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OF HERMAN DOOYEWEERD

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*Reformation and
Scholasticism
in Philosophy*

VOLUME I

THE GREEK PRELUDE

Herman Dooyeweerd

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by

Herman Dooyeweerd

Volume I
THE GREEK PRELUDE

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Volume II – Greek and Medieval Philosophy

Volume III – Nature Philosophy and Anthropology

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Preface

A few years before the outbreak of the Second World War, I received a request from the publisher T. Wever of Franeker to write a booklet on *Calvinism and Philosophy*. Their plan was to include it in a series *Calvinism and the Questions of our Time*. This request came to me at an inopportune moment. My energies were completely taken up with working out my philosophical anthropology. In addition, I was attempting to give my three-volume *Encyclopedia of the Science of Law* a definitive form.

I then conceived the plan of writing, concurrently with the latter work, a smaller book on *Reformation and Scholasticism in Philosophy*. I intended to devote this book in particular to elucidating the questions of anthropology in terms of the opposition between the ground-motive of the Reformation and that of the scholastic line of thought. This small work would then serve as an introduction to the positive elaboration of my anthropological insights.

I conceived this plan in the face of the deep-seated objections which had been raised immediately preceding the war in certain Reformed theological circles, particularly against the view of the human soul that had been presented in the Philosophy of the Law-Idea. These objections were rooted entirely in traditional scholastic ideas. In view of this fact, I was eager, first of all, to place them in their appropriate historical setting. By putting them in this light I hoped to provide an explanation as to why this philosophy had so decisively rejected the scholastic conceptions of the human soul.

Once the theme "Reformation and Scholasticism in Philosophy" had taken hold of me, however, I soon realized that it demanded a much broader treatment than I had originally intended. For the genius of scholastic thinking can be understood in its opposition to that of the Reformation only when the religious ground-motive of Greek thought has been traced in its radical opposition to the ground-motive of Scriptural revelation.

That there is indeed one common religious ground-motive at the foundation of Greek thought, which gives us the key to understanding the typical dialectical course of development of Greek philosophy, is, however, more easily claimed than actually demonstrated by way of a careful investigation of this development. Such a proof requires not only a thorough study of the religious notions of the Greeks but also a study in depth of the Greek philosophical texts. Every classicist knows that this places almost insurmountable obstacles in the way of a non-classicist. Because of the profound importance of the inquiry, however, I felt obliged to go ahead with it, undeterred by the difficulties. Now, after an involved and time-consuming preparatory study, I am sending forth the first volume of my *Reformation and Scholasticism in Philosophy*.

The introductory section of this work deals with the four religious ground-motives of Western philosophical thought and with the relationship between theoretical and religious dialectic. The major lines of thought of this section have already appeared in an article of mine in the journal *Philosophia Reformata*.¹

As my study of Greek philosophy broadened and deepened, I became more and more convinced of the accuracy of my original conviction that the background of the Aristotelian form-matter scheme is much broader and has deeper roots than is generally admitted. In fact, as I had suspected, it gives philosophical expression to the dialectical ground-motive which governed all of Greek thought from the beginning.

In this regard the attitude of Aristotle himself should have served as a warning. As one who lived in the Greek world of thought, he construed the entire preceding history of philosophy within this scheme. This of itself should have been enough to alert the modern investigator to the fact that what we have here is far more than a subjective thought-construct of the great Stagirite. Indeed, if this motive had been simply an invention of Aristotle, which did not truly apply to the philosophy before him, it would have been impossible for him to have forced the latter into its mold without provoking opposition. He would have distorted it so badly that the mutilation could not have gone unnoticed by his contemporaries. For it is the very foundations of Greek thought that are at stake here. In addition, the very fact that the form-matter motive so consistently maintained its position throughout later Greek thought and during the entire Scholastic period, controlling the very way in which the philosophical problems were framed, should have served as a second warning against the misconception that what we have here is merely a philosophical invention of Aristotle by which he arbitrarily measured all of his predecessors.

¹ "De vier religieuze grondthema's in den ontwikkelingsgang van het wijsgerig denken van het Avondland," *Philosophia Reformata*, VI (1941), 161-179.

If one penetrates behind the question of terminology, which of itself is insignificant, and concentrates on the actual meaning of Aristotle's form-matter scheme, a thoroughgoing study of Plato and of the so-called pre-Socratics will reveal that what is at issue here is indeed a dialectical ground-motive in which the entire Greek community of thought was rooted from the beginning. Once this has taken place, the only remaining task is to lay bare the religious meaning of this ground-motive. At this point, one cannot fail to see that what has been a continual subject of investigation since the Romantic period, the encounter between the pre-Homeric religion of nature and the later culture religion of the Olympic pantheon, is the origin of that deep religious conflict in the Greek consciousness which is embodied in the polar opposition between the form motive and the matter motive. Once one possesses this clue, the entire history of Greek philosophy is bathed in a surprising light. Much within it that had previously appeared inexplicable or internally contradictory is now made clear as it is placed against its proper background. Furthermore, the true meaning of Scholasticism, which tries to construct a bridge between the ground-motive of the Christian religion and the dialectical ground-motive of Greek thought, can now be made fully clear for the first time.

In this way the possibility arises of a true transcendental critique of both Greek and scholastic philosophy. By this critique, furthermore, the standard portrayal of the history of philosophy as a process of increasing emancipation from the fetters placed upon it by religion is revealed as a radical misconception.

This misconception was rooted in the a priori prejudice that philosophic thought, according to its very nature, is autonomous. Those making this judgment, however, glossed over the fact that in Greek philosophy this presumed autonomy had a completely different meaning from the one it had in Thomistic Scholasticism, and that in both of these its meaning was totally different from the one it has in modern humanistic thought. If fuller account had been taken of this incontrovertible fact, the critical question would have surfaced of its own accord: What is it that has determined the profound differences in the way that this autonomy has been conceived in the course of history? It would then have appeared, as a matter of course, that these differing conceptions were entirely dependent on the religious ground-motives which have undergirded Western thought in its whole development. Then the "axiom" of the autonomy of philosophy would have become a critical problem. Then, too, the philosophic dogmatism which elevated this autonomy to the position of a "dogma" would have had to make way for a transcendental, critical stance, for which philosophic thought itself had the status of a theoretical problem. For only a serious investigation of the inner structure of this thought can provide a truly critical answer to the question as to whether a religiously unprejudiced philosophy in the modern sense of the word is in fact possible.

I initially developed such a transcendental critique of philosophic thought in the first volume of my *Philosophy of the Law-Idea*.¹ There I applied it in a detailed analysis of the dialectical course of development of modern humanistic philosophy. Now the same method will be followed in an investigation of Greek philosophy. And, in conformity with the overall design of this work, it will be the questions of anthropology that stand in the foreground.

In order to help the reader draw his own conclusions as to whether and to what degree this method of approaching Greek philosophy in terms of its own ground-motive does greater justice to Greek thought than the standard one, I have throughout supported my analysis with extensive Greek quotations. Insofar as the sources permit, these are included in the context of the entire argument of the writers themselves. For the benefit of those who do not know the Greek language or who have an insufficient grasp of it, I have placed after each quotation a translation, in which I have attempted as far as possible to avoid prejudicing the philosophical interpretation. The fact that one can never fully succeed in this attempt is known to all who have learned from experience the problems encountered in translating.

By far the greater part of my exposition treats the development of Plato's thought. The justification for this will be found in the design and execution of my method of investigation itself. For, in the philosophy of Plato, all the strands of philosophy before him are gathered together, and it is in the development of his thought that the dialectic of the Greek ground-motive obtains its most representative and, at the same time, its most complicated expression.

At this point I shall make only a few brief comments about the two volumes that are to follow the present one. The second critically investigates the opposition between the Philosophy of the Law-Idea and scholastic philosophy, more particularly scholastic anthropology. This volume is now completely finished. It will appear in a short while, as soon as paper becomes available and as soon as there is opportunity to have it printed. This volume will also contain a detailed discussion of the relationship between philosophy and theology, the issue which appears to have been the pivotal one for Christian thought from the beginning. At the same time, by way of a transcendental critique of the Thomistic and Augustinian schools of scholastic thought, I shall resume my analysis of the dialectical development of Greek thought at the point that I temporarily left it after my analysis of Plato. The third volume, which for the greater part has also been brought to completion, will contain an extensive treatment of the problems of anthropology within the framework of the Philosophy of the

¹ *De Wijsbegeerte der Wetsidee* (Amsterdam: H. J. Paris, I [1935]).

Law-Idea. This final volume is intended to comprise an important addition to this philosophy, which will make it possible to gain a more precise insight into its overall design and outworking. It is my fervent hope that many misunderstandings which have persisted regarding my earlier published work will thereby be removed.

