development is to have a clear direction, there must be one guiding force.

In classical Greek civilization, this force was the *polis*, the city-state, as the bearer of the new religion of culture. In the classical Roman era, the same position was occupied by the *res publica* and, shortly thereafter, by the emperorship. These served as the bearers of the religious *imperium* idea. The same was true during the Byzantine era, when the idea of the *sacrum imperium* became reconciled in an external fashion with a persecuted Christendom, after the latter had begun to undermine the foundations of the whole of ancient culture.

The Roman Catholic church succeeded in maintaining a position of cultural hegemony during the Middle Ages. Indeed, the next great cultural crisis did not occur until the advent of the modern Renaissance movement. After the way had been prepared by late scholastic nominalism, this movement began to divert the stream of influence emanating from ancient culture from the power of the church, after having basically reinterpreted it in the spirit of the budding humanism of the day. At the same time the great movement of the Reformation exerted pressure on the ecclesiastically unified culture of Rome from a fundamentally different standpoint.

In the lands which on the whole had remained faithful to the Roman church, Roman Catholicism regrouped its forces in the Counter-Reformation, creating a favorable climate for the reception of Renaissance culture. In the Protestant countries, meanwhile, the cultural leadership passed for a short time into the hands of the Reformation. Gradually, however, a new trend began to emerge within Western civilization, in which both Rome and the Reformation were forced to retreat from their positions of cultural leadership in the face of the advance of modern humanism. That did not mean that either one was thereby eliminated as a major force in the history of the West. They carried on indestructibly in this role, partly in antagonism to the new world and life view, in which Christianity was secularized into a rational religion of personality, and partly in a variety of pseudo-syntheses with the new humanistic ideas which had been able to enter formatively into history. Neither Rome nor the Reformation was any longer in a position, however, to place its own stamp on Western civilization. For two centuries they were forced onto the defensive in the titanic battle that was raging for control of the spirit of our culture. Temporarily, the position of leadership had been taken over by humanism.

Since the last decades of the nineteenth century, however, we have seen the humanistic world and life view as a whole begin to crumble. Now it, itself, has gradually been forced onto the defensive before the onslaught of new, antihumanistic cultural forces. In the arena of world history we are now faced with a violent transitional period. Within it the struggle for the spiritual leadership of our Western culture is not yet finalized.

In this manifestly chaotic time of transition, the two older, spiritually

consolidated cultural powers of the West, Roman Catholicism and the Reformation, now armed with modern weapons, are once again making themselves felt in this great spiritual battle. Their aim is not merely to stand in defense of the Christian foundations of modern civilization; it is to reassert their claim to leadership in the struggle for the future of Western civilization, which, even in its most immediate prospects, remains shrouded in darkness.

This Promethean struggle has also affected the history of philosophy. In its course of development, Western philosophy reveals its historical dependence on the leading cultural powers. By reason of their commanding position in history, these impress on philosophy too their deepest religious ground-motives.

It is predominantly four of these ground-motives that control the history of Western philosophy.<sup>1</sup> Of them, three are clearly dialectical. That is to say, they are torn by an inner dualism, which constantly induces them to spawn positions in which one factor is set irretrievably in diametrical opposition to the other. It is not only the development of theoretical thought that is ruled by these ground-motives, however; as religious dynamics (*δυνάμεις*), that is to say, as forces that control one's perspective on life, from its center to its entire circumference, they lie at the foundation of Western cultural development as a whole.

These four ground-motives are the following:

- (1) the *form-matter* motive of Greek antiquity;
- (2) the Scriptural ground-motive of *creation, the fall into sin, and redemption through Christ Jesus in the communion of the Holy Spirit*;
- (3) the Scholastic motive of religious synthesis, introduced by Roman Catholicism, that of *nature and grace*, which attempts to reconcile the former two motives;
- (4) the modern humanistic ground-motive of *nature and freedom*, in which the attempt is made to bring all of the earlier motives into an immanent (*diesseitige*) religious synthesis, concentrated in the human personality.

a. *The Greek Form-Matter Motive*

The initial motive, which was first given the name “form-matter” (*morphē* and *hylē*) by Aristotle, was the one that governed Greek thought from the very beginning, in accordance with its religious con-

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<sup>1</sup> Whatever influence Jewish and Arabic philosophy and also Eastern religious philosophy have had on Western thought was able to be exerted only within the framework of the ground-motives peculiar to the latter.

tent.<sup>1</sup> It originated in an unresolved conflict within the Greek religious consciousness between the ground-motive of the older telluric, chthonic, and uranic *nature religions*,<sup>2</sup> on the one hand, in which a proto-Greek nucleus was supplemented by many elements both of indigenous pre-Greek (Minoan) and of foreign origin, and, on the other hand, the ground-motive of the newer *culture religion*, the religion of the Olympic pantheon.<sup>3</sup>

The nature religions varied greatly from one locality to the other in their cultic forms and their peculiar beliefs. Especially because of the lack of deciphered written sources, furthermore, there is much guesswork involved in reconstructing exactly what these forms and beliefs were.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, a number of features distinguishing pre-Homeric from later religion can now be established with certainty. H. W. Rüssel summarizes these as follows:

Pre-Homeric religion did not have gods possessing any particularized form, but rather, at most, certain symbols for the deity, which was itself conceived as invisible. Here there are clear traces of a religion of earth and water, whereas the Olympian reli-

- 1 Thus Aristotle was correct, in the first book of his *Metaphysics*, in treating the entire preceding history of Greek philosophy within the framework of this ground-motive. To be sure, one must exercise a proper critical reserve as to his evaluation of his predecessors, and one must discount his typically Aristotelian terminology and his characteristic attempt at synthesis; nevertheless, I shall demonstrate in detail that the view cannot be maintained that the entire form-matter scheme is nothing more than a fabrication of Aristotle himself.
- 2 The telluric religions focus their attention on "mother earth" as the origin of life; whereas the chthonic religions are directed more to the inorganic soil, and the uranic to the sky and later also to the sea.
- 3 The presence of this religious conflict, which Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche in his youthful work of genius *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music* (Leipzig, 1872) characterized as the split between the Apollonian and the Dionysian elements, may be regarded as having been definitively established since the investigations of Johann Jakob Bachofen and Erwin Rohde. For one who is not in a position to acquaint himself with the extensive literature on the development of the Greek religions, the book of H. W. Rüssel, *Antike Welt und Christentum* (Amsterdam/ Leipzig, 1941), pp. 48 ff., is a good source of information, although his presentation is strongly influenced by the Roman Catholic synthesis between the ground-motives of the Greek and the Christian religions. The famous smaller book of Albrecht Dieterich, *Mutter Erde* (1905; 3rd ed., 1925), also remains very instructive. Dieterich was a student of Prof. Usener, to whom I shall refer later.
- 4 Attempts to decipher the Cretan script, which could be a rich source of information concerning the ancient, pre-Greek (Minoan) forms of religion, have to the present consistently met with failure. Even if these efforts should become successful, however, the reconstruction of the pre-Homeric religions, with their strong local differences, would remain hypothetical in many respects, for there are also many other non-Greek elements lying hidden in them.

gion of Zeus would seem to have arisen from the worship of an originally Indo-Germanic sky-god, i.e., a particular individual deity. ... This ancient religion has the character of nature myth, and like nature itself it is wilder, more unpredictable, and often more cruel and demonic than the gods of Homer. On the other hand, it is also filled with a profound ethical seriousness. The pre-Homeric Greek approached his gods with dread, deep humility, piety, and reverence. His gods were gods of the sacred, unbreakable orders of birth, death, blood, the earth, procreation, and growth. Unlike the male gods of Homer, it was here that female deities stood in the foreground and were sought out by men for help, blessing, and deliverance. The mercy which these deities of mother earth displayed in giving help was equalled, however, by the pitilessness and ineluctability of their curse. Whereas for Homer death is a shadowy thing which is no concern to one who is alive and healthy, since his gods are gods of life, the center of pre-Homeric religion is occupied by death, the cult of the dead, and the conviction that there is a continued existence after death. For this reason the dead were here buried in the mother earth, while in Homer cremation was the usual practice.<sup>1</sup>

Nilsson, Cornford, and others have convincingly demonstrated that this last feature mentioned by Rüssel does not in any way imply that primitive Greek nature religion held to a belief in the personal immortality of the soul.<sup>2</sup> It was only later that the belief in individual immortality, which had been present in Orphic and Pythagorean circles and especially among those who had been initiated into the Eleusinian mysteries, came in any real sense to replace the old nature belief in the immortality of the stream of life throughout the cycle of generations. As we shall see later, this change could not have taken place apart from the influence of the individualizing tendencies of the religion of culture. For, whatever remained in pre-Homeric religion of a belief in the personal immortality of rulers and national heroes who were specially favored by the gods and were granted a blessed second life in the “Elysian fields,” lay beyond the sphere of nature religion proper. Perhaps such beliefs were based on a tradition descended from the highly developed religious conceptions of Minoan civilization, which probably originated with the Egyptians, a tradition that in any case meant little to the common people.

Within this pre-Homeric religion of nature there was predominantly a single ground-motive at work, which retained a lasting place in the substratum of the Greek mind. This was the motive of *the divine, eternally flowing stream of life*. Arising from mother earth, this stream of life peri-

1 H. W. Rüssel, *op. cit.*, pp. 46 ff. (English version by translator).

2 Cf., e. g., Martin Persson Nilsson, *Geschichte der griechischen Religion* (Munich, 1941), p. 637; esp. p. 640.

odically, in the cycle of time, brings forth everything that has individual form and shape; but then, inevitably, the latter falls prey to blind, unpredictable fate, to dread Anankē (*Ἀνάγκη*; necessity), in order that the eternally flowing and formless stream of life might continue on with its cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. This divine stream of life, coursing through everything that has bodily form, is a *psychic fluid*, which is not bound to the limits of the bodily form and thus cannot die with the latter, but which is conceived of nevertheless as material and earthly. The deepest mystery of the “psyche” lies in an ecstatic transcending of one’s bodily limits in a mystical absorption into the divine totality of life. In the words of Heraclitus, the obscure thinker of Ephesus, “You could not in your going find the ends of the soul... so deep is its law (Logos; *Λόγος*).”<sup>1</sup>

In Dionysus, who appears in Homer and Hesiod as the wild god of wine vegetation, the ground-motive spoken of here – which I have designated the Greek *matter motive* in its polar opposition to the form motive of the religion of culture – is embodied in its most pregnant form. It is noteworthy that this deity, whose worship had been imported from Thrace,<sup>2</sup> did not receive a fixed cultural form and a developed personality in the Greek pantheon until he was brought into connection with his antipode, the Delphic god Apollo. For, as we shall see later, Apollo became the most pregnant expression of the Greek *form motive*, even though he too was probably non-Greek in origin, and in spite of the fact that, as an oracular god, he had a contrasting, ecstatic side to his personality.

The young Nietzsche, in his brilliant work *The Birth of Tragedy*, was acute enough to detect the sharp distinction between these contrasting “night” and “light” sides of Greek religion. Through his influence the opposition between the Dionysian and Apollonian elements in the Greek spirit has become commonplace in the subsequent literature. In no way did this mean, however, that insight had been gained into the radical meaning and the true interrelationship between these two opposing religious motives. Indeed, this was impossible, as long as religion was regarded exclusively from the immanence-standpoint and the attempt was made to understand it as a psychological phenomenon or to explain it sociologically.

It should be repeated by way of emphasis that in the ancient religion of nature the deity was not conceived and represented in an established form and a personal shape. The deity itself remained fluid and invisible in the eternally flowing stream of life. There was, however, no abstract unity in

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1 *Translator’s note*: Cf. Kathleen Freeman, *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers: A Complete Translation of the Fragments in Diels*, *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* (Cambridge, Mass., 1948), p.27.

2 *Translator’s note*: The clause regarding Thrace has been interpolated on the basis of a remark in Herman Dooyeweerd’s own *corrigenda* and of his *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, I (Philadelphia/ Amsterdam, 1953), 62.

the conception of the deity. On the contrary, a boundless multiplicity of divine powers was worshiped, in connection with the immense variety of natural phenomena, which were continually embodied in a flowing and variable notion of the deity.

In this situation, it is understandable that the rise of relatively permanent, discrete individual forms and shapes in nature was felt to be an “injustice,” for which, in accordance with the mysterious saying of Anaximander, the Ionian nature philosopher, they must “make reparation to one another... according to the arrangement of Time.”<sup>1</sup> Likewise, it is clear how in the telluric religion of Gaia, Demeter, and Dionysus, and at first also in the Eleusinian mystery cult, which was connected to the worship of Demeter and at one time became attached to the cult of Dionysus (Dionysus Iacchus), the belief in the continuity of the divine stream of life through the coming and going of the generations could be a source of comfort in the face of the necessary destruction of all individual life that was embodied in a specific visible form and shape.<sup>2</sup>

In later times also, Dionysus remained the deity in whom life and death were united. As a god with a personal form and shape, he differed from the Olympian culture gods in lacking immortality. His grave was even displayed in the sanctuary at Delphi. In the Orphic doctrine, which I shall discuss later, he became, as Dionysus Zagreus, the suffering god who was torn asunder and devoured by the Titans (here the personification of the principle of evil). In the Orphic mysteries, this suffering of the dying god was symbolically reenacted: in orgiastic frenzy animals were torn to pieces and their flesh was consumed raw, in order that the participants might enter into communion with the suffering of Dionysus. Thereupon, the suffering and death of this god was followed by his miraculous rebirth in a new form.

The connection of pre-Homeric religions with the mystery cult of Eleusis and Samothrace, with the Orphic and Dionysian movement during the religious crisis of the transition period of Greek history, and also with the religious ideas of the tragedians (Aeschylus and Sophocles), of Pindar, and of the Greek philosophers (especially Pythagoras, Empedocles, and Plato) was pointed out as early as the famous book *Psyche*,<sup>3</sup> written by Nietzsche’s friend Erwin Rohde. Since then, the scientific study of reli-

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<sup>1</sup> *Translator’s note*: Freeman, *op. cit.*, p.19.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Nilsson, *op. cit.*, pp. 439-40. In this connection, see also the well-known verses of Aeschylus, in which, according to Wilamowitz, the entire Demeter religion can be discerned: *καὶ γαίαν αὐτήν, ἢ τὰ πάντα τίκτεται, θρέψασά δ’ αὖθις τῶνδε κῆμα λαμβάνει.* [Choephoroi 127].

<sup>3</sup> Erwin Rohde, *Psyche: The Cult of Souls and Belief in Immortality among the Greeks* (tr. from the 8th ed.; London/ New York, 1925).

gion in both its philological<sup>1</sup> and ethnological<sup>2</sup> aspects has further broadened and deepened these insights.

The new culture religion was embodied in the official religion of the Greek *polis* (city-state). It created the first national religious center at Mount Olympus. In contrast to the religion of nature, it was the religion of *rational form, measure, and harmony*. It soon received its most typically Greek expression in the Delphic Apollo, the law-giver. The Olympian deities left “mother earth” and became *immortal, radiant form-gods*, who in their supersensible form and personal shape were equivalent to *idealized and personified cultural powers*.

This new religion, which obtained its most brilliant expression in the epic poetry of Homer, attempted to absorb into itself the older religion, both as to its original Greek<sup>3</sup> and as to its imported and its pre-Greek domestic elements. It attempted to adapt it to its own ground-motive of form, measure, and harmony. In particular, it sought to restrain the ecstatic, telluric worship of Dionysus by means of the lawful form principle of the service of Apollo. At Delphi, Apollo and Dionysus became brothers, with the latter losing his indeterminate wildness and appearing in the more serious role of a “shepherd of souls.”

In their theogonies, the ancient Greek theological poets (Homer, Hesiod) and the Orphic seers of the archaic transition period attempted to make clear to the people that the Olympian deities had been brought forth by the formless, fluid nature gods themselves. In the process of becoming set forth in Hesiod’s theogony, which along with Homer’s theogonic constructions exerted great influence on the development of Greek philo-

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- 1 In this connection particular mention is due the school of Herman Karl Usener, whose work *Götternamen: Versuch einer Lehre von der religiösen Begriffsbildung* (Bonn, 1896) had a great influence, even though it met with some criticism.
  - 2 Here I mention only Miss J. E. Harrison, *Prolegomena to the Study of the Greek Religion* (Cambridge/ New York, 1903) and *Themis: A Study of the Social Origins of Greek Religion* (Cambridge, 1912, with later editions remaining unchanged). In spite of her often speculative combining of Émile Durkheim’s positivistic sociological method with the ideas of Henri Bergson, the French philosopher of life, she has nevertheless made a variety of important discoveries with respect to the ancient Greek religions of nature, in particular that of the *ἐνιαντὸς δαίμων*, the representative of vegetative life in its death and revival. Mention can also be made of the influential book *From Religion to Philosophy* (London, 1912) by the Cambridge philosopher F. M. Cornford, whose work also has strong ties with Durkheim’s sociology. Cf. also the book *Zeus* (I, 1914; II, 1925), by A. B. Cook, who belongs to this same school.
  - 3 The elements belonging to the proto-Greek religion undoubtedly included the original patriarchal service of Zeus, the sky god, of Poseidon, the sea god, of Athena, as a household goddess, and of Hestia, the goddess of the hearth, and also the cult of the forefathers. Cf. Nilsson, *op. cit.*, pp. 313 ff.

sophical thought, the formless confusion of Chaos<sup>1</sup> arises first, and thereafter mother earth (Gaia) and the underworld. Simultaneously, there appears *eros* or sexual love, the principle of the divine stream of life and the driving force in the development from chaos to cosmos. From the marriage of Gaia and Uranus, the first sky god, come Cronus and Rhea. The latter, in turn, bring forth Zeus and his two brothers, who subsequently dethrone Cronus.

All of these attempts at synthesis were doomed, however, for three reasons:

- (1) The new culture religion ignored the deepest problems of life and death. The Olympian deities offered protection to man only so long as he was strong and healthy. They withdrew themselves when the dark power of *Anankē* or *Moirai*, against which even Zeus, the supreme sky god, was powerless, sounded the death knell over those who were under their protection. In the words of Homer, “Not even the gods can fend it away from a man they love, when once the destructive doom of leveling death has fastened upon him.”<sup>2</sup>
- (2) As a mere culture religion, the religion of Olympus in its mythological, Homeric form clashed with the ethical standards of the Greek people. For although the morality of the Greeks stood under the protection and sanction of the Olympian gods, the latter themselves, as Homer presented them, lived “beyond good and evil.” They engaged in adultery and theft, and mythology glorified deceit, if only it was contrived “in a divine manner.”
- (3) The resplendent divine assemblage of Olympus was too far removed from the ordinary people. In the historical form in which it was cast, the Homeric world of the gods was appropriate to Greek civilization only during the feudal age of Mycenaean knighthood, and it lost any real contact with society at large as soon as the role of the knight had been played out. After this, it could find support only in the power of the Greek *polis*. It was precisely during the critical transition period from the era of Mycenaean knighthood to the Persian wars, when the Greek *polis* endured its crucial test in splendid fashion, that the religious crisis arose which Nilsson characterizes as the conflict between the ecstatic (mystical) and legalistic tendencies.<sup>3</sup> The former, which came to expression in the

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1 It appears unacceptable to me that the word “chaos” in Hesiod (Theog. 116) should mean “gaping, immeasurable empty space.” An “empty space” cannot procreate; but that is exactly what Hesiod’s chaos does (*ibid.*, p.123).

2 Homer, *Odyssey* (Lattimore translation; New York, 1967), p. 57.

3 Nilsson, *op. cit.*, pp. 578 ff.

so-called Dionysian and Orphic movements, which I shall discuss later, was a revival and reformation of the suppressed older religion,<sup>1</sup> while the latter found its typical representative in Hesiod as a defender of the newer religion of culture.

For these reasons, then, it is understandable that the Greeks, while honoring the Olympian deities as the official gods of the *polis*, should have held fast in their private lives to the ancient religions of nature and of life, and that the deeper religious impulses of the masses should have drawn them especially to the mystery cultus, where the problems of life and death stood at the center. Already in the sixth century before Christ, the culture religion, in the mythological form given it by Homer, had been seriously undermined. The criticism to which it was subjected in intellectual circles became increasingly bold, and the Sophist movement, the “Greek Enlightenment,” scoffed at it with relative impunity, even though there was a certain amount of reaction which took the form of trials against atheism.

Nevertheless, the *dialectical religious ground-motive* which had been engendered in the Greek consciousness by the encounter between the older nature religions and the Olympian culture religion continued to live on, and after the influence of mythology had been undermined, it was able to undergo modification in philosophical circles, clothing itself in beliefs and ideas that were more appropriate to the religious needs of the time. This dialectical ground-motive, which had come to expression as early as Homer and Hesiod in the opposition between the dark *Moirā* and the rational power of Zeus, retained the imprint of this conflict between the eternal flow of all forms, an irrational principle which remained bound to the earth, and the “supermundane” rational and immortal form principle, which is not subject to the stream of becoming.

The matter principle of formless fluidity (which is essentially oriented to the conception of the bio-organic aspect of temporal reality as being “animated” or endowed with soul), in its indissoluble connection with *Anankē*, the threatening, unpredictable power of fate, gives to Greek thought a typically obscure, mystical cast which is foreign to modern, natural scientific thinking. In contrast, the form principle (which in essence is oriented to the *cultural aspect* of temporal reality) continually directs the mind to the supersensible and imperishable form of reality, which does not allow itself to be grasped in a mere concept, but is rather to be intuited in a non-sensible, luminous figure or form. This too is a primeval Greek trait. The Olympian deities were held to be imperishable, luminous fig-

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<sup>1</sup> Concerning this religious reaction, cf. Albert Rivaud, *Le problème du devenir et la notion de la matière dans la philosophie grecque depuis les origines jusqu'à Théophraste* (Paris, 1906), chapter X; cf. also Otto Kern, *Die Religion der Griechen*, II (Berlin, 1935), 182.

ures beyond the reach of sense perception. In like manner, the Greek could only conceive that which exists immutably in a shining non-sensible form.

That this form principle is related to the theoretical *intuition of forms* comes to clear expression in the Greek terms *eidos* (εἶδος) and *idea* (ιδέα), which play a very important role in Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy. Both of these terms are derived from the stem *IΔ* (ιδεῖν, “to see, to intuit”). They cannot be understood apart from the Greek form motive. The same applies to the Greek idea of theory (*theōria*; θεωρία) to which I shall repeatedly turn in the course of my investigation. *Theōria* too continually involves the activity of observation, which attempts to apprehend the concept in a non-sensible form or figure.

Within the religious ground-motive of Greek thought, however, the principles of form and matter are unbreakably interrelated, in the sense that they mutually presuppose each other. In their dialectical interrelationship they determine the Greek conception of the “nature” (*physis*) of things. At one point, this might well be looked for in the “ensouled” fluid continuum of the matter principle, or, at another point, exclusively in the supersensible rational form-principle. For the most part, however, it is sought in a dialectical synthesis of the two. This dialectical ground-motive leads Greek thought into true polar antitheses and causes it to diverge into movements that seem to oppose each other radically. These, however, manifest their underlying affinity within this ground-motive itself. The Greek intellectual community was rooted in this ground-motive, and for this reason it is quite impossible to understand the history of Greek philosophy in its uniqueness without having come to grips with it.

In this first volume I shall present a survey of this development up to and including Plato. My critical investigation of Scholastic philosophy in the second volume will also present the opportunity of examining later Greek and, in particular, Aristotelian philosophy in the light of the Greek ground-motive. In keeping with the overall design of this work, the anthropological questions will stand at the center of inquiry. Thereby, the transcendental critique of Western thought, which I initiated in my *Philosophy of the Law-Idea* (Volume I, part II), will be brought to a provisional completion.

*b. The Scriptural Ground-Motive of the Christian Religion:  
Creation, the Fall into Sin, and Redemption*

The second ground-motive is that of *creation, the fall into sin, and redemption through Christ Jesus in the communion of the Holy Spirit*. Tying in with Old Testament Judaism, the Christian religion introduced this theme into Western thought as a new communal religious motive, which, already in its doctrine of creation, placed itself in diametrical op-

position to the ground-motive of ancient philosophy.

As the authentic revelation of God's Word, this motive is distinguished by its *integral* and *radical* character. That is, it penetrates to the *root* of created reality. As the Creator, God reveals himself as the absolute and integral origin of all things. No self-sufficient, equally primordial power stands over against him. For this reason, no expression of a dualistic principle of origin can be found within the created cosmos.

In the powerful words of the 139th Psalm, this integral character of the Scriptural creation motive is expressed in an unsurpassed manner:

Where can I go from your Spirit?  
Where can I flee from your presence?  
If I go up to the heavens, you are there;  
if I make my bed in the depths, you  
are there.

If I rise on the wings of the dawn,  
if I settle on the far side of the sea,  
even there your hand will guide me,  
your right hand will hold me fast.

If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me  
and the light become night around me,"  
even the darkness will not be dark to you;  
the night will shine like the day,  
for darkness is as light to you. (NIV)

Truly, the message of this psalm stands at the antipodes of the Greek dualism of the form and matter motives.

In the revelation that he created humankind after his own image, God disclosed humankind to itself in the fundamental religious unity of its creaturely existence, where the entire meaning of the temporal cosmos had been comprehensively focused. According to God's plan of creation, the integral Origin of all things finds its creaturely image in the human heart. The human heart is thus the integral, individual-spiritual fundamental unity of all the functions and structures of temporal reality. Drawn together at the point where human life has its spiritual center, these functions and structures were supposed to be directed towards the absolute Origin, as human beings completely surrender themselves in loving service to God and their neighbor. This revelation had the effect of cutting off at its root the religious dualism of the Greek form-matter motive, which comes to its clearest expression in the religious antithesis found in Greek anthropology between a material body and a theoretical mental substance having the character of pure form.

Inseparably related to the revelation of creation is that of the fall into sin. In the dialectical ground-motives sin has no place in its radical Scrip-

tural sense. Indeed, it cannot play a role there, because one can understand it properly only as he is possessed of the genuine, radical self-knowledge that is the fruit of divine revelation. Within the religious consciousness of the Greeks, the only thing that obtained recognition was the conflict between the principles of form and matter. Modern humanism simply replaced this opposition with that between the world of sense, or “nature,” which was ruled by the mechanical law of causation, and the “rational autonomous freedom” of human personality. Even in its more profound Kantian conception, the description of this conflict could reach no further than the acknowledgment of an evil moral inclination in man to allow his actions to be guided by his sensual passions rather than by the moral law. In neither case, however, is the opposition one that occurs in the religious root of man’s life. In both it takes place only in the temporal ramifications of human existence, where it is merely absolutized in a religious sense. As a consequence, the sense of guilt could not avoid being dialectical in character, consisting in a depreciation of one side of the cosmos in favor of a contrasting, deified side. We shall see later on that the Romanistic conception also eliminated the radicality of the fall by conceiving of sin as nothing more than the loss of a “supernatural gift of grace.”

In contrast, the Word of God in its revelation concerning the fall into sin pierces through to the root, the religious center, of human nature. As apostasy from God, the fall took place in the integral center, the heart and soul, of human existence. As alienation from the absolute Source of life, it was spiritual death. The fall, therefore, was radical, and precisely for this reason it affected the temporal cosmos in its entirety, since the latter is brought to its fundamental religious unity only in man. Every conception that denies this radical meaning of the fall, even though it retains the word “radical,” as in Kant’s ethical teaching concerning the “radical evil” in human nature, stands diametrically opposed to the ground-motive of Scripture and does not know man, nor God, nor the abysmal depth of sin.

The revelation of the fall into sin, on its part, has no room for an autonomous principle of origin standing over against the Creator. Sin is unable, therefore, to introduce an ultimate dualism into the created cosmos. Satan himself is merely a creature who in his created freedom voluntarily apostatized from God.

The Divine Word, whom the Gospel of John declares to have created all things, was made flesh in Christ Jesus. Thus the Word entered into both the root and the temporal ramifications, into the soul and body, of human nature. Just for this reason the redemption accomplished by the Word is a radical one. It was the regeneration of man and thereby of the entire created temporal cosmos, which had been religiously concentrated in man. In his creative Word, through whom all things have been made and who has become flesh in the person of the Redeemer, God also preserves the fallen

cosmos through his common grace (*gratia communis*) until the coming of the final judgment. At that time, the redeemed creation will be freed from its participation in the sinful root of human nature and will be allowed to shine in a higher perfection. Then the righteousness of God will radiate even through Satan and his kingdom in confirmation of the absolute sovereignty of the Creator.

Thus, as long as it is understood in its pure, Scriptural sense, this religious ground-motive in no way manifests in itself a dialectical, dualistic character. When it entered into the Hellenistic world of thought, however, it found itself threatened from every direction.

Already by the first centuries of its existence, the Christian church was forced to engage in a life or death struggle in order to prevent the Greek ground-motive from overrunning and conquering that of the Christian religion. In this conflict there was the formulation of the dogma of the oneness of the divine nature (*homoousia*) of the Father and the Son, and shortly thereafter, that of both of these with the Holy Spirit. Moreover, the dangerous influence of Gnosticism within Christian thought was brought to an end. Before this time, the so-called Apologists as well as the Alexandrian school of Clement and Origen had indulged in a form of *Logos* speculation borrowed from the Judaic-Hellenistic synthesis philosophy of Philo. In its conception of the Divine Word (*Logos*) as a demi-god, this line of thinking gave expression to a fundamental denaturing of the Christian ground-motive and transformed the Christian religion into a higher moral doctrine (in the case of the Alexandrians, into a moralistically-tinted religious-philosophical system), wherein a great variety of influences from the ground-motive of Greek philosophy came into play. The Gnostics as well as Marcion (second century A. D.) also attempted to divorce the Old and the New Testaments, and it was above all through its preservation of the unbreakable unity between these that the Christian church under God's direction was able at this time to conquer the religious dualism, introduced by Gnosticism, which drove a wedge between creation and redemption and thereby reverted to a dualistic principle of origin.

In the orthodox Patristics, philosophic thought then reached its high point with Aurelius Augustine, who placed his stamp on Christian philosophy until the thirteenth century and who continued as an important influence even after that time. No one was yet in a position, however, to achieve a sufficiently independent expression of the Christian ground-motive within philosophical thought itself. In particular, there existed at this time great unclarity concerning the relationship of philosophy to dogmatic theology, because the inner connection of philosophic thought to the religious ground-motives had not yet been discovered. The Christian character of philosophy was sought in its relationship of subordination to

dogmatic theology,<sup>1</sup> a relationship that was so conceived that all philosophical issues were treated within a scientific theological framework. In this way, Christian philosophy (*philosophia christiana*) and Christian theology came to be identified, and under the influence of the Greek idea of *theōria*, the threat repeatedly arose of even identifying this theology with the Christian religion. Later on I shall deal with all of these points at length, and in so doing I shall turn my transcendental critique on Christian thought itself.

Under these circumstances, there was no objection to taking over lock, stock, and barrel many important elements from ancient philosophy, for the ground-motive of the latter had not yet been clearly discerned as to its pagan character. Thus theologians resorted to adapting or accommodating heathen thought to the doctrine of the Christian church. As we shall observe later on, this led of necessity to an uncritical reception of a large amount of heathen conceptual matter into Christian philosophy. In turn, theology too was infected at more than one point by the uncritical adoption of Greek philosophical doctrines.

In Augustine's thought, however, at least the Christian ground-motive was on the whole preserved intact. Here then there is no question of a standpoint of a truly religious synthesis, which deliberately aims to unite the Scriptural and the Greek ground-motives.<sup>2</sup>

c. *The Romanistic Scholastic Synthesis Motive of Nature and Grace*

The attempt to bridge the radical antithesis between the Greek and the Christian ground-motives led in the period of the ecclesiastically unified culture under the sway of Romanism to a new basic dialectical theme, that of nature and grace. It is this motive that placed its distinctive imprint on medieval Scholasticism. With its internally unresolved dualism it also continued to dominate reformational thought to a significant extent. That was the case even though the Reformation had overcome it in principle by returning to the Scriptural doctrine of the radical meaning for human nature of the fall into sin, which had also been defended by Augustine, and to the confession of justification by faith alone. Indeed,

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- 1 Here we may already observe that the view that philosophy is the handmaiden of theology (*ancilla theologiae*) is nothing else than a transposition of the Aristotelian concept of the "science of the end of all things and of the good" (i. e., metaphysical theology), as the queen of the sciences, which "...the other sciences, like slave-women, may not even contradict..." Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, B 996 b 10: "For inasmuch as it is most architectonic and authoritative and the other sciences, like slave-women, may not even contradict it, the science of the *end* and of the *good* is of the nature of Wisdom (for the other things are for the sake of the end)." Aristotle, *Metaphysics* (tr. W. D. Ross; Oxford, 1908; second ed., 1928).
- 2 In this regard, Augustine's use of the terms "nature" and "grace" is not decisive. He preserves intact the integral and radical character of the Scriptural ground-motive.

the reformational theology of Luther and especially that of Calvin took great initial strides toward freeing the Scriptural ground-motive from its entanglement with scholastic philosophy; nevertheless, there remained important scholastic remnants in Reformation theology. And since, as I shall demonstrate, theology as a science cannot do without philosophical foundations, and since the way to an inner reformation of philosophy certainly had not yet been found, the “school philosophy” soon regained its influence under Melancthon. As a consequence, there arose beside that of Rome a Protestant brand of Scholasticism, which shared with its Roman sister the dialectical synthesis motive of nature and grace, even though it gave to this motive a new twist, which was more adapted to the theology of the Reformation.

The dialectical and internally dualistic character of this new ground-motive is latent in the attempt to reconcile the Greek (in particular the Aristotelian) conception of the nature (*physis*) of things, which was completely determined by the dualistic form-matter theme, with the Scriptural conception of the nature of created reality, which is based on the divine order of creation. In the scholastic views of man, this motive came to pregnant expression in the notion that the relationship of the human soul and body is that between an *anima rationalis*, as substantial form, and a material body. With its affinities to the dialectical form-matter motive, this conception left no room for insight into the fundamental religious unity of created human existence. Neither could it be harmonized, in its consistent elaboration, with the radical meaning of the fall into sin and of redemption.

As long as this ground-motive controlled philosophy, it continually led to the appearance of typically dialectical tensions within Christian thought. At one time, the latter would be driven in a dangerous pagan direction, which ascribed the primacy to nature in its typically scholastic sense; at another time, it would be driven in a no less perilous mystical direction, which to the neglect of the creation motive identified nature with sin and sought to flee nature in a mystical experience of grace. Yet a third possibility was an outright dualism, which ascribed a complete independence to nature and wanted to make a radical separation between nature and grace. In this process, the way was once again opened in Christian thought for the influence of Gnosticism, as well as for the semi-Pauline theory of Marcion with its dualistic distinction between the imperfect Creator God of the Old Testament and the perfect Redeemer God of the New.

As long as this ground-motive itself was maintained, it was only the Roman ecclesiastical authorities who were in a position to keep this religious pseudosynthesis alive, by officially condemning “heresies” in the scholastic philosophy. In this effort, they found their greatest support in the solution offered by Thomas Aquinas, who posited nature as the autonomous but subordinate “preamble” of grace or supernature. Further, the mutual

relationship between these was conceived as that between matter and form. Thus Thomas came to his solution with the aid of the same device that had already done service in the Greek intellectual community to bind together two antagonistic religious ground-motives.

In the second volume of this work, this scholastic synthesis, as it worked itself out within the philosophical thought which it governed, will assume an important place and will be subjected to a transcendental critique. In the present connection our aim is only to obtain a clear insight into the nature of the ground-motive itself. To do this, however, it will be necessary for us to embark on a more detailed investigation of the relationship of what is truly *religious* dialectic to what is called *theoretical* dialectic. This inquiry, in turn, will inevitably drive us to examine more closely the relationship of the synthesis motive of nature and grace to that of form and matter.

*d. The Modern Humanistic Ground-Motive of Nature and Freedom*

Finally, the fourth major ground-motive is that of *nature* and *freedom*. It arose at the time of the Renaissance out of the modern humanistic religion of personality and of science. This motive sought gradually to assimilate the three older ground-motives into itself, by subjecting them to a complete metamorphosis.

This motive first appeared in Western thought in a specific form at a particular historical juncture. The internal dialectic of the Romanistic synthesis of nature and grace had led the thought of Late-Medieval Scholasticism into an open dualism between the Christian religion and natural life. Moreover, the ecclesiastically unified culture, which had succeeded in bringing all of the spheres of temporal life under the aegis of the church, had begun to disintegrate. Then there arose a religion of the human personality, which gradually secularized the Christian motive of “freedom in Christ Jesus” into a new ideal of personality. This ideal culminated in the idea of the absolute *autonomy* or self-legislation of the human personality, centered in its reason. It turned with revolutionary fervor against any and all authoritarian restrictions imposed on human thought by the church or by the Divine Word-revelation. Within this personality ideal, the creation motive was also secularized. Here it came to signify the domination of reality in its entire extent by a new, “creative” method of thought, which stood in contrast to the purely intuitive approach of Greek and scholastic philosophy.

Hand in hand with this new *freedom motive* of the humanistic ideal of personality, there developed a new conception of nature. This differed both from the Greek conception of *physis* and from the scholastic view of nature in a most basic fashion. Here nature was viewed as the macro-

cosmic reflection of the human personality, as a cosmos that offered infinite possibilities for the deployment of man's creative powers. Nature was emancipated both from the grip of the dark matter-motive of Greek thought and from the Christian motive of the fall into sin. It was regarded as independent of all supernatural powers and influences.

In Renaissance philosophy, Giordano Bruno deified this novel view of nature as "nature naturating" (*natura naturans*). Renaissance art also brought it to clear expression. When shortly thereafter Galileo and Isaac Newton laid the foundations of modern mathematical natural science, thus pointing the way to the control of natural phenomena by means of capturing them in mathematical formulations, within an absolutely determined network of causes, the humanistic personality ideal seized on this new scientific method with true religious zeal and elevated it to the position of the classical ideal of science, which aimed to reconstruct reality in all its aspects according to its own standards. At first this science ideal constructed a new metaphysics. This vaunted its ability to grasp the true nature of reality with the help of mathematically oriented natural scientific thought, placing itself thereby in sharp opposition to the Aristotelian-scholastic metaphysics of substantial forms. Furthermore, even after this metaphysics collapsed under the weight of the criticisms of David Hume and Kant, the deterministic ideal of science continued to assert its right of domain over the whole of nature.

From the beginning, this new science ideal, which was spawned by the personality ideal itself, came into dialectical tension with the latter, a tension which since Kant has generally been described as that between *nature* and *freedom*. According to this view, "nature" is to be seen as reality conceived, in accordance with the deterministic ideal of science, as a closed chain of cause and effect, which comes to expression in "natural law-conformity" or "natural necessity." "Freedom," in contrast, is the personality ideal of free, autonomous self-determination. The latter cannot tolerate the determinism with respect to human activity which is claimed by the natural sciences; it requires that personality govern its own conduct in accordance with norms or rules of propriety which are established by autonomous reason.

Under the influence of the classical ideal of science, Kant continued to view this freedom motive in a rationalistic and individualistic fashion. In Romanticism and within the sphere of what is called "absolute idealism," however, it was given an irrationalistic and universalistic (transpersonalistic) turn. The critical boundary line which Kant had drawn between nature and freedom was no longer respected. Indeed, the freedom motive forced the classical science ideal to retreat even on the terrain of nature. The attempt was made to discover hidden traces of freedom even within nature itself and to arrive at a dialectical synthesis of the two opposing re-

ligious motives by the route of theoretical dialectic.

In its new irrationalistic and universalistic form, the freedom motive also gave birth to a new science ideal, one that turned away from mathematical natural science and took its cue from the science of history. Here the concern was no longer to discover universal laws which would make it possible for one completely to determine and govern the course of phenomena; rather, it was to obtain an understanding of the individual, unrepeatable phenomenon, in terms of its historical and super-individual context, according to a method appropriate to the human sciences (a *geisteswissenschaftliche* method).

In attempting to grasp everything in its historical determination, this new science ideal took its point of departure in a historicistic view of reality. Just like the classical science ideal, however, it eventually came into conflict with the freedom motive which had given it birth. In its historicism it destroyed the belief in the eternal validity of the ideas of freedom and humanity. The dialectical pseudo-synthesis which freedom idealism had made between nature and freedom thus dissolved once again into a polar antithesis, and this ultimately led to the undermining of the belief in the value of human personality itself. Historicism, disengaged from freedom idealism, then moved in a positivistic direction, and for a time it allied itself with the evolutionary approach of Darwinism and with modern sociology as the latter took its cue from the natural sciences. In the twentieth century, however, as historicism extended its influence still further, it even undermined the belief in evolution. As a final consequence, both the ideal of science and the ideal of personality became involved in a process of religious uprooting.

In this entire development, the dialectical character of the humanistic ground-motive comes into sharp relief. Until the end of the previous century it had undergirded the thought of the Western community at large. Through its absolute supremacy in modern culture, it had also impressed its conceptual pattern in many ways upon Catholic and reformational thought, at least insofar as these intellectual currents did not want to have themselves banned from the scientific community.

Since in the first volume of my *Philosophy of the Law-Idea* I have already presented such a lengthy analysis of the dialectic of this ground-motive as it has come to expression in the history of modern Western thought, I shall confine myself at the appropriate place in this work to presenting a brief survey in which this development is summarized as incisively as possible. At the same time, this will shed additional light on the causes of the present crisis, which has affected the very foundations of modern philosophy.

In the present context, I need only point out that, after it had secularized

the ground-motive of the Christian religion, the humanistic ground-motive gradually attempted to assimilate both the Greek and scholastic ground-motives as well. For example, both Leibniz and Kant made use of the form-matter motive in this way. Both of these humanistic thinkers, furthermore, introduced the motive of nature and grace into their philosophical systems. As I shall later demonstrate in detail, however, both of these motives were deprived thereby of their original religious content and were transformed into mere intellectual schemata in the service of the humanistic ground-motive of nature and freedom.

## 2. The Relationship between Religious and Theoretical Dialectic<sup>1</sup>

### a. *The Communal Character of the Religious Ground-Motives and the Use of the Critical Method in the Investigation of the History of Philosophy*

None of the above ground-motives is intrinsically theoretical or scientific. On the contrary, they are all religious in character. That is to say, they have an absolutely central meaning for the whole of life. They exert, therefore, as we have already noted, an influence at the heart of the cultural development and of the entire spiritual and intellectual structure of the West, far beyond the range of philosophic thought. They are, moreover, genuinely communal, for they control the outlook on thought and life of the individual, regardless of whether that person is aware of it or not.

If there is to be a truly critical method for the scientific investigation of the history of Western philosophy, it is above all necessary to trace these four ground-motives, both in their original meaning and in the complicated formal interlacements in which they became involved in their historical development. The philosophical problematics are determined by these ground-motives, and, as I shall demonstrate in detail in my transcendental critique of philosophic thought, any attempt to extricate them from the latter is uncritical and unscientific. Any such attempt could never make it possible to describe the history of philosophy as a purely scientific development; it would only result in one's imposing on an earlier philosophical period the religious ground-motive controlling one's own thinking, whose significance one had not yet understood. In fact, one would have effectively closed the door thereby to a correct understanding of that

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<sup>1</sup> In this connection, see my essay "De vier religieuze grondthema's in den ontwikkelingsgang van het wijsgerig denken van het Avondland: Een bijdrage tot bepaling van de verhouding tusschen theoretische en religieuze dialectiek," *Philosophia Reformata*, VI (1941), 161-179.

period.<sup>1</sup>

b. *The Religious Ground-Motives and the Modern Historicistic Pattern of Thought*

At this point I must hasten to warn against a basic misunderstanding. It is indeed true that modern historicistic thought is readily inclined to admit that each period in the history of philosophic thought must be interpreted in terms of its own ground-motive. It will, however, conceive of these religious ground-motives themselves as dynamic forces of a merely historical-psychological kind, which are accessible as such to theoretical-scientific investigation, free from any religious bias.<sup>2</sup> It might even come to the insight, along with Wilhelm Dilthey, one of the most brilliant and perceptive trailblazers of this school of thought, that "...the religious life is the constant substratum of intellectual development, not a passing phase in the mental development of humankind."<sup>3</sup> Thereupon it will attempt to understand this religious life itself merely in terms of a "fundamental lived experience" (*Erlebnis*), however, in which humanity through its entire course of historical development had the experience of its "personal freedom over against the confines of nature," the experience of "guilt and conscience," and of "the contrast pervading all areas of the inner life between the imperfect and the perfect, the transitory and the eternal, together with the longing of man for the latter." This entire religious lived experience was then thought to be founded on the consciousness of an "absolute dependence of the sub-

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1 This applies, for example, to a widely accepted interpretation of Greek philosophy, which views it in terms of the modern humanistic ground-motive of nature and freedom. Cf. the discussion of B. J. H. Ovink's final work, *Philosophie und Sophistik* (The Hague, 1940), in my essay "Een tweegesprek met Prof. Ovink over dogmatische en critische wijsbegeerte: Naar aanleiding van *Philosophie und Sophistik* door Prof. Dr. B. J. H. Ovink," *Gereformeerde Theologische Tijdschrift* (42nd year, no. 5), pp. 209-227.

2 The positivistic sociological school of Émile Durkheim, of course, will attempt to explain these "psychical dynamic forces," which it sees at work in religion, in terms of the historical organization of social life. It too will readily concede, however, that these religious dynamic forces are fundamental historical-social powers, which also determine the direction of thought. Professor Cornford, whom I have already mentioned, also understands Greek philosophy essentially in this way, as "the analysis of religious material." *op. cit.*, p. 125.

3 "das religiöse Leben der dauernde Untergrund der intellektuellen Entwicklung ist, nicht eine vorübergehende Phase im Sinnen der Menschheit...." Wilhelm Dilthey, *Einleitung in die Geisteswissenschaften. Gesammelte Schriften*, I (Leipzig/ Berlin, 1923), 38. (English version by translator.)

ject.”<sup>1</sup> On this supposition, the various ground-motives could only be the historical manifestation of this original religious lived experience, which allegedly resides at the foundation of the entire historical process of development.

By this line of reasoning, however, Dilthey actually does away with the religious ground-motives in their true sense. In spite of his many fine observations in his exposition of the development of Western thought since the Greeks, Dilthey does not give adequate account of these religious ground-motives as to their content and their significance for this development. The “psychological analysis” of “fundamental lived experience,” which constitutes Dilthey’s point of departure, completely overlooks the fact that in their concrete meaning, all of the “experiences” which he ascribes to the content of this feeling are entirely dependent on the religious ground-motives themselves. The latter, in turn, being in themselves neither psychological nor historical in nature, lie at the foundation of every scientific psychological analysis. The concrete religious understanding of such things as “personal freedom” and the “confines of nature,” “guilt” and “conscience,” “perfection,” “transitoriness,” and “eternity” is in the last analysis determined by a religious ground-motive, which controls from its very center one’s entire perspective on life and thought. For the consciousness of the Greek these were something radically other than for Christian consciousness, which lives out of the ground-motive of the divine Word-revelation. Furthermore, the Roman, scholastic understanding of these also differed, in the most basic way, from that of modern humanism. In other words, it is precisely in the central sphere of religion, which transcends temporal life, that the antithesis between attitudes concerning life and thought becomes absolute and admits of no synthesis.

c. *The Fundamental Critical Problem in the Study of the History of Western Philosophy. The Intellectual Community of the West*

This state of affairs gave rise to an extremely difficult and complex problem, which confronts any truly critical study of the history of philosophy. The religious ground-motives which have controlled the course of development of Western philosophy introduce truly radical caesuras into it, because they themselves are not merely historical or psychological but are rather transcendent and religious in nature. If we are not to cut the ground out from under a truly scientific investigation

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p.137: “Nun sind Erfahrungen solcher Art die Freiheit des Menschen, Gewissen und Schuld, alsdann der alle Gebiete des inneren Lebens durchziehende Gegensatz des Unvollkommenen und Vollkommenen, des Vergänglichen und Ewigen sowie die Sehnsucht des Menschen nach dem letzteren. Und zwar sind diese inneren Erfahrungen Bestandteile des religiösen Lebens. Dasselbe umfasst aber zugleich das Bewusstsein einer unbedingten Abhängigkeit des Subjekts.”

of the history of philosophy, however, we must hold fast to the idea of a common and universally valid *structure* of theoretical thought, as well as to the existence of a *historical* community of *patterns* of thought in the West, and a *historical continuity* in the development of Western philosophy. How can we hold on to both these discontinuities and these continuities without falling into internal contradiction?

In order to give a satisfying answer to this question, I should have to proceed immediately to an exposition of my transcendental critique of theoretical thought in general and of philosophical thought in particular, as it was already developed in germ in my three-volume *Philosophy of the Law-Idea*.<sup>1</sup> The design of this present work requires, however, that I postpone this critique to a later point. At that juncture, I shall be in a position to elucidate the necessity of the central role of the religious ground-motives, by way of an analysis of the structure of theoretical thought itself.

d. *The Scholastic Approach to This Problem. The Natural Community of Thought Based on the Autonomy of Natural Reason*

In the present context, I shall confine myself to warning against a frivolous evasion of the problem I have formulated. Thomistic Scholasticism, which is rooted in the ground-motive of nature and grace, thrusts this problem aside with an appeal to the autonomy of natural reason. This reason is judged to be capable of achieving insight into the universally valid truth of nature, independently of religion. Thomistic Scholasticism takes its point of departure, therefore, in a “natural community of thought,” which is not susceptible to influence from differences of religious standpoint. This particular view of the problem, however, is completely determined by the Romanistic ground-motive. Scholasticism seeks a foundation for this natural community of thought in a metaphysics. Modern humanism, which just as definitely takes its point of departure in an “autonomous natural intellectual community of mankind,” rejects this Scholastic metaphysics as a matter of principle. The upshot of the matter is that the scholastic conception of the autonomy of natural reason differs in a most basic way both from that of the Greeks and from that of modern humanism. At a later point I shall demonstrate in detail how this fundamental difference is once again completely determined by the respective religious ground-motives.

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<sup>1</sup> *Editorial note:* Dooyeweerd consistently made the claim that this work, *De Wisbegeerte der Wetsidee* (Amsterdam, 1935-1936), contained a transcendental critique, even though it was not formally elaborated. A version of the transcendental critique, in its formal elaboration, appears in the English edition (revised and enlarged) of the above work, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* (4 vols.; Amsterdam/ Philadelphia, 1953-1957; The Collected Works of Herman Dooyeweerd, A Series, The Edwin Mellen Press, 1997).

e. *Dilthey's So-Called Hermeneutical Method with Respect to This Problem. The "Fundamental Religious Sense" of Humanity and "historisch freischwebende Intelligenz"*<sup>1</sup>

In the recent crisis of foundations of the Western intellectual community, the historicistic way of thinking, with an air of scientific neutrality, has also claimed to occupy a position above the diversity of philosophical movements and to be capable of placing itself within every standpoint in an unbiased manner with the aid of an "empathetic hermeneutic." To this a truly critical approach must of necessity respond by inquiring as to the foundation on which this method itself is based.

Once Dilthey's conception of "the religious lived experience of humanity" has been unmasked as a residue of the classical humanistic idea of a "natural religion of humanity," an idea that was completely determined by the ground-motive of humanism, the vicious circle involved in this effort to overcome "intellectual dogmatism" comes into sharp relief. If one concedes with Dilthey that the religious life is the constant substratum of intellectual development, one can no longer share this thinker's expectation that the historical manner of thought "will free scientific thinking from the last remnants of its dogmatic subjection to religious prejudgments." For to accomplish this the thought of the scientific historian would have to be capable of assuming a position above the religious ground-motives, which as a matter of fact determine the entire point of departure and direction of this thought. In fact, if scientific thought cannot even disengage itself from its *historical* fetters, and if even the mere search for a "historisch freischwebende Intelligenz"<sup>2</sup> must be dismissed from the outset as an impossibility, how much less will scientific thought be able to elevate itself above its religious ground-motive, which determines its entire point of departure and direction!

Dilthey seeks a way out of this difficulty by conjuring up an "impersonal cosmic-historical consciousness of humanity," which is supposed to be rooted in a religious lived experience that belongs to one by nature. By entering into this consciousness and abandoning his own individual historical determination, a thinker is supposedly able to give an unbiased interpretation of the cultural development reflected in it, in terms of its unique cosmic life-center. This "impersonal historical consciousness of cultural development," however, which allegedly merely comes to

1 *Translator's note:* Intelligence "freely floating" with respect to history, i. e., historically unbound or undetermined.

2 I have borrowed this term, with a slight variation, from Karl Mannheim's *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge* (Second German edition of: *Ideologie und Utopia*, 1930, p.126; English translation, New York, 1968). The book itself speaks of a "sozial freischwebende Intelligenz," but it means thereby an intelligence that has freed itself of all social-historical determinations.

self-reflection in the critical-historical manner of thought, is a quintessential metaphysical construct. This is indeed the case, even though Dilthey himself regards metaphysics as the great obstacle to the development of truly critical thinking. This construction is nothing else than Hegel's metaphysical idea of reason in history (*Vernunft in der Geschichte*), transposed into the framework of a historicistic life-philosophy (*Lebensphilosophie*).<sup>1</sup>

f. *The Absoluteness of the Religious Antithesis*

We are still faced with the problem described above, the problem of how a Western community of thought is possible, in the face of the profound divergence of the religious ground-motives which have governed its development. In addition, we cannot get away from the fact that there is an *absolute antithesis* between the Christian ground-motive and two of the others. There is an absolute antithesis between the ground-motive of the Christian religion and that of the Greek religious consciousness. This antithesis holds just as well between the Christian and the humanistic ground-motives, even though in its process of formation the latter passed through the former. For its part, the Romanistic basic theme preserved at least to a degree its connection with the divine Word-revelation. In the face of this divergence and especially in the face of the absolute antithesis between the Christian and the non-Christian ground-motives, what is it that guarantees the existence of a community of philosophic thought in Western civilization?

g. *Is There in the West a Religious Intellectual Community of a Dialectical Kind? Hegel's Conception*

One could ask here, first of all, whether the radical religious antithesis does not presuppose a certain community in which there is the possibility of mutual *religious understanding*, apart from which indeed such an antithesis could not even exist. This community, then, would have to be a dialectical one, in which the various ground-motives set themselves over against one another in order to enter into mutual conflict. And once one conceded the necessity of such a dialectical religious community, embracing the whole of Western thought, he would be faced at once with the analogy of the dialectic within it to *theoretical dialectic*, which attempts, of necessity, to bring a theoretical antithesis into a higher synthesis. In this analogy, the mutually opposed antithetical moments appear merely as parts which have been separated in a purely theoretical manner from a higher totality, which embraces both and thus can be absolutely identified with neither. Indeed, these opposed aspects are each other's correlates, and they are therefore incapable of excluding each

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<sup>1</sup> See my *Recht en historie: Referaat voor de drie-en-twintigste Wetenschappelijke Samenkomst der Vrije Universiteit*, July 13, 1938 (Assen, 1938), pp. 18 ff.

other in any absolute sense. This kind of solution to the fundamental problem I have posed lies completely in the line of the dialectical thinking of Georg W. F. Hegel.

To be sure, this great thinker knows nothing of religious ground-motives as I have presented them. In his system, as is well known, religion is the second stage in the development of “absolute spirit” (*Geist*), that is, the level of representation (*Vorstellung*). The first stage of this development, art, is that of intuition (*Anschauung*), whereas the third form, philosophy, in which the former two are brought into a higher synthesis, is that of the concept (*Begriff*).

In line with his theoretical dialectic, however, Hegel now attempts to construct three principal forms of religion, as the three necessary stages of development of representation, which absolute spirit assumes within human consciousness. These are: 1) the religion of nature; 2) the religion of spiritual individuality (*geistige Individualität*), which among the Jews comes to expression as sublimity (*Erhabenheit*), among the Greeks as beauty (*Schönheit*), and among the Romans as utility or practical understanding (*Zweckmässigkeit*); 3) the absolute, or revealed, Christian religion, in which God appears as that which He *is*, that is to say, the Absolute Spirit, which in accordance with the basic dialectical principle must be a Trinity.

In this Trinity, the religions of nature and of spiritual individuality, which were the two earlier forms of development, are brought into an absolute synthesis. For God the Father is nothing other than the eternal idea, which develops itself in the world, i.e., in nature, and which as substantial power “in the reflective determination of causality”<sup>1</sup> is the creator of heaven and earth. God the Son is nothing other than the idea as it has come to consciousness and has entered completely into representation, and which, as concrete individuality and subjectivity, is *spirit* and is one with the Father. And God the Holy Spirit is nothing other than the idea which, as the universal spirit of the church, rules the latter and realizes itself in its external and internal communion, and which is substantially one with the Father and the Son.

In his first major work, *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (*Phänomenologie des Geistes*), Hegel summarizes this dialectical development of religion in “natural, artistic, and manifested (revealed) religion” as follows:

The first form of development is religion

“...as immediate and therefore Natural Religion. In this, Spirit knows itself as its object [it should be noted that the theoretical *Gegenstand* relation, the foundation of all theoretical dialectic, is here transposed to religion!] in a natural or immediate shape. The

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<sup>1</sup> *Translator's note:* “in der Reflexionsbestimmung der Kausalität.”

second reality, however, is necessarily that in which Spirit knows itself in the shape of a superseded natural existence, or of the self. This, therefore, is the Religion of Art; for the shape raises itself to the form of the self through the creative activity of consciousness whereby this beholds in its object its act or the self. Finally, the third reality overcomes the one-sidedness of the first two; the self is just as much an immediacy, as the immediacy is the self. If, in the first reality, Spirit in general is in the form of consciousness, and in the second, in that of self-consciousness, in the third it is in the form of the unity of both. It has the shape of being-in-and-for-itself; and when it is thus conceived as it is in and for itself, this is the Revealed Religion.”

There then follows the passage which Christian Hegelians would be delighted to gloss over, since they do not wish to acknowledge that Hegel claimed to find the highest synthesis of the dialectical oppositions, not in religion, but in philosophy:

“But although in this, Spirit has indeed attained its true shape, yet the shape itself and the picture-thought<sup>1</sup> are still the unvanquished aspect from which Spirit must pass over into the Notion, in order wholly to resolve therein the form of objectivity, in the Notion which equally embraces within itself its own opposite. It is then that Spirit has grasped the Notion of itself, just as we now have first grasped it; and its shape or the element of its existence, being the Notion, is Spirit itself.”<sup>2</sup>

Hegel’s conception of religion, just as well as his dialectical construc-

- 1 *Translator’s note:* The German term here, “Vorstellung,” is usually translated “representation.”
- 2 G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (tr. A. V. Miller, with Analysis of the Text and Foreword by J. N. Findlay; Oxford, 1977), p. 416. The German text reads as follows: “... [Religion] als unmittelbare und also natürliche Religion; in ihr weisz der Geist sich als seinen Gegenstand in natürlicher oder unmittelbarer Gestalt. Die zweite aber ist nothwendig diese, sich in der Gestalt der aufgehobenen Natürlichkeit oder des Selbst zu wissen. Sie ist also die künstliche Religion; denn zur Form des Selbst erhebt sich die Gestalt durch das Hervorbringen des Bewusstseyns, wodurch dieses in seinem Gegenstande sein Thun oder das Selbst anschaut. Die dritte endlich hebt die Einseitigkeit der beiden ersten auf; das Selbst is ebensowohl ein unmittelbares als die Unmittelbarkeit Selbst ist. Wenn in der ersteren der Geist überhaupt in der Form des Bewusstseyns, in der zweiten – des Selbstbewusstseyns ist, so ist er in der dritten in der Form der Einheit beider; er hat die Gestalt des An- und Fürsichseyns; und indem er also vorgestellt ist, wie er an und für sich ist, so ist dies die offenbare Religion. Obwohl er aber in ihr zu seiner wahren Gestalt gelangt, so ist eben die Gestalt selbst und die Vorstellung noch die unüberwundene Seite, von der er in den Begriff übergehen musz, um die Form der Gegenständlichkeit in ihm ganz aufzulösen, in ihm der ebenso dies sein Gegentheil in sich schlieszt. Alsdann hat der Geist den Begriff seiner Selbst erfaszt, wie wir nun erst ihn erfaszt haben, und seine Gestalt oder das Element seines Daseyns, indem die der Begriff ist, ist er selbst.” *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (ed. D. Johann Schulze; 2nd ed., 1841),

tion of its three forms of development, is completely determined by the religious ground motive of humanism, namely, that of *nature* and *freedom*, although in accordance with the new conception of the freedom motive in Romanticism he calls it “nature” and “spirit.” This motive stands behind the uncritical circularity of his dialectic. The absolute idea, which in the dialectical process of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis exists in and for itself (*an und für sich*) in the logical activity of thought, and which subsequently “steps outside of itself” as nature in order once again to return from its otherness as nature back to itself in the spirit (as subjective, objective, and absolute spirit, respectively), is in essence nothing other than the religious dialectic in the ground motive of nature and freedom itself, which governs the entire theoretical dialectic and gives it direction. Hegel’s failure to recognize this is simply a consequence of his well-known uncritical transformation of theoretical into metaphysical dialectic, in the course of which the process of theoretical thought is identified with “reality as it truly is.” The dogmatic character of metaphysics always hangs on the fact that it does not arrive at a transcendental critique of philosophical thought. That is closed to it, because it is convinced beforehand that theoretical thought and the totality of being are one and the same.

*Religious* antithesis permits of no genuine synthesis, for the fact that it is religious in nature entails that it is also absolute. The idolatrous ground-motives are not one-sided dialectical moments in the development of religion; they are religious dynamic forces of the spirit of apostasy, which do not allow for any compromise with the spirit of truth.

Now, care must be taken not to apply to the central sphere of religion the dialectical syntheses characteristic of theoretical thought. That must be avoided, if only for this reason, that theoretical dialectic as such can never extend beyond theoretical thinking. If it then turns out that theoretical thought itself is necessarily determined by the religious ground-motives, it follows that any attempt to resolve or mediate the religious oppositions by way of philosophical dialectic must fall by the wayside. The laws of theoretical dialectic do not apply to the radical antithesis which is at work in religion. I shall demonstrate in my transcendental critique that theoretical synthesis can be carried out in a genuine and appropriate fashion only when thought takes its point of departure from the true fundamental religious unity of the moments which have been distinguished and set apart from each other in the theoretical relation.

With this too the question is decided in principle concerning the possibility of religious understanding with respect to the ground-motives. It must be established from the outset that the Christian and the non-Christian starting points do not at all stand in the same position with respect to understanding each other religiously. Certainly from the perspective of the Christian starting point, based on the Scriptures, it is entirely possible

to penetrate to the religious meaning of the starting points and ground-motives that stand in opposition to it. For it is only in the light of the Christian starting point that the latter can be revealed in their most profound meaning. The Christian shares, furthermore, in the solidarity of the human race in its fall into sin. Thus the ground-motives in question cannot be alien to him in a religious sense.

It is in the light of the ground-motive of the divine Word-revelation that the true position of the non-Christian ground-motives is established. They are unequivocally a result of the fall. In the redemption accomplished by Christ Jesus the fallen world has been reconciled, not in a speculative and dialectical fashion, but *in reality*. This means that the non-Christian ground-motives are not dialectically mediated in the ground-motive of Scripture. On the contrary, the divine Word-revelation exposes them as fundamentally false and annihilates them as religious starting points, even as it illumines by the light of the divine truth whatever relative moments of truth they may contain. Of themselves the non-Christian ground-motives have nothing to offer the Christian ground-motive by way of complementation. They have no inherent, positive truthfulness to set over against it. The Christian ground-motive, moreover, may not be conceived of as the higher synthesis of all the non-Christian ones; for a synthesis is unable to stand in absolute antithesis to the mutually antithetical elements which it itself has brought to a higher unity.

In its continuing operation, however, the ground-motive of the Christian religion is the only one in a position to guarantee the integrity of the historically determined philosophical community of thought in the West. That is the case, because as a point of departure for philosophy it bars the way to any scientific exclusivism, in which any particular line of thought would seek to elevate its own point of departure, making it the criterion for what does and what does not qualify as science.

If the Christian ground-motive truly has an effect on philosophic thought, it of necessity leads the latter to a radical, transcendental critique, which elucidates the fundamental difference between scientific judgments proper and the supra-scientific pre-judgments which lie at the foundation of their possibility. For this reason the Christian ground-motive refuses to allow any particular philosophical movement to be excluded from the philosophical community because of its point of departure. It relentlessly exposes every scientific dogmatism, which exalts its own religious point of departure to be the criterion for what may qualify as science, and which passes off the so-called autonomy of science as a scientific axiom even though a truly critical inquiry into the structure of scientific thought has never been undertaken. The Christian ground-motive also cuts off at the root the *hubris* of schools of thought which entertain the illusion that they themselves have the monopoly on science and which therefore never engage in truly scientific discussion with those who occupy other standpoints. And, finally, it is in possession of the only real key to understand-

ing those religious ground-motives over against which it has set itself in radical religious antithesis. Therefore, it will allow these [non-Christian] ground-motives to receive their full due in respect of their own significance for the *internal philosophical stance* of the *trend of thought* controlled by them.

At the same time, however, the Christian ground-motive, with its resources for understanding, reaches out beyond the boundaries of the West and lays the only possible foundation for a genuine intellectual community of mankind, because it penetrates beyond all of the temporal distinctions of race and historical culture to the fundamental religious community of the human race. It is this basic community, lying at the religious center of human existence, that at bottom establishes the possibility of the community of philosophic thought. And since the radical antithesis, resulting from the fall and the redemption in Christ Jesus, was made manifest within this basic community itself, as it came into existence through God's creation, the influence of this antithesis must also be felt in the temporal community of thought, as soon as the Christian ground-motive comes into play within it as a spiritual *dunamis*. Nevertheless, just as this absolute antithesis at the spiritual root of humanity does not result in the destruction but rather in the radical preservation of community, it can never lead to the disintegration and dissolution of the historically conditioned philosophic community of thought, as long as the religious dynamic of the Christian ground-motive continues to make itself felt within it. For the Christian religion does not release its grip on fallen man, nor does it leave him out of account; it continually goes in pursuit of him. The radical antithesis it poses is the absolute condition for the preservation of the philosophic community of thought within our sinful society.

Before the outbreak of the Second World War, I presented an argument for all of these points in my essay "The Transcendental Critique of Theoretic Thought: A Contribution toward the Elimination of Exclusivism in Science."<sup>1</sup>

*h. The Absence of Reciprocity in the Possibility of Religious Understanding between the Christian Starting Point and the Points of Departure against Which the Christian Religion Sets Itself in Radical Antithesis*

From a non-Christian standpoint there exists no true, i.e., religious or spiritual, possibility of understanding with respect to the Christian ground-motive. This possibility cannot exist apart from the life-giving Spirit, who enlightens the spiritual eye and focuses it upon the true center of life, Jesus Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> Herman Dooyeweerd, "De transcendentale critiek van het wijsgerig denken: Een bijdrage tot overwinning van het wetenschappelijk exclusivisme der richtingen." *Synthese*, IV (July 1939; with an introduction by Prof. Dr. N. Westendorp Boerma), 314-39.

Just for this reason the idolatrous ground-motives will continually seek to ban the *dunamis* of the Scriptural ground-motive from the intellectual community of the West. They constitute, therefore, a constant threat to it in its integral character. They are continually impelled to restrict the intellectual community to the circle of their own actual or presumed adherents. Accordingly, they must present those who engage in philosophy from a Christian standpoint with the choice of either accommodating their philosophic thought to the apostate ground-motive which is temporarily dominant in Western culture, or of seeing themselves excluded from the circle of those who have intellectual standing. Since they never arrive at a veritable transcendental critique of theoretical thought, the adherents of these ground-motives are constantly guilty of dogmatically identifying their own supra-theoretical pre-judgments with scientific axioms. As a consequence, misled by the dogma of the autonomy of science, they constantly run the danger of interpreting Western philosophy from its beginnings within the framework of their own modern ground-motives.

In all of these tendencies, they will invariably come to stand in radical antithesis to philosophic thought which is impelled and directed by the Christian ground-motive. For this reason, it has only the appearance of paradox when I assert that the radical antithesis which is posed by the Christian religion is the sole guarantor of the integrity of the intellectual community of the West.

*i. The Origin of the Religious Dialectic. Why the Religious Antithesis Permits No True Synthesis. The Polar Tendency in the Dialectical Ground-Motives*

There is no higher religious synthesis, therefore, which might serve to bridge the radical antithesis of the ground-motives undergirding the history of Western thought, analogous to the way in which theoretical synthesis embraces a theoretical antithesis in a correlation of partial moments. There is, on the contrary, a *religious dialectic*, which holds sway of necessity within all of the ground-motives in relation to which the Christian religion sets itself in absolute antithesis.

The intrinsic necessity of this religious dialectic resides in the fact that these standpoints are based on an absolutizing of what is relative. Everything that is relative calls forth its *correlata*. Absolutizing something that is relative, therefore, means that these correlates, which now have been cut off from their true fundamental religious unity, will set themselves over against what has first been absolutized with the same presumed absoluteness. For, as I shall demonstrate at a later point, every absolutization is at bottom religious and thus can never be explained merely from theoretical, scientific points of view.

Such absolutization gives rise to a genuine polarity in the religious ground-motive. In it the diametrically opposed elements mutually cancel

each other out in their supposed absoluteness. At the same time, because of their necessary correlativity, they mutually determine each other in their religious meaning. This state of affairs assumes, of course, that the two antagonistic motives which have set themselves in opposition to each other in the religious ground-motive have also come to awareness in the religious consciousness or subconsciousness of those whose thought is impelled by them. In view of this, it is understandable that the true meaning of the Greek matter motive first came to light in its opposition to the religious form motive, and vice versa. The same applies to the relationship of nature and freedom in the humanistic ground-motive and to that of nature and grace in the scholastic motive.

Because of its religious nature a ground-motive cannot be satisfied with a mere correlation of the opposed elements within it. (Such a correlation, in fact, can only exist on the foundation of the absolute fundamental unity of the *correlata*, which is not to be found in a dialectical ground-motive.) Thus philosophic thought is inexorably driven back and forth from the one pole to the other, entangled in a religious dialectic that transforms the correlation into an absolute opposition. By the standards of theoretical dialectic, such a religious dialectic is utterly inexplicable.

In this context a “balance des contraires,” in the sense of the French thinker Pierre-Joseph Proudhon,<sup>1</sup> is just as impossible as a resolution of the antithesis in a higher synthesis, in the sense intended by Hegel.

*j. The Device of Ascribing the Primacy to One of the Two Polar Motives Which Appear in the Dialectical Ground-Motive*

Lacking a foundation for a true religious synthesis, religious dialectic will invariably seek a way out by ascribing the primacy or religious priority to one of the antithetical principles which are manifested in the religious ground-motive. Let no one think that he can follow the Hegelian school, therefore, in attempting to employ the method of theoretical dialectic in order to “correct” this religious dialectic, to the extent that it makes itself felt in philosophic thought. This would be a completely uncritical method of philosophizing, for behind this overextension of theoretical dialectic itself there resides a religious dialectic, which remains hidden to the thinker.

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<sup>1</sup> According to Proudhon, the antinomies in philosophical thought, which have their origin, as we have noted, in religious dialectic’s control over theoretical dialectic, are not resolved or mediated in a higher synthesis, as Hegel thought, but merely hold one another in equilibrium. For reality itself is supposed to consist of a balance of contradictories.

k. *The Boundaries of Theoretical Dialectic and the Intrusion of Religious Dialectic into Theoretical Thought*

Theoretical dialectic, in the only form in which it is genuine and justified, remains limited to theoretical synthesis in the *Gegenstand* relation, which will be investigated later.<sup>1</sup> Through the theoretical idea this synthesis receives its transcendental directedness, pointing to the supratheoretical fundamental unity and Origin of all the aspects of reality which have been distinguished and set in opposition to one another in the antithetic *Gegenstand* relation.<sup>2</sup> True theoretical synthesis presupposes that theoretical thought is indeed focused on the true, fundamental unity and Origin of the theoretically separated moments of temporal reality. If the religious ground-motive is dialectical in nature, however, the theoretical synthesis itself becomes polar. That is to say, it will look for the higher unity of the terms that have been theoretically opposed to each other in the *Gegenstand* relation in one of the poles of the dialectical ground-motive.

Thus the Greek philosopher Heraclitus, guided by the dialectical ground-motive of Greek philosophy, sought the deeper unity of the forms which stood out in opposition to one another in the process of becoming in the fluidity of the principle of matter, the eternal movement of life which coursed through the contrarily opposed individual forms. Similarly, from an idealistic humanistic standpoint, Hegel sought the deeper unity of nature and freedom (spirit) in the logical self-unfolding of the idea of freedom in the spirit, which incorporates<sup>3</sup> natural necessity, as its logical otherness, within itself as one moment in a higher synthesis. Such a presumed synthesis always entails an unjustified logical relativization of the principle of contradiction (*principium contradictionis*), one that is unjustified because the theoretical antithesis does not permit of a logical resolution or mediation. Indeed, it never comes to resolution in this way. What actually takes place when one goes this route is that the theoretical antithesis is replaced by a polar absolutization.

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1 *Translator's note:* *Gegenstand*, literally, "that which stands opposed," is the standard German word for "object." Dooyeweerd uses this German term in order to bring out the relationship of opposition between thought and its object that is inherent in the theoretical attitude of thought, and also because, for him, the objects of theoretical thought are fundamentally different from the objects of naive experience. In Dooyeweerd, therefore, "*Gegenstand*" always means "object of theoretical thought." The abstract *Gegenstand* relation between theoretical thought and its object (its *Gegenstand*) always must be distinguished from the concrete *subject-object* relation that belongs to naive experience.

2 This statement will become clear to the reader only after he has studied my transcendental critique of philosophical thought.

3 Dutch: *opheffen*; German: *aufheben*.

To state the same thing in a different manner, religious dialectic has intruded into theoretical dialectic. By imposing its own terms, it attempts not merely to unite the theoretical antithesis in a synthesis but to cancel it. The theoretical antithesis may not be cancelled on the theoretical level, however, since it is grounded in the *Gegenstand* relation itself.

*l. The Religious Dialectic of the Scholastic Synthesis Motive of Nature and Grace. Two Possible Points of Contact for This Presumed Synthesis*

A religious dialectic arises with equal necessity in the ground-motive of philosophic thought when an attempt is made to establish a synthesis between the Christian and the non-Christian points of departure. This simultaneously gives rise to what has the appearance of a community of thought with the non-Christian movements in philosophy, built on a dialectical religious basis. Within this particular synthesis standpoint, however, this community of thought is never grounded in religion, but rather exclusively in the autonomy of natural reason.

The synthesis motive in Western thought that answers to this description is that of nature and grace. It has been employed to effect dialectical syntheses between the Christian ground-motive and both the Greek and the humanistic ground-motives. As such this motive appears to originate in the scholastic thinking that is characteristic of Roman Catholicism, even when, in conflict with the Scriptural standpoint of the Reformation, it is accepted in Protestant thought.

In this connection, there is no possibility of a genuine religious synthesis which would preserve the Christian ground-motive in its absolute character. As we have noted, this is prevented by the absoluteness of the religious antithesis, which itself can never be of the nature of mere theoretical dialectic. What actually occurs here is that the ground-motives are accommodated to each other. In this process, both of them are partially divested of their original meaning and are thereby rendered capable, in this denatured form, of serving as poles of a religious dialectic.

There are two main directions in which the point of contact for such a dialectical-religious synthesis can be sought. First, it can be sought in the *idea of creation*. Second, it can be sought in the *idea of the fall into sin*.

*m. The First Way: The Thomistic Synthesis and the Roman Catholic Standpoint*

The first option appears in the Thomistic synthesis, which is brought to expression in the official doctrine of the Roman Catholic church with respect to the relationship between nature and supernatural grace. In the creation idea, nature and supernature are placed over against each other, and in the conception of the nature of created reality, an attempt is made

to adapt the Aristotelian Greek form-matter scheme<sup>1</sup> to the Scriptural creation motive. Clearly, the Greek ground-motive is thereby forced to undergo a metamorphosis as to its meaning, for it is now “bracketed” by the new synthesis theme of nature and grace. Grace or supernature is granted religious primacy over nature, in that it is conceived as the supernatural perfecting of the latter as to its form. As it is subordinated to grace within this hierarchical scheme, however, nature is not divested of its intrinsic autonomy; rather, this autonomy is merely relativized. On this standpoint, nature remains centered in the rational form principle, just as God is regarded as the “pure Form” who must be conceived entirely apart from the matter principle.

This line of thought introduces a true religious dialectic into the idea of creation. “Pure form” has its religious antipode in “pure matter,” which is thought of as completely formless. In the Greek ground-motive, the principle of matter cannot have its origin in the principle of form.

Within the nature-grace scheme, however, there was need to correct the form-matter motive of the Greeks, because the Scriptural creation motive will not tolerate any such polarity. In order to avoid dualism, matter was understood to have its origin in the divine creation – but then only the concrete matter of created beings, which is first brought into actual existence as a constitutive principle in composite beings by means of a specific form. This matter was then conceived as a mere possibility, a potentiality, a receptivity for form, and simultaneously as the principle of imperfection, which exists over against the form principle as the principle of perfection. This latter conception is formally connected with the Aristotelian understanding of *hylē* as “potential being” (*dunamei on*). It cannot do away, however, with the autonomy and originality of the Greek matter principle, which also comes to expression in Aristotle in the polar opposition between *Anankē* (blind, unpredictable chance) and the rational causality of the form principle, which operates according to a predictable, purposive plan. The attempt to wed the Greek form-matter motive to the Scriptural idea of creation introduces into the latter an autonomous principle of metaphysical imperfection, which is completely foreign to it.

Can the divine Creator be the origin of imperfection? Indeed, he must be just that if he is the creative author of nature in the Greek sense, something that was never taught by the Greeks themselves. Escape was then sought from this antinomy by regarding “absolute” or “pure” matter as a so-called *sterēsis* or privation of being, which as such is not created.

Centering nature in an autonomous principle of rational form requires, thus, in its turn, a reinterpretation of the Christian doctrine of creation, and the effects of this must also spill over into the understanding of the fall and

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<sup>1</sup> The fact that the Aristotelian concept of nature is completely controlled by the form-matter motive appears in Aristotle’s exposition of this concept in his *Metaphysics*, D, 4. 1015 a.

of redemption. In Thomistic theology, the creative work of God loses its active character, since according to Aristotelian-Thomistic philosophy activity is regarded merely as a natural striving of matter (potentiality, imperfection) toward form (actuality, perfection), a striving that is incompatible with God's essence as "pure Form." In Thomas, therefore, the creation is reduced to a purely one-sided relation "ex parte creaturae."<sup>1</sup> The *principles* of form and matter are both withdrawn from God's sovereignty as Creator, for the latter only extends to concrete, created things.

The fundamental religious unity of nature is thus left out of account. The Scriptural, Augustinian doctrine that nature has radically fallen into sin must therefore also be abandoned, because the fall now affects only the connection between nature and supernature. It is the loss of the "supernatural gift of grace." As a final consequence, redemption in Christ Jesus also loses its radical meaning, according to which it transforms the religious root of fallen nature. The doctrine of the "natural preparation for grace" forms the dialectical capstone in the elaboration of this synthesis motive.

*n. The Law of Religious Dialectic: The Operation of the Polar Tendency in the Dialectical Ground Motive. The Dualism between Nature and Grace in Ockham and in Averroistic Nominalism*

As we have already noted, it was possible to insulate this typically Romanistic synthesis against the polarizing effects of this dialectic only by the exercise of ecclesiastical authority. As soon as these tendencies were set free to obey the law of religious dialectic, the artificial hierarchical synthesis dissolved into a polar antithesis. This happened with William of Ockham, the leading figure of late-scholastic (fourteenth century A.D.) nominalism. Ockham promulgated the idea that there was a yawning gulf between nature and grace. In the school of nominalism which was influenced by Arabic Averroism (e.g., Siger of Brabant, John of Jandun, a contemporary of Ockham), this gulf had been further widened, even becoming the doctrine of two-fold truth.

Ockham's nominalistic opposition to the reality of the so-called *universalia* (i.e., the universal ontic forms of material things) went hand in hand with his unsuccessful attempt to purge scholastic theology of the denaturing influence of the Greek principle of rational form by means of his conception of the creative sovereignty of God as a *potentia absoluta*. This attempt was doomed to failure, because the absolute omnipotence of God was not understood in its Scriptural sense, but rather – within the framework of the dialectical ground motive of Scholasticism – as a lawless, un-

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<sup>1</sup> I shall return to this point in my critical analysis of Thomistic ontology in volume II of this work, where I shall also give the references to the sources.

predictable arbitrary power, a sort of *Anankē* in the sense of the Greek matter motive, which here was divested of its original religious meaning by being bound to the Christian creation motive. Indeed, the religious depreciation of natural reason and of the validity of all law and form in natural life had its origin in the deification of the principle of matter as it was understood in ancient Greek religion.

*o. The Second Way: Lutheranism and the Dialectic of Law and Gospel. Dialectical Theology*

The nominalistic dualism between nature and grace had its effects within the Reformation movement itself in Luther's dialectical opposition of *law* and *gospel*. Here the point of contact for a synthesis between the Greek and the Christian ground-motives was sought primarily in the doctrine of the fall. This was the second direction in which there was an attempt at synthesis.

Ockham's view of law was undoubtedly at work in the religious depreciation of the law as the form principle of sinful nature. In the background there also lay Marcion's dialectical antithesis between the God of creation and the God of redemption, an idea which in this thinker from the second century A. D. was accompanied by an opposition to the moralistic-legal view of the gospel and by a pseudo-Pauline emphasis on justification alone *at the expense of the law*.

Nature, which in line with scholastic theology is still conceived in terms of the rational form principle of Greek thought, is the "kingdom of sin under the law." It is regarded dialectically in polar opposition to grace, the kingdom of the evangelical freedom of the Christian, who breaks through and overcomes the law. "The whore, reason" is tolerated only in the wilderness of sinful nature; covered with shame, it is cast out from "Abraham's tent," the community of faith.

The ground-motive of nature and grace, however, also lends itself very well to a pseudosynthesis between the Scriptural and the humanistic ground-motives, one in which nature is viewed in terms of the polar opposition between nature and freedom. Insofar as this attempt at synthesis issues from the Lutheran conception of nature and grace, it is once again the revelation of the fall that is used to downgrade autonomous nature and to assign it a position diametrically opposed to grace.

In this fashion the humanistic view of temporal reality can also be accepted, even though this view must, of course, be externally accommodated to the Lutheran articles of faith. Along with this, the humanistic ground-motive of nature and freedom, which is still allowed a place of influence in philosophic thought, is invariably disqualified as a typical expression of sinful nature because of its prideful religious root. At the same time, however, every attempt to allow the dynamic power of the Scriptural

ground-motive to effect an inner reformation of philosophy as well as scientific thought in general, is sharply rejected from this point of view as a fatal confusion between the Christian life of grace and sinful natural life.

The religious dialectic of the ground-motive of nature and grace as they are here conceived ultimately led, by way of Luther's dualism of law and grace, Kantian criticism, and the more recent irrationalistic philosophy of existence, to what is called "dialectical theology." Here again it expresses itself within theology in polar fashion. In the thought of Karl Barth, there is no point of contact between nature and grace. The influence of Marcion is also unmistakably present in Barth's dialectical theology, although it does not lead here, any more than it did in Luther, to an absolute separation between the Old and New Testaments.

*p. The Dialectic of the Ground-Motive of Nature and Grace  
in Reformed Scholasticism*

To the extent that the ground-motive of nature and grace is able to establish a beachhead in Calvinistic thought, it will never express itself in a theological way in terms of the polarity characteristic of Lutheranism. The Lutheran dualism of law and gospel is foreign to the Reformed confession. Reformed Scholasticism, which to the present has had results only in theology and which, for reasons I shall explore later, has never been able to elaborate an independent philosophy like that of Thomism, will prefer to go the first way of synthesis. Seizing upon the creation motive, it will seek, just as Thomism does, to accommodate the Greek view of nature to it. In so doing, however, it will reject both the Lutheran dualism between nature and grace and the Thomistic substructure-superstructure theme.

In Reformed Scholasticism, nature can never be conceived of as the antipode of grace or as its relatively autonomous substructure. For, in conformity to Augustine, 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. 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*), that is supposed to come up with the "Scriptural principles" to which the other sciences must conform.

In the absence of papal ecclesiastical authority, however, all of the theological resources that Reformed Scholasticism can bring to bear will be incapable, even in its own circles, of holding back the influence of the po-

lar tendencies within the ground-motive of nature and grace. Here again, the theologically contrived pseudosynthesis between the Christian and the Greek ground-motives will always be threatened with dissolution. The point of contact for the dualistic separation between nature and grace will be sought, in particular, in the doctrine of *common grace*, which in its relationship to “special grace” can easily degenerate into a doctrine of two separate realms. The Reformed practitioners of the non-theological sciences, finding in scholastic theology no usable guidelines for their own branches of investigation, will appeal to common grace, in order to justify their alliance with the prevailing, supposedly neutral modes of thought. And insofar as they take care not to trespass on the perilous terrain of theology, scholastic theology for the most part will not interfere with them.

Indeed, in this view, theology supplies an external link between natural thought and the Scriptures. However, since this connection is completely dominated by the unscriptural ground-motive of nature and grace and cannot lead, therefore, to an inner reformation of scientific thought, the latter will place more and more distance between itself and the Scriptural ground-motive of the Christian religion. In time it will discover that it has even distanced itself completely from the scholastic way of doing theology.

Within the realm of science, the polarity of this ground-motive will increasingly show up in a separation and even in internal discord between dogmatic theology and the “profane sciences.” Within theology itself the accommodated Greek conception of nature will remain in basic tension with the integral and radical ground-motive of the Christian religion.

The dialectic of the synthesis motive of nature and grace is thus always a religious dialectic “of the second power.” It contains within itself either the dialectic inherent to the Greek form-matter motive or that of the humanistic ground-motive of nature and freedom. As to both of their poles, these are welded to the Scriptural ground-motive, which in this abortive attempt at synthesis has been robbed of its meaning. In this way, a secondary dialectic is brought into being within the Scriptural ground-motive.

For this reason, a complete understanding of the significance of the scholastic synthesis motive for philosophy, to which a substantial portion of my investigation in the second volume of this work will be devoted, cannot be achieved without having a clear view of the dialectic inhering in the Greek form-matter theme. I shall now proceed, therefore, to present an in-depth study of the dialectical unfolding of the latter motive in Greek philosophy, up to and including Plato. In this presentation, the philosophy of Plato will occupy the center of attention. For it is Plato who incorporated in his thought the entire preceding history of Greek philosophy. It is also he who brought the dialectic of the Greek ground-motive to its high-

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est and at the same time its most sharply formulated expression.

In presenting this sketch, I do not intend, of course, to write an exhaustive history of Greek thought. Neither shall I emphasize the historical method of approach. Instead, my sole aim here is to investigate the dialectical development of the religious ground-motive in philosophic thought, and this will require the application of a unique transcendental method, which is capable of penetrating to the mainsprings of Greek thinking.