Persons and their lives. Reformational philosophy on man, ethics, and beyond

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PERSONS AND THEIR LIVES
REFORMATIONAL PHILOSOPHY ON MAN, ETHICS, AND BEYOND

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My view on what I see as the predicament of Christian philosophy in ethics has been shaped by a number of experiences. I will first share with you some of these experiences, to give you an impression of the background against which this article has been written.

1. *Introductory personal remarks*

First, my take on philosophy has been influenced by experiences as psychiatrist. In the course of years I have been intrigued by the formal similarities between certain kinds of philosophy and the practice of psychiatry and psychotherapy, in so far as both philosophy and psychiatry aim at restoring, or re-establishing, the connection between the person (the thinker, the patient) and some truth, or simply: 'truth'. In the search for this truth, I learned to distance myself from the psychoanalytic model of 'uncovering' the truth, which is still indebted to an objectivistic epistemology.[1] By learning to abandon this epistemology I gradually adopted a way of looking at people and their troubles that searches for an underlying fundamental dynamic behind the different layers of symptoms, syndromes, social and biographical context. This fundamental dynamic could be located in the interpersonal and, more fundamentally, in the intrapersonal sphere.

This dynamic has many dimensions, but is basically religious, I think. In clinical practice it seemed appropriate to phrase it in terms of a basic attitude or mood or theme or a set of such attitudes, moods, and/or themes. The crucial change of view appeared to be to consider these attitudes (moods, themes) as being themselves the expression of some existential dynamic, and not as merely referring to such a dynamic as if these attitudes (moods, themes) were 'about' or 'toward' a particular concrete event or state of affairs in the world (Glas 2001).[2]

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[1] 'Objectivism' refers here to the psychoanalytic notion that truth consists of the latent, hidden content beneath the surface of consciousness and of everyday life. This content should be laid bare by 'analysis'. I admit that this way of phrasing the case against psychoanalysis is one-sided. I am addressing what has been called Freud's metapsychology, his theoretical account of the unconscious and of unconscious processes. Hermeneutical reinterpretations of psychoanalytic theory, however, focus much more on relational aspects of the analytic encounter and view truth more as emerging 'within' the analytic situation, that is, in the interaction between analyst and analysand.

[2] In clinical practice, though, both aspects often go together: the prevalent mood or affective stance expresses a particular existential dynamic and may at the same time refer to certain events, imagined or real.

> An example: anxiety related to loss of important others may refer to a fear of be-ing abandoned by a certain person; however, taken as an existential attitude, anxiety related to loss of others is itself already the manifestation of such loss. It expresses, by its very existence, the unconnectedness and isolation of the person in question.[3] The unconnectedness of people with respect to this form of anxi-ety pervades their entire existence. They cannot connect to other people, they cannot commit themselves to a certain purpose of life, and they even seem to be unable to take their own existence serious.

It seemed to me, moreover, that these types of dynamic not only operate in pa-tients, but in each of us, differently of course, but yet recognizable. Each of us has a life which centres on certain core 'themes', representing fundamental attitudes or sets of attitudes and concomitant moods. We all have our anxieties and doubts, our hopes and longings, our unrest and moments of happiness.

Reformational philosophy has been extremely helpful in making sense of this dynamic in a philosophical way. It has always struck me, to what extent 're-establishment of contact' was at the very heart of Dooyeweerd's endeavour, and how intrinsically this endeavour was connected with the uncovering of the re-ligious dynamic in the perennial philosophical debate. More specifically, this dynamic has been laid bare in his theory of the process of opening-up of law spheres and of intermodal subject-object relationships. This theory has been extremely helpful to gain a sense of the interwovenness of structural unfolding and religious dynamism.[4]

The convergence between psychiatry and philosophy at such a crucial point has shaped my view of what I see as the predicament of Christian philosophy, also when it comes to ethics and morality in our time, namely: to restore con-tact with what people value; to help them reconnect to the fundamental dy-namic of their existence, by showing possible ways to open-up the closed and futile circles that encompass their lives — locking them in their private worlds.

Second. This article has been written against the background of developments in the professional practices, especially medical practice (similar issues have been raised in business ethics and discussions on ethics and globalization). I will be brief, here, the issue is well-known, that is, a rising concern about the 'humanness' of practices in the grip of the so-called technological and eco-nomical imperative. New technical devices, increasing specialization, and pro-tocollization of diagnostic and treatment procedures have contributed to the

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[3] Of course, one could say that these basic attitudes (moods, themes) do not completely lack an 'object'; their object is not 'nothing' or 'nothingness'. The 'object is rather existence itself, as a 'whole', in a more or less encompassing sense.

[4] Other thinkers have also been instrumental in re-interpreting philosophy as a way of re-storing contact. I am thinking of Søren Kierkegaard, Martin Heidegger, Emmanuel Levinas, Paul Ricoeur, Charles Taylor and Alasdair MacIntyre – Søren Kierkegaard (1844, 1845, 1848) with his analysis of human freedom as entangled in itself and liberated by the 'jump' into faith; Heidegger (1927) with his analysis of anxiety as openness for the possibility of one's (own) im-possibility; Levinas (1974) with his notion of the Other as a disquieting openness or wound in my existence, Ricoeur (1990) with his four-fold analysis of the self as a relatedness to oneself opened-up by the presence of the other, Taylor (1989) with his notion of disengaged reason and of the intrinsic relation of persons to (their) 'goods', MacIntyre (1981) with his concept of 'goods' internal to practices.

image of the professional as technician and administrator. Medical practice is increasingly dominated by external criteria like efficiency and (economic) profitability.

The attitude of the general public with respect to this development appears to be ambiguous. People, on the one hand, ask for diagnosis and treatment at the highest technical level; however, on the other hand, they also ask for tailor-made advice, individualized treatment and personal concern on the side of medical personnel. The question then is how to combine professionalism at the highest technical level with humanness and wisdom.

Another, related issue is how high moral standards of doctors and nurses at a micro level (the individual patient and his or her family) should be weighed against moral standards at a macro level, especially the principles and values that govern the distribution of goods among the members of the society. Beneficence (micro level) and justice (macro level) are often competing values, especially when financial means are scarce. High tech does not solve this tension. On the contrary, it heightens it.

A third issue concerns the increasing importance of images and expectations with respect to medicine. One of the paradoxes of modern medicine, at least in the Western world, is that we feel increasingly unhealthy, whereas health statistics show an improvement of health and increased life expectations. Images and expectations highly contribute to the exaggeration of the role medicine can play in the provision of happiness and fulfilment.

In response to these demands Reformational philosophers have recognized the need for a new type of moral analysis. This type of analysis tries to avoid the pitfalls of both a deductive type of moral reasoning common in certain protestant theological circles and the pragmatist utilitarianism of much contemporary medical ethics by beginning with a structural analysis of the nature of the doctor — patient relationship.[5] What would merit investigation before anything else is whether morality is in some way intrinsic to the medical situation, the doctor — patient relationship. Other approaches, by emphasizing the instrumental role of medicine, treat medical practice as if it is neutral in itself and as if values and principles are to be added from without (by the patient, the doctor, or society) (see for similar interpretations: Taylor 1989; McIntyre 1981). In response to this naturalist and instrumentalist approach Henk Jochemsen, Jan Hoogland, and others, including myself, developed a model in which the doctor (nurse) - patient relationship is analyzed in terms of constitutive and regulative norms and principles; with the constitutive side further analysed in terms of qualifying and conditioning norms, rules, and functions.[6] This

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[5] The traditional protestant theological approach, we had in mind, tried to derive moral guidelines for specific practical situations from general biblical principles and moral demands. This approach seemed to lack sensitivity for the specific nature of, for instance, the medical situation. The pragmatism of common medical ethics concerned for instance the well-known principalism of Beauchamp and Childress (1989, 2001) who in their approach tried to combine the duty (rule) oriented view of the one and the utilitarian stance of the other author. This example is not meant to detract from the important role this book has played to put ethics on the medical agenda.

[6] Jochemsen and Glas (1997), chapter 3.

analysis is a torso, I admit, and still needs further development in order to grant a more detailed and balanced view of the institutional and the consumer side of medical practice, the nature of nursing, and of issues related to the division of labour and responsibilities in highly technical medical practices .

Third. One of my concerns is the specific form of the issue of pluralism (moral, social) in which the possible contribution of Reformational philosophy seems to be cast. What I mean is that in a global world the work of Christian philosophers, and even more so of philosophers of the Dutch Neo-Calvinist brand, seems to be marginal and utterly local. There is, on the other hand, their conviction that they have something to offer and that, if not the conceptual analyses they provide, than at least the biblical worldview behind it has a claim to universality. However, two senses of the term 'pluralism' seem to blend here: the pluralism of the local and marginalized position of Christian thinking considered from a global (or: world) perspective; and the pluralism of the different moral and religious worldviews. These two senses of plurality need careful distinction. There is no need for Christian philosophers to give up their claims with respect to the universality of their moral and religious views when granting that their contributions at a global scale are marginal, or marginalized (both are true, I think).

This being said, however, it should be acknowledged that both senses of plurality do not stand completely apart and that global plurality, or better: particularity, affects the way Christian philosophers address their public — both academic and non-academic. This specific situation urges Christian thinkers, more than ever I think, to reflect on how to enter into the academic and cultural discussion. What is needed particularly is the cultivation of a *double sensitivity*, that is, sensitivity for the needs of the global world with its overwhelming differences between contexts on the one hand (this could be called: *sensitivity for differences*) and sensitivity for how to tune in to these needs on the other hand (*relational sensitivity*). Neo-Calvinist philosophy has something to gain with respect to this second aspect, I think. Christian philosophers have to be self-reflective and to be aware of the position from which they speak. They are themselves part of the plurality and fragmentation that threatens their and others' access to spiritual sources. Therefore, they have to develop sensitivity for what is really essential and radical in the context in which they are speaking. Their self-criticism helps them to be perceptive as to what supports and what hinders their message in the local context from which they are speaking. They need this perceptiveness in order to make contact with other thinkers in all their different contexts.

2. *The predicament of Christian philosophy in ethics*

After this lengthy introduction, which in itself is an attempt to tune in to the situation in which we (I) find ourselves (myself), I can be relatively short about what I see as the predicament of Christian philosophy in ethics, i.e.: to provide the conceptual tools to help people connect to the 'good' for their and others'

lives. This may be accomplished when people learn to articulate their moral sensitivity while remaining true to its spiritual roots and with full awareness of the distinct responsibilities people have in different contexts. These very general formulations leave several important questions unanswered, but they have the advantage of identifying the issue as one of connecting (instead of merely describing or analyzing), i.e. as a matter of exertion of receptive skills and on the focused and qualified nature of human responsibility.[7]

As I already suggested, the moral problem of today consists first of all of a lack of connectedness to sources of meaning (or value, or truth, or — even — reality). Meaning, value, truth and reality are concepts that usually are analyzed within the framework of systematic philosophy and metaphysics; partly also in philosophical anthropology. These concepts are bound to persons, in the sense that meaning, value, 'the' good and truth do matter for persons — and not for animals or inanimate objects. They are, moreover, bound to persons in such a way that the meaningfulness and truth of their lives depends on the manner and the extent of being connected to sources of meaning, truth, and the good. In other words, these concepts are both systematic and personal (or: existential). It is the task of philosophy to frame these terms in such a way that both aspects, the systematic and the personal, are related appropriately to the situation under discussion.

This may sound a little abstract. What I mean to say is that in the analysis of a particular moral situation, the philosopher tries to tune in to what is needed for the sake of the good in that situation (the 'systematic' aspect). While doing so, the philosopher is taking into account how people in that situation are related to 'the' good and also how the philosopher himself (herself) is related to the good — in order to understand whether and in which way this relatedness could enable others to restore their relationship to the good (the 'personal' aspect). I am referring here, in other words, to the double sensitivity mentioned earlier.

One example of this sensitivity would be the ability to recognize when in a certain moral debate a conceptual analysis of a certain state of affairs is appropriate and when a more 'hermeneutic', i.e. probing and questioning, type of attitude is called for. Another example would be to find the right way to communicate that while one's own situation is to a certain extent similar to the situation of other parties, yet one's attitude to that situation may well be fundamentally different from that of others. Christian philosophers have to show their solidarity with the problems of the world. These are their problems as well, irrespective of whether their solutions differ from those of secular thinkers.

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[7] The 'unanswered questions' refer to questions like: (a) how is philosophy as theoretical activity related to the practice of connecting? (b) is ethics about what is good or about what is right (cf. the contribution of John Hare in this volume)? and (c) is ethics concerned with all sorts of normativity, or only with a particular 'ethical' kind of normativity? and if so, (d) how to define this ethical normativity? I realize that in a full account of the position I defend, these questions have to be addressed. For now, I don't want to bother too much about these more or less technical preliminary issues, because it would distract too much from the main thesis of this article.

My focus on finding the right balance between existential and universal meaning ('the' good) is not meant to detract from the importance of descriptive and purely analytical approaches to ethics. The reasons are obvious: these approaches help clarify concepts, they provide the conceptual tools to analyze complex situations, they may be instrumental for maintaining a balance between certain moral principles and/or normative aspects; their insights may also be used to structure the moral debate, for instance in (medical) ethical committees. However, even in (medical) ethical committees the most fruitful discussions arise when the issue of the good itself is tested intuitively and conceptually.

At first sight it seems that Reformational philosophy has not been very sensitive for this aspect of recognizing the importance of one's relatedness to truth. However, this is only seemingly so. Dooyeweerd, for instance, has been very clear that he did not see philosophy as a straightforward theoretical expression of a certain life- and worldview; suggesting by this that there is a difference of 'stance', or attitude, between pre-theoretical and theoretical understanding. Tempting as the idea of a comprehensive Christian approach (philosophy as expression of a life- and worldview) may be for a Christian philosopher, it would disregard the limitations of philosophy, limitations that are inherent to any theoretical thinking. It would unduly charge philosophy with claims inherent in such a life- and worldview, claims like being ultimate and/or encompassing. Aside, no philosopher has been more aware of the intricateness of this issue as Søren Kierkegaard (see especially Kierkegaard 1845). His play with pseudonyms is one sustained attempt to enter into the discussions of his time in the appropriate way and to save so both the personal — i.e.: the passion of faith — and the ultimate and universal character of Christendom.

Dooyeweerd's sensitivity for the issue of 'relatedness' is a bit masked, I admit. But it is strongly present, albeit beneath the surface. Think for instance of his idea of 'four horizons of truth', each horizon having its own requirements as to the right position vis-à-vis the question of truth; think also of the emphasis on self-criticism and self-relatedness in his transcendental critique; and on the very notion of boundary itself. It has been said earlier by others, that boundaries are no water-sheds. They can better be viewed as signposts, indicating differences and transitions. Abraham Kuyper coined the term *sphere sovereignty* to indicate the irreducibility of responsibilities — and, thus, the irreducible differences between attitudes/positions. Dooyeweerd expanded this sociological concept to a cosmological one, expressing the irreducibility of meaning aspects of reality. Transferred back again to the domain of human action, this cosmological principle of irreducibility gains a new dimension in the sense that the twin concepts of boundary/irreducibility now point to the distinctness of moral situations and corresponding responsibilities, while at the same time showing the inevitability of transitions between one 'sphere of action' (and characteristic demeanour) to another.

So, the term 'difference' refers both to differences between positions and to differences between responsibilities associated with these positions and their characteristic demeanor. Positions are linked to specific features of the situa-

tion or context. Differences can be made transparent with the language of modal aspects, but we need another language here too, a language that is geared toward a typology of practices and of distinct responsibilities of the parties involved in these practices, together with an idea of the most appropriate way for philosophy to tune into and to analyze these practices. The term 'transition', then, refers to the unavoidable change of perspective when a person assumes another position (attitude; responsibility) and/or enters into another situation.

Philosophy itself, from this perspective, never gains the status of meta-science, overarching all these practices; though it can address them all if it keeps well aware of the specific *habitus* and modest role of the philosopher. In short, the double sensitivity, mentioned previously, is an expression of a both Dooyeweerdian and Kierkegaardian recognition of distinctness of positions, responsibilities, and corresponding relationships to the good; and of the impossibility to define them all from the perspective of an overarching meta-language.[8]

3. *Ethics and* Reformational *Philosophy*

Contrary to what some might be inclined to say, there has already been done pretty much in the area of ethics and moral philosophy by Reformational philosophers. Of course, a lot of work is still waiting, but when everything is taken into consideration the contribution of Reformational philosophers both to systematic-philosophical and to more applied issues has been substantial.

> I am thinking here of Dooyeweerd's analysis of the ethical aspect and of inter-modal subject-object relations, his work on the process of opening-up of law spheres, and the human body as an enkaptic structural whole; of Troost's work on praxeology, dispositions, and the ethos; his insistence that no moral answer whatsoever has to be expected from ethics as a scientific discipline; of Richard Mouw's contribution to 'divine command ethics' and his balancing of Calvinist and Anabaptist traditions. I also like to mention Puolimatka's conceptual analysis of the 'meaning kernel' of the ethical sphere (benevolence; Puolimatka 1989); Al Wolters's work on the notion of a creational order (Wolters 1995); Jim Olthuis's on love (2001); the development of an ethics of compassion by Jim Olthuis, Brian Walsh and Hendrik Hart (Walsh et al 1995); Sander Griffioen's (partly together with Richard Mouw) mapping of the differences between moral, contextual and associational pluralism, as well as his use of the metaphor of 'finding a way' (Mouw and Griffioen 1993; Griffioen 2003); the analysis of the moral nature of medical practice by Jochemsen, Glas, and Hoog-land (Jochemsen and Glas 1997); Schuurman's work on ethics in a technological society (forthcoming); Stafleu's on anthropology, as well as his contribution to an ontology of subject-object relationships (Stafleu 2002); the work of Sytse Strijbos on medical practice and systems philosophy (1988); and, last but not least, Bas

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[8] In writing the last paragraphs and previous ones on double sensitivity in am indebted to Soren Kierkegaard's notion of indirect communication, i.e., the idea that — in the current era — we do not have immediate access to truth ('from face to face') and that every understanding of truth is necessarily mediated by the person's attitude to truth, which itself should be a manifestation of truth too.

> Kee's (and others) on business ethics. This list is not exhaustive and has been restricted to the work of those who feel they are in some way building forth on and/or substantially relating to the work of Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven.

Instead of now summarizing these contributions in a systematic way, relevant parts will be reviewed later on in our discussions , following the same approach as earlier in this essay. What I would like to do first, however, is to highlight three areas of possible concern, corresponding to what I consider to be three white spots in Reformational philosophical thinking, so far.

1. Reformational philosophy does have only a rudimentary account of the inner connection between religious directedness and the 'embodiment' of the ethical ('the' good) in character, attitudes, habits, and professional and institutionally anchored practices. Or, in the idiom of Reformational philosophy: there is a gap between religious directedness in the 'central' sense and the moral practices in which this directedness takes on shape and expression. It is at this level that philosophical anthropology could play a useful and important role (like political philosophy with its theory of institutions in its account of communal goods).

2. Reformational philosophers have shown a relative neglect of the issue of evil and of reconciliation. Dooyeweerd was very hesitant with respect to a philosophical investigation of evil and sin. "I for one do not venture to try and know anything concerning the problem that has been raised [the problem of whether sinful reality is still meaning; GG] except what God has vouched to reveal to us in His Word", he says in the second volume of the New Critique.[9] True and sincere as this statement may have sound seventy years ago, and for many still may sound, in a world in which the reality of evil erodes all public authority and is awkwardly present in every news bulletin, it simply does not convince any longer. Christians can not afford to abstain from philosophical reflection on the nature, the transmission and the battle against evil. Evil itself can settle down in innocence; its favourite path of transmission is — often — plain denial.

   Certainly, very important work has been done in unmasking the deities of the present and the past ages. Dooyeweerd's analysis and definition of apostate groundmotives comes even very close to a definition of sin. His large historical reconstructions are a way to show how the *peccatum originans* of a certain way of thinking, in the end leads to unsolvable tension. Things go wrong when something 'under the law', the subjectum or subject-side of reality, is absolutized. This absolutization is in fact a form of deification. When a culture deifies something 'under the law', the process of opening-up will inevitably stagnate and will ultimately break down by internal antagonism. It may take a while, but sooner or later the consequences of this 'absolutization' are bound to lead to a clash of contrasting sub-motives and thus to internal disruption.

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[9]   H. Dooyeweerd, NC II, p. 33.

Basically the same type of analysis could be performed with respect to persons and the way they exert their individual and group responsibilities. Analyzing the internal antagonism in people's lives and in the dynamics of all sorts of groups can enormously profit from the conceptual framework of Dooyeweerd's theory of opening-up of spheres of reality.

However, these types of analyses would still lack the right sensitivity to evil itself, especially its dynamics, its transmission, its seducing and even demonic qualities. In addition to the structural analyses sketched above, we, therefore, need *a more intuitive, phenomenological, psychologically and theologically informed approach*, an approach which is sensitive to evil's non-transparency and consequently to the ambiguity of any attempt to 'understand evil'. Such an approach would understand evil as human freedom entangled in its own web; as a dynamic that restricts and paralyzes (instead of that it opens-up) and as something larger and 'older' than the persons who are involved.

3. My third point is closely related to the previous one, but broadens the scope by suggesting that Reformational philosophy could greatly benefit from a re-opening of debates with theology. These debates have virtually been absent for a number of reasons, which I will not discuss here *in extenso*. It is well known, that Dooyeweerd's caution was inspired by his fear for a scholastic type of rationalism — present also in the work of Abraham Kuyper — that could invade and damage the Christian life- and worldview. However, this attempt to safeguard the biblical life- and worldview against any theological input, could in the end lead to a kind of theological *naiveté* which made Reformational philosophy even more vulnerable to both uncritical traditionalism and scientific criticism (by liberal theologians, for instance). On my view, Christian intellectuals can no longer afford to ignore the results of biblical scholarship. Philosophers have an important role to play in scrutinizing these results with respect to their implications for the biblical life- and worldview. By doing so they may help the Christian community to appropriate these results. More specifically, Christian philosophers need the help of theologians in their reflection on normative issues in the life sciences and the great cultural debates of our time.

In the remainder of this article I will focus on the first two issues, 'embodiment' and 'evil'. In my treatment of these issues I will now and then make use of theological insight, in a provisional attempt to do justice to the third issue.

4. *Embodiment or the possible contribution of philosophical anthropology*

In this section I will give an idea as to how the gap between central 'directedness' and local moral practices might be bridged, as well as of the role philosophical anthropological insights may have in this respect. I will first explore the notion of *embodiment* by surveying the salient features of an ethics of action (Embodiment [1]). Action is related to identity, identity is gained in the inter-

action between structural unfolding and directedness at existential tasks; this interaction presupposes self-relatedness; and self-relatedness otherness. It will appear by then, that the ethics of action has to be supplemented by an ethics of receptivity. In an intermezzo I will, then, highlight these issues from the perspective of Paul Ricoeur's work on the self (Embodiment [2]). After this intermezzo I will give a short review of what has been achieved in philosophical anthropology thus far — with a view to its relevance for ethics (Embodiment [3]). And then, finally, I close the section with a discussion of virtue ethics (Embodiment [4]).

4.1 Embodiment — the preliminaries

Let me start with the truism that the 'the ethical' should be seen as a qualifier (defining quality, indispensable feature) of human acting and behaving. In other words, the ethical is not a quality of a 'what', a thing or an event in the world; it is a feature of an act, more precisely of human acts. Acts refer primarily to a 'who', that is, to a person performing acts. Moral theory, therefore, is related to notions of who one is, that is, to personal identity, and, further on in the chain of reflection, to social identity.[10] A moral person is a person whose moral nature is exemplified by his or her character, by his or her being endowed with particular qualities and dispositions (i.e., virtues), and, above all, by typical normative responses to morally demanding situations, responses which give testimony of the moral integrity of the person.

   This may all seem self-evident, but it is nevertheless important to stress the bond between 'the ethical' and human action for several reasons. The first reason is that the conceptual link between the ethical and human action can be used to raise reflection on ethics beyond the level of a modal (or: aspectual) approach. By tying the ethical to action, we are brought to a new conceptual and ontological realm in which the notion of agency gains relevance. Agency can not be reduced to 'being a feature' of a 'substance', nor can it be reduced to 'being a cause' (it would become a very special cause, then, a self-causing cause).[11] The notion of agency opens a dimension of normativity right in the

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[10]   By saying this I do not imply that the physical world, plants and animals, in the way they function, lack any normative moment. Nor do I suggest that the ethical dimension is in some way 'added' to the world by the subject. One of Dooyeweerd's great insights has been that the non-human world is receptive to normative qualities of human behaviour. This is expressed by the concept of object function. Inanimate objects, plants, and animals have an ethical object function, which means that their physical, biotic, and psychical functioning is receptive to and can be opened up by appropriate moral functioning of human persons. Knives can be used to kill and to heal. The knife is not just a knife, a merely physical object; it is in some cases a murder weapon and in other cases a healing instrument. The ethical object function of the knife is indicated by its murdering and healing qualities — qualities that are not 'added to' the knife, from without so to say, but functional possibilities of the knife itself.

[11]   I cannot go into the question whether substances can be such self-causing causes and consequently how agency could be conceived in a metaphysics of substances. Moreland and McRae (2000) argue for such an approach in their important work on anthropology and ethics. I concur with their spirit (a defense of the notion of soul in a biblical sense), without sharing their mind-body dualism and the metaphysics behind it. One could make a case, I think, of the statement that in their account the substantiveness of the body gradually disappears, in

middle of human existence, the dimension of responsibility. The other reason is that the conceptual link between the ethical and human action allows us, via the notion of personal identity, to attribute to normativity a certain degree of 'substantivity'. The ethical is not just a feature of human action, like other features, it is embodied in actions, it solidifies in habits and practices and, by doing so, pervades human existence. I admit that these formulations suffer from a certain vagueness, but I hope the thrust of what I am saying is clear enough.

It is tempting to continue at this point with a discussion of virtue ethics, its influence, of what it implies for the notion of *embodiment* — compared to Reformational philosophical insights on this score. But all this will have to wait till the last subsection (Embodiment 4), because — otherwise — a crucial conceptual knot in our discussion would be left undisentangled. So, let me first make a preliminary note on identity; and this on three related points.

The first point is that identity — via the notion of embodiment — is precisely the kind of concept we need in order to gain a better insight into the interdependence of the temporal unfolding of the structural side of reality and the deeper existential and ultimately religious dynamics at work in this process of unfolding. It is by relating to oneself and others as well as to objects and events in the world that the subject (the child) acquires his or her identity.[12] The concept of embodiment refers to this same process of acquiring identity: it is by relating to others that the child learns to incorporate psychomotor patterns (e.g., smiling; cooing and early forms of speech) and intentional actions (e.g., pointing at objects) and that it acquires inner stability with respect to regulation of basic needs and tolerance for the temporary separation from primary caregivers. All these processes contribute to one's identity, which at the experiential level is reflected in the emergence of a basic sense of self, or core self. This identity is both attitudinal — we learn to take a stance with respect to minor and major issues — and structural — we acquire more or less stable traits (character traits, for instance) and habits. Identity means that these attitudes and structural features become flesh and blood. They take on substance in a non-essentialist way, so to say. Identity is, therefore, not a possession (which one has and of which one is the owner), nor a mysterious (metaphysical) quality behind the empirical world. It is embodied in attitudes, traits, and habits, but also physically in gestures, mimic, body language and other physical characteristics. With this I do not suggest that there is nothing mysterious to identity; on the contrary, there will always remain something very enigmatic in

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spite of their body — soul dualism. Another issue is the distinctness between biblical and scientific language. An important argument in almost all dualist accounts is the separation between body and 'soul' at death. I am not convinced that this 'separation' can be used as an argument for body-soul dualism as a philosophical position. Is what occurs at the moment of death not just as mysterious as what occurs at the moment of conception (and in God's act of creation)? By introducing the biblical notion of the soul in a scientific discourse on mind-body dualism, one is coerced to adapt the biblical meaning of the concept to the prevailing ontology of substances and entities; and this almost always implies not only reduction (loss of meaning), but also adoption of certain conceptual characteristics inherent in the metaphysics of substances (such as separateness of substances; or self-sustenance; or being bearer of a bundle of features).

[12]   For a classic account see Daniel Stern (1985).

the singularity that is implied by the notion of identity, especially — but not only — with respect to human persons. What I am saying is that identity implies embodiment and that embodiment presupposes the interplay between structurally anchored opportunities and a basic drive to gain orientation in the world.

The second point is closely related to this and in fact the other side of the same coin. It says that the embodiment of human beings, just sketched, can only fully be grasped from the perspective of self-relatedness. Self-relatedness, in other words, is the hinge, the conceptual link, between structural unfolding and fundamental (existential/religious) orientation. This self-relatedness exists even at very elementary levels of existence, as developmental psychology and neurobiology have made clear. Basic capacities like grasping, visually localizing the source of sounds, and distinguishing between me and you, develop as a result of ongoing multimodal processes of acting and experiencing, of changing one's action a little bit and then experiencing how this feels or what it looks like. These visual, tactile, and kinaesthetic experiences are not only changes in the child's relationship to a certain object, but also changes in the relationship of the child to itself. In short, doing something different, feels different.

> It is tempting to pursue this idea a bit further by extrapolating it to the bodily sphere and especially to the working of the brain. Could it be that self-relatedness is even reflected in the biological substratum of mental functioning, in particular in neuronal structures, in the way they are wired and function? This is something to hold on to. It is certainly intriguing to see how many bodily functions and structures are represented in the brain (suggesting self-relatedness) and how also one's life history is 'stored' and represented and remembered, to an important extent by cues that are given by the memory of the body's history (Damasio 1994; 1999). This link between episodic memory and the history of the body not only points at the importance of embodiment, but also at the implicitness of self-relatedness. Long-term memory is not like a room in an enormous building that could freely be opened (conscious remembrance) or closed (no memory). This metaphor obscures that not only conscious memories, but also implicit memories play an important role in the way we structure our current experiences. The biographic self is in other words continuously related to the present self, and vice versa. It helps the present self to orient itself in the world.

The third point concerns the notion of identity from the other pole of the spectrum of self-relatedness, that is, the side which relates to more reflective and developed forms of self-relatedness. As will be obvious by now, there exists an infinite number of ways of relating to oneself. Self-relatedness presupposes the embeddedness in an unfathomable number of relations to objects, events, and persons in the world. So, self-relatedness is not an egoistic or, even, subjectivistic notion. It presupposes, from the outset, a world, the world of which one is part oneself; together with others with whom one shares one's life. Now, we have to discern a new dimension of the concept of identity, that is, its orientation to otherness. Otherness is already present from the beginning, in the first attempts of the child to explore the world. To develop is to be oriented to what is new and what differs from oneself and from what one is already acquainted to. To learn is to appropriate this 'otherness'. This appropriation is no 'swal-

lowing up' of 'the' other, but a learning to discern distinctions, transitions, and boundaries and a way to relate to these distinctions, transitions, and boundaries.

So, to summarize — what I am saying, is that identity implies embodiment as the result of the interplay between structural unfolding and existential orientation (first point); that the interplay between 'structure' and 'direction' can better be understood when the fundamental nature of the concept of self-relatedness is acknowledged (second point); and that the recognition of 'otherness' forms the heart of this notion of self-relatedness (third point). It is with this orientation of identity toward otherness that we are in better position to preserve a dimension of responsibility which goes beyond character and virtue. And this was the reason for our threefold interlude.

4.2 Embodiment – Paul Ricoeur on oneself as another

A brief intermezzo on the work of Paul Ricoeur may be helpful to phrase what has been said till now in a slightly different way. I will make use of Ricoeur's *Oneself as another*, a rich text which is meant to demonstrate (a.o.) the moral nature of self-relatedness. I will highlight two issues: the need of a dimension of self-relatedness beyond character and virtue; 'attestation' is the term Ricoeur invents to indicate this dimension; and the interdependence of structural unfolding and existential dynamic, an interdependence phrased by Ricoeur in terms of an interplay between idem-identity and ipseity. I begin with the second issue.

When Ricoeur opens his discussion of personal identity in *Oneself as another*, he begins by drawing a fundamental distinction between *idem*-identity and *ipse*-identity (Ricoeur 1990/1992). Classical accounts of personal identity, says Ricoeur, have failed to make this distinction by focusing almost exclusively on numerical and qualitative identity. Numerical identity, or singularity, refers to the bare fact that there is only one who is me (with the fingerprint as bodily expression of that fact). Qualitative identity refers to a particular quality or feature which is considered to 'define' or at least capture a fundamental aspect of personhood. Examples of such features are having a memory of oneself, character, and self-consciousness. Both numerical and qualitative identity, however, are one-sided in that they only refer to identity as 'sameness' in the course of time, that is, to *idem*-identity (being the same), thereby ignoring the other and even more fundamental aspect of personhood, namely selfhood, that one is someone, a self. Ricoeur offers an alternative view on personhood, by pointing to the self-referring nature of selfhood, for which he coins the term *ipse* (or ipseity; *ipse*-identity). Ipse-identity refers to oneself as a self-designating, reflexive structure, that is, a self that exists by relating to itself. The term reflexive refers in this context to self-relatedness, not to conscious self-reflection. The self-referential nature of the I-self relationship may imply, of course, conscious self-reflection. However, self-reflection is not a necessary condition for having a relation to oneself.

So, what is important about this distinction between *idem* and *ipse* identity? Ricoeur's first answer is that a reduction of personhood to *idem*-identity would erase the difference between things and persons. We need *ipse*-identity to express who we are. At the level of *idem*-identity 'who I am' can not be distinguished from 'what I am'. The human person, however, is not a thing in the world. He or she is not a thing that re-acts, but someone who acts and speaks and, by doing so, gives testimony of being a self-designating being. In short, we need a notion of *ipseity* to avoid materialism. So much will be clear by now. The second, and more important answer, is Ricoeur's suggestion that both dimensions of identity are related in spite of their fundamental difference. For, the answer to the question who I am, helps to shape qualities of both singularity and sameness — singularity in that it is only me who can be responsible for acts done by me; and sameness in that I remain myself by being faithful to (for instance) my promises. The ipseity of the person brings us, therefore, via a transformed meaning of *idem* (sameness), into the sphere of faithfulness and personal responsibility.[13] We may interpret this as Ricoeur's manner of indicating the interdependence of structural unfolding and existential dynamic by self-relatedness.

The second issue. Ricoeur's key word to indicate the moral nature of this self-related self is 'attestation'. This is a difficult and somewhat ambiguous term in the sense that it refers to both 'witnessing' ('being a witness'; 'bearing witness of') and to an elementary sense of 'being called upon'. So much is clear that both meanings of attestation refer to otherness. The self, in its very self-relational structure, cannot do without the otherness to which it is attuned. This openness towards otherness is expressed by my listening to and transmitting of the stories of others. It is manifest in the assumption of an attitude of responsibility. What happens to others does say something to me and deprives me from an existence that is based on self-evident and self-sufficient certainties. The self is 'oneself as another', that is, a self which searches for an openness that is both based on and the expression of 'otherness' — the otherness of others whose fate I bear witness of and for whose lives I adopt responsibility by allowing them to hurt me and to awaken my sense for their well-being.[14]

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[13]   Ricoeur delineates how self-relatedness is implied in domains of speech, action, narration, and communal (institutional) interaction — in speech by the use of performatives (promises, assertions, declarations) which refer to the integrity (trustworthiness) of the speaker; in action by the fact that acts are not simply events in the world but presuppose agency and responsibility; in narration by the subtle dialectics between character and plot, a dialectic in which the narrating self aims at coherence of the I-self relationship over time; and, at the communal level, because larger communal wholes (institutions) maintain their moral identity only in the openness to otherness.

[14]   I am very much aware of the fact that this notion of 'otherness' is highly unqualified and needs further delineation. I already suggested a link to Reformational philosophical distinctions when I said that the child does not just 'swallow up' otherness, but learns to discern and to distinguish as one of the effects of the confrontation with otherness. Otherness may heighten one's sense for qualitative (and potentially structural) distinctions, in other words.

4.3 Embodiment – Reformational philosophical anthropology and its contribution to moral theory

Ricoeur's book is rich, I said, but I have to admit that it does not offer the reader much detail with respect to the interplay between the structural and the dynamic aspects of self-relatedness. Let us now turn to what Dooyeweerd and other Reformational philosophers have to say about the issue. At the beginning of this and in the previous section I pointed to the gap in Reformational philosophy's understanding of the embodiment of the ethical. Perhaps, I was perhaps a bit too critical by speaking of the 'only rudimentary account' of Reformational philosophy. Let us summarize some of the insights of Dooyeweerd and others and see what can be done further.

First we have to note the remarkable fact that for Dooyeweerd the human body or corporeality involves human existence in its entirety. I will not go deeply into this issue. Dooyeweerd's reasons were obvious: mind-body dualism had to be rejected at any prize. We may welcome Dooyeweerd's insight as a recognition of the embodied nature of all human functioning, mental functioning included.

Secondly. The human body is called an *enkaptic* structural whole consisting of four hierarchically ordered substructures, the physical substructure being the 'lowest' and the (non-qualified and open) act-structure as the 'highest', with the biotic and psychical as intermediate substructures. The hierarchical ordering is significant: it brings to expression that no function of the act-structure is freely floating; all functions of the act-structure are embedded in the functioning of the three 'lower' substructures. These substructures and their mutual relationships are, subsequently, analyzed along the familiar lines of his theory of structures of individuality, with its idea of opening-up of 'lower' structures by 'higher structures' and the notion of intermodal subject-object relationships.[15] It is important to recognize at this juncture, that in the process of opening-up of these substructures and their subject-object relationships the self-relatedness of persons is not merely a formal, conceptual prerequisite, but receives its due by the gradual emergence of physical-biotic dispositions, habits, and character traits. In other words, self-relatedness is part of the course of a person's development. This is a normative process. Self-relatedness seems to play a role in inventing this normativity, i.e., the process of discovering the internal 'destiny' of functions, capacities, and dispositions. We could perhaps even say that the subject is responsive to normativity because it is a self-relating subject. All normative responding is 'self-relational' responding.

I realize that by saying it this way we run the risk of mixing things up. The term responding is usually reserved to refer to the response of the subject-side of reality to the law or the law-side. So it is more precise to say that in the unfolding of the substructures and their functions we are dealing with self-relatedness in the sense of the duality of activity — receptivity, mentioned ear-

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[15] The subject in these subject-object relationships is not the ego or I, or the mind, or any Cartesian cogito. 'Subject' refers here to the 'active' side in the process of opening-up (activity in itself not implying any consciousness of it), like the biotic 'object-side' of a bird's nest — as such a physical structure — is opened-up by the biotic subject function of the bird.

lier. This duality itself, in its turn, what I called 'inventing' or the process of discovering normativity, can be said to be subjected to the law-subject scheme. In that sense all human development is normative development.

The flux and reflux of doing and experiencing, of activity and receptivity, forms the basis for the development of a sense of self that is basic for all further emotional and personality development. This sense of self serves as a point of reference against which future acts are weighed and current situations are judged with respect to their relevance and impact. This sense of self is the experiential 'embodiment', the receptive side, of who one basically is, like character traits and other dispositions are embodiments of the 'active' side. So, the difference between my account and Dooyeweerd's does not regard the significance attributed to the law — subject distinction, nor the recognition of self-relatedness as such. My account differs from Dooyeweerd's in that I put more emphasis on the *receptive side* of human functioning as an indispensable element in the unfolding and stabilizing of the self-relatedness of human beings in character, dispositions and habits. It was the notion of self-relatedness that made us aware of the importance of the interplay between action and experience, and, thus, of human receptivity.

Thirdly. With respect to 'embodiment' we find the notions of disposition and character already mentioned in Dooyeweerd's 28th thesis of his '32 theses about being human' (Dooyeweerd 1942).[16] Troost (1983) and others have elaborated on the issue of dispositions. Troost, moreover, distinguishes the 'ethos' as a kind of foundational layer within the actstructure. The ethos is a fundamental motivating power in a person's personality, a basic, continuously active and integrative layer directing and ordering all human desires and strivings. The ethos is also shared with other people, usually a group of people with similar life- and wordviews. Terms like mentality and attitude do not reach deep enough, according to Troost. They ignore the religious and ethical motivation of all human functioning. What I miss, here, is again the recognition of the receptive side of the ethos. Think for instance of the kind of moral sensitivity that expresses itself as compassion and of the notion of conscience. Compassion has been recognized by Reformational philosophers as an important dimension of the Christian ethos (Walsh et al. 1995). Little has been written about conscience. It is my impression that this has something to do with its negative connotations, that is, its association with feelings of guilt and shame and oppression by law-givers and authorities. However, I would like to suggest a much more positive account of conscience, an account which, for instance, includes gratitude for the very fact of one's existence (like Aljosja expresses in *The Brothers Karamazov*) and a special kind of moral sensitivity, a sensitivity not only for suffering, but also a practical understanding of how to do the right

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[16] There is a certain order here: character is a set of dispositions at the level of the actstructure; temperament is the ensemble of dispositions that is anchored in the psychical substructure; typical tendencies in motor behaviour and bodily expression are related to the biotic and physical substructure. It is interesting that the distinction between character and temperament, after having become obsolete at the end of the fifties and after decades of absence in the scientific literature on personality and personality development, has re-emerged some 15 years ago and has begun a second life.

things, and of how to relate to other people, even, of how to see how life is meant to be.

Discussions about the notions of ethos and disposition are important because they reflect more fine-grained attempts to grasp the coherence between religious directedness and the unfolding of (sub)structures. Troost has been one of the first in the movement of Reformational philosophy to acknowledge that ethics would become an inert and ineffective partner in the moral debate if it would restrict itself to be 'science of the ethical aspect'. For this reason he developed his so-called praxeology, a science of human action, analyzing concepts like the ethos, dispositions, and the principles of what he called 'normative situational structures'. The concept of disposition is, just like the notion of ethos, attractive for such a broader conception of ethics, because dispositions are not bound by one particular modal aspect. Extraverts manifest their temperament of extraversion in all areas of life: in the choices they make, in coping with stress, in their work, family life and sexuality. Their temperament reveals on the one hand who they are (identity; core sense of self) and is, on the other hand, fully interwoven with all aspects of act life and the functioning of the substructures (even the biotic and physical ones as recent findings on the neurochemistry of pleasure suggest). In short, dispositions form the flexible conceptual matrix connecting 'structure' and 'direction'. I think the emphasis on dispositions as organizing and integrating factors in human activity is important and justifiable. However, it should be supplemented with an account on moral receptivity (or: sensitivity), both in a dispositional sense and as part of the notion of ethos.

The notion of self-relatedness may be helpful here too to solve an old, somewhat technical issue in Dooyeweerd's systematic philosophy, which also affects Troost's conception of dispositions. The issue being whether or not 'modalities' 'reach', or rather take part in, the supra-temporal heart and, therefore, could or could not be said to exist 'in' the heart. In the latter case the modalities 'stop' at the border between the temporal and the supra-temporal world. Dooyeweerd's 'prism' metaphor strongly suggests that modalities find their source in the supra-temporal (unbroken) sphere, the heart, like the light before it is 'broken' into the spectre of colours. Epistemologically there arises a problem, however. How could one know of such 'non-fused' (white, supra-temporal) light, when modal distinctions, like colours, loose their distinctness in the concentric direction? And, what are the ontological consequences of this epistemological uncertainty? Troost is inclined to locate dispositions and the ethos in a conceptual space 'closer' to the heart than the sphere of modal diversity. He then stumbles on the same epistemic problem and suggests an understanding of dispositions in an 'idea-like' fashion, that is, in a quasi-transcendental sense.

I fear that spatial metaphors reach their limits here and are in fact overstretched with respect to their meaning. Much of the problem dissipates when the directional component is conceptualized in terms of a multiform dynamics of self-relatedness with more and less stable elements — dispositions being instantiations of a more stable type of self-relatedness, and experiences and

short-lasting actions as fleeting and unstable instantiations. I emphasize that the concept of self-relatedness is not meant to deny the importance of Dooyeweerd's notion of the heart, or even his notion of concentration. Nor do I suggest that self-relatedness can solve the enigma of personal identity, for instance by providing a definition or a set of criteria. The task of the concept of self-relatedness in this context is twofold: to highlight the fundamental nature and incredible plurality of forms of being self-related; and to help avoid any suggestion of a metaphysical interpretation of Dooyeweerd's notion of supra-temporality.

The notion of self-relatedness, furthermore, has the conceptual potential to preserve the fundamental meaning of the biblical notion of the heart. First and foremost this biblical notion refers to the fact that human existence at its most fundamental level is determined by and responding to Divine calling and sustaining action. Before we were there, we were already 'seen' and meant to exist by the Other. Even our deepest longings are preceded and transgressed by Divine longing, which is a longing for man (Heschel 1954; 1955; 1962). Conceptually nor existentially Divine presence can be encompassed or 'grasped'. It is this superabundance (or: transcendence) that defines human self-relatedness. Responding to the Divine call is the very essence of our existence. Living is to relate to this 'essence'. Instead of referring to a state of self-absorption, the notion of self-relatedness, therefore, refers to the most fundamental conviction that otherness is constitutive for self-relatedness.

I admit that new questions will emerge with such an account: how different has the otherness of the Other, and of others, to be? Can otherness be appropriated? Does such a heavy accent on otherness not lead to a negative theology? Is it compatible with the idea of a speaking God? Is it compatible with a Divine command ethics? I have no satisfactory answer to all these questions, and it is not the place here to go into these issues in detail. But let me at least share my impression that these questions may not be insurmountable provided, at the least, the notion of otherness be not taken in an absolute sense (as the totally unknowable other or absolutely different otherness), but rather as referring to difference, distinction, and transition. With respect to 'Divine commands': how could they be taken as 'natural', 'familiar', or 'of my flesh and blood' (that is: as identical with or similar to my nature)? With respect to oneself: we often distance ourselves from our most spontaneous acts (in which otherness seems swept away), we say 'I lost myself' or 'I acted on impulse'. With respect to otherness in the interpersonal sphere: even in our most intimate interpersonal moments 'otherness' is never away; on the contrary, otherness heightens the intensity and meaning of these moments, both physically, affectively and spiritually.[17] Otherness is most difficult to delineate when applied to knowledge of God. My hunch is to seek for a way in the same direction as just sketched, that is, a way that does not take otherness in an absolute sense, but as

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[17]   Think for instance of the difference between being touched and touching oneself; the 'otherness' that is present in being touched is what fulfils; touching oneself may give a sense of safety or be self-assuring or exciting, but always via conscious or non-conscious memories or the use of imagination; memories and imaginations in other words that imply the existence of others, real or imagined.

recognition of the fact that God radically differs from me — to the extent that even my dearest thought or experience of Him may be inaccurate or false — together with the faithful acknowledgement that nevertheless He addresses me in a rich plurality of ways and knows how to reach me in spite of my imperfection.

In sum, my suggestions for improvement of the Reformational philosophical view on man and on ethics follow from my emphasis on self-relatedness and its diversity. They are threefold:
- to give more relative weight to receptivity in balancing activity and receptivity, as well as on the playfulness that comes with it;
- to acknowledge the importance of a core sense of self as the receptive side of a self that is co-constituted by dispositions and character on the 'active' side;
- to more fully appreciate the role of conscience, empathy, and compassion in the exertion of moral sensitivity.

4.4 Embodiment – virtue ethics

We are now ready for an appreciation of the contribution of virtue ethics, recently revived from a condition of being almost near-death and now, again, an important current in ethical theory and especially in medical and nursing ethics. I will — again — abstain from a scholarly overview and immediately dig into the systematic issues.[18] Virtue ethics and Reformational philosophy have a natural inclination towards each other for obvious reasons: they are both interested in normativity as a dimension that is inherent to the practices in which human beings are involved.[19] What they share is recognition of the intrinsic normativity of human existence and a set of ideas about how this normativity could be expressed in virtuous action (virtue ethics) and the normative unfolding of the structural side of reality (Reformational philosophy), respectively. So, intrinsic normativity and substantiveness are at the heart of both approaches to ethics.

I must say that I consider the work of Taylor and McIntyre as enormously important for the unmasking of naturalist ethics (which views the good as a freely chosen 'option') and the emptiness of emotivism (which views the good as 'what feels good'). Especially Taylor's *Sources of the Self* is admirable for the kind of receptive intuition that helps him to get a feel for the different layers within the *Geist*, the moral spirit, of our age. His work is a beautiful illustration

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[18]   The revival of virtue ethics has different backgrounds: concerns on moral pluralism, nihilism and naturalist ethics in the work of Alasdair MacIntyre (1981) and Charles Taylor (1989), respectively; interest in male/female distinctions in moral development in the Gilligan-Kohlberg debate (Gilligan 1982); ensuing re-appreciation of the notion of care in both humanist and catholic contributions to medical and nursing ethics.

[19]   At the occasion of the presentation of Henk Jochemsen and my book on the foundations of medical ethics, the Catholic bishop W. Eyk welcomed our contribution as the final recognition of the familiarity between the Catholic appropriation of Aristotelian ethics and the Reformation view on creation.

of the exertion of moral receptivity we spoke about earlier, combined with deep historical insight and philosophical structural analysis. Here we have an example of a philosopher, who shows his solidarity with the culture he criticizes and who uses his self-relatedness as a receptive instrument informing and shaping his critical analysis. Consider for instance Taylor's hesitance with respect to the dilemma at the end of his book, viz. the dilemma between what he calls 'spiritual lobotomy' and 'self-mutilation'. *Spiritual lobotomy* would mean to abstain from any philosophical judgment on spiritual sources and their possible contribution to the moral problems of our age. *Self-mutilation,* on the other hand, refers to the unintended consequences of what occurs when we do allow spiritual sources to inspire us to high ideals (the ideal of benevolence, for instance). Taylor says: "... the demands of benevolence can exact a high cost in self-love and self-fulfilment, which may in the end require payment in self-destruction or even in violence".[20] Perhaps a little bit prudence is appropriate here, he suggests. Elsewhere he warns for the dangers of moral superiority, the kind of superiority for which Nietzsche was so allergic, because he recognized it in a certain servile mentality among Christians as well as in an inclination to self-sacrifice. I think, these are nice and important points. Any ethics of suffering is vulnerable to the kind of moral superiority, Taylor has in mind — the superiority of the victim, who is always right, and the superiority of the one who takes side of the victim, and thereby shares in the victim's moral righteousness. Of course, I am not implying that an ethics of suffering would by definition or factually imply a position of moral superiority. On the contrary! Yet, compassion and suffering are not the sole issues for Christian ethics.

At this juncture I would like to comment briefly on virtue ethics.

First. Virtue ethics, with its emphasis on what is internal and therefore 'naturally given' in a certain normative practice may have difficulties in pointing out the normative moments of highly technological practices. Reformational philosophy is familiar with a similar problem, viz. how to discern creational normativity, especially in contexts in which everything is man-made and artificial.[21] For example: to what extent has medical and nursing ethics to argue for a 'thick' notion of care in highly technical settings with a far developed division of labour? Reformational philosophy, with its sharp nose for distinct responsibilities and its rich conceptuality language for articulating these distinctions, is — at least in theory — ahead of virtue ethics to give a full account of the normativity of highly developed, technical practices. In addition, for both virtue ethicists and Reformational philosophers, I would like to recommend a greater appreciation for the elements of play, invention, and trial and error. We often simply do not know how a certain division of labour and use of techniques will turn out to influence a certain practice. These new practices have to be tested and sensitively evaluated by all parties that are involved.

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[20]   Taylor (1989), 528. The dilemma itself is described at page 530.
[21]   Al Wolters, in a more general sense, refers to the same difficulty at the end of his paper at the occasion of the celebration of the 25th anniversary of ICS in Toronto (1995); cf. Wolters (1995), 45.

Practices, therefore, have the same circular and self-related structure as the people working in them and as human beings in general.

Secondly. Virtue ethics lacks the notion of a religious depth dimension as well as a vocabulary for evil, sin, and wrongness. Virtuous action can be performed with only a superficial commitment to the spirit by which these virtues are supposed to be animated. Virtue ethics is attractive for medical ethicists and practitioners because its language can rather easily be translated into the now common language of 'competencies'. However, it lacks a vocabulary for issues such as inspiration and commitment, benevolence and malevolence.

To conclude: virtue ethics is an important ally in the current moral debate for its recognition of the intrinsicness of the normative dimension of human existence and its substantive notion of how this normative dimension could be acknowledged in different practices. However, it falls short in the analysis of highly technological and/or specialized practices and in its relative neglect of the volitional and spiritual aspects of human existence, in particular acts of malevolence and the notion of evil.

5. *Evil – transcending philosophical anthropology; instigation to go beyond ethics*

With these latter remarks we are already touching our last subject, the enduring reality of evil and its impact on the way we as philosophers think about moral theory. We called this subject — with some further qualifications — a white spot in Reformational philosophical thinking and argued for a more substantive account.

The notion of evil takes us to a region of thought that transcends the scope of philosophical anthropology and — if we may believe Paul Ricoeur (1955)[22] —, also of moral theory proper. It leads to questions that are usually dealt with in cosmology, theology, metaphysics, and philosophy of religion. Evil is both older and larger than man, I said earlier, and this is reflected in the broad range of disciplines from the perspective of which it can be studied. I will, nevertheless, say a few words about evil because it seems such an important subject in the understanding of who we are and what we have to do.

There is another reason to deviate from the path of a strictly anthropological approach at this point of our discussion. This is that to a considerable degree contemporary moral confusion seems to be related to tensions that have arisen between the macro- and the micro-sphere of human interaction. I mentioned already the tension between justice, conceived as just distribution of goods among the population, and beneficence as prevailing value in the individual doctor (nurse) — patient relationship. I will discuss this example in more detail further on.

But, first, I will make a few remarks about evil. In the section on 'Ethics and Reformational philosophy' I pointed out how according to Reformational philosophy the reality of evil shows up: in an unjustified absolutization of an aspect, or thing, under the law; in an attendant internal antagonism of the

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[22]   See also Van der Hoeven (1980a), (1980b).

apostate ground motives; as well as in disproportional developments and anti-normative states of affairs. I suggested that this type of structural analysis should be complemented with a more phenomenological, psychologically and theologically informed approach that is sensitive to evil's non-transparency.[23] I refer here to what has been said about improvement of the receptive skills of Reformational moral philosophy. This type of empathic description and respectful analysis may make us aware of unnoticed aspects of the phenomenon under study.

Let me, for the sake of clarity, give an example from my own work, based on a philosophical interest that first awakened at the occasion of the 50th anniversary of liberation day in Holland in 1995 and was enhanced by the Srebrenica drama that took place in the summer of the same year. I saw for the first time the entire documentary Shoah of Claude Lanzmann (1985) and watched several television documentaries on the events in former Yugoslavia, among which an impressive BBC documentary. During those days I also read Hannah Arendt's *Eichman in Jerusalem* (1965) and Robert Lifton's *The Nazi Doctors* (1986). I provide this biographical information to give you an impression of the type of experiences and events that helped shape my attempt to clarification. (Later followed other experiences, clinical experiences as well.)

First of all, what struck me was the non-transparency and impenetrable nature of acts of evil. In the presence of these acts people watching them did not only keep their mouth about the badness of what was going on. Even more important was the strong suggestion that such 'moral' talk was futile and totally irrelevant; the reality of evil seemed to exert an influence that made it unthinkable and literally unreal to speak about what 'really' was going on. I am talking about life reports on the hunt and the execution of Muslim men.

Later, I found out how little there has been written on sadism and other forms of excessive malevolence. Some authors were clear about their dilemma: trying to explain excessive malevolence seemed to reduce malevolent acts to the order of what can be understood; however, were these acts, or at least some of them, not beyond any comprehension?[24] And would any explanation sooner or later not be interpreted as an excuse. For, understanding is pardoning. Bruno Bettelheim, famous Jewish psychoanalyst and writer of several books, among which an important book on fairy tales, severely criticized psychiatrist and journalist Robert Lifton for attempting to comprehend what the Nazi doctors did. By doing so, Lifton could not but reduce the moral responsibility of the Nazi doctors — which, according to Bettelheim — should be avoided at any cost.

What struck me in the second place, was the splitting in the mind of many perpetrators. Lifton gives a post-hoc analysis of several of the characters of the Nazi doctors and concludes that their mental functioning could only escape from breakdown by the strong activity of splitting as an inner, psychic mecha-

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[23]   Transparency is one of Kierkegaard's favorite terms to indicate that a person's freedom is appropriately proportioned to that person's relationship to God. Persons may increase or loose transparency (cf. Kierkegaard 1848). For my own account of this non-transparency (I use the term speechlessness), see Glas (in press).
[24]   This issue is explored by Goldberg (1996), Chapter 1.

nism of defence. Mengele stroke the children over their hair and gave them candy, and yet was able to watch their death in the gas chamber 15 minutes later, seemingly untouched.

What finally became clear was the fundamental importance of the emotion of shame in the development and maintenance of splitting. The unlimited desire for power and domination of the perpetrators appeared to have roots in deep feelings of inferiority and shame, and, therefore, unexpressed anger and hatred.[25]

What is the point of this phenomenological and psychological reconstruction when it comes to moral philosophy? Most important, I think, is the increased awareness of the power of evil, as a real dynamic that is almost impenetrable both cognitively and affectively. We can simply not understand plain evil, nor can most of us empathize with it. The power of evil is sometimes larger than us. With respect to moral philosophy we could add that a heightened awareness of some of the features of evil (that it resists to be verbally addressed and that it is mentally blocked off) may perhaps also be recognized in our philosophical discussions, for instance when certain topics are blocked off or not spoken about in spite of their obvious importance. Experiencing the enormous diversity of forms of self-relatedness may, therefore, be helpful to get a sense for the unsaid and to address it, and, by doing so, to overcome denial and mental suppression, also in our philosophical work. So, philosophical work may be exciting and even healing, precisely when we have our most difficult moments, when the issues become dark and the realities we study are fragmented and we seem to have lost our capacity to see them in the right perspective. These are the moments that the unsaid can be addressed and splitting and shame, if present, overcome.

Other issues might be brought up in this context. Has moral philosophy a message for a culture that seems to be in the grip of anxiety and feelings of unsafety? How do we and should we evaluate this 'anxiety'? What is its nerve? Is there a religious dynamic present in this anxiety?

I leave these questions for this moment in order to say, finally, a few words about the issues that emerge in the clash between macro- and micro-worlds, especially the tension between justice and beneficence. Here we see Reformational philosophy at its best, I think. I would like to illustrate this by contrasting reformational philosophical insights with Avishai Margalit 'ethics of memory'. Margalit (2002) draws a distinction between 'thick' and 'thin' relations, thick relations being the ones we entertain with 'whom we care about' (family, friends) and thin relations being the ones we have with the rest of humanity. He makes a corresponding distinction between ethics and morality — a distinction in which ethics is focused on thick relations and morality on thin relations. The ethics of memory, as one could guess on the basis of this, is concerned

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[25] Interestingly enough it appears that the structural features of reconciliation show a reversed version of the structural features of evil. Resolving the evil I do toward the other requires that I am able to say what I have done wrong (the reverse of silence and the unspeakable), that I recognize my guilt (which is incompatible with splitting) and that I ask for forgiveness (which is very shameful, but may resolve shame when penitence is accepted and forgiveness is given); see Glas (in press); Murphy and Hampton (1988); Volf (1996).

with thick relations. They are the kind of relations of which it is important to keep memories alive. Thin relations are guided by communal self-interest, that is, by a theory of social contract and the concept of justice that ensues from this theory. By drawing such a sharp line between the two types of relationships and their corresponding types of moral reflection, Margalit seems to propose a division in ethical theory too: a communitarian approach for theories of thick relations and a utilitarian approach for the theory of thin relations.

Margalit's account is interesting for a number of reasons. First, it contains much interesting material for the dialogue between Christians, Jews, and humanists, because of the mix of receptivity for underlying meaning, frequent references to biblical stories and parables, and unshakable determination with respect to the main thesis.

Secondly, Margalit does have a point with his objection to some humanist and Christian approaches which presume that all ethics is about thick relations. Such accounts of ethics are questionable because they easily lead to exaltation and sometimes even a false sense of authenticity. Ordinary people, like we almost all are, hardly tolerate to care for a severely ill or dying person for more than a couple of days. It is not only compassion we feel for these people, but also disgust and boredom. And: we simply can not entertain thick relations with every human being in the world. We are finite beings and limited in our capacities for such moral heroism. Margalit's accounts reminds us of a saying of Ricoeur that in the sphere of institutions the 'I — thou' disappears and is replaced by relations between me and 'third persons' (he/she/they).

Finally, Margalit's duality certainly goes too far. However, this exaggeration of the difference between relational types gives us the opportunity to bring in the much more refined type of analysis that Reformational philosophy could give of interpersonal and institutional relations and their intrinsic normativity. Here we see the strengths of a sound analysis of the normative structure of such relationships. The doctor — patient relationship, for instance, is thick, nor thin. It is not a relationship that is aiming at the preservation of a shared memory or the cultivation of the uniqueness of that relationship. Nor is the nature of this relationship compatible with a purely utilitarian (contractarian) approach, an approach in which doctor and patient are strangers. The same holds for the relation between nurse and patient. One of the most crucial professional competencies of doctors and nurses is that they pay equal attention to patients, irrespective of whether these patients are talkative, rich, attractive, or interesting in another sense. This equality in the distribution of attention might be conceived as (analogically) referring to the equality that is inherent to the concept of distributive justice. This would imply that justice and care do not necessarily exclude one another and may even need one another. The example of the doctor/nurse — patient relationship can help to recognize that there exists not a watertight barrier between communitarian and utilitarian approaches, or between thick and thin, or care and justice. Such schemes are much too simple to capture the reality of modern medicine — and of or our culture. All that has been said above points in the direction of a plurality of

relations or relational types, with each their own normativity, and — even — kind of theory to support it.

6. *Conclusion*

Is Reformational ethics bound to the perspective of the law and of a sovereign lawgiver maintaining an unchangeable creational order? I do not think so. Such a perspective would be one-sided and may even cause harm. My approach concurs with the development of a Trinitarian perspective by Richard Mouw (1990), and others (cf. several contributions in Clark and Rakestraw 1994).

First, the law is the law of a loving Father, who liberates from the slavery and exile of sin as expressed in the preamble of the Ten Commandments.

Our Reformational ethics, is secondly, sensitive for the dynamics of evil, sin, and reconciliation. It is tries to develop a giving and healing vocabulary, a vocabulary that is both subtle enough to express involvement with the problems of the world and strong enough to preserve its own identity. This identity is not a possession, but a gift, based on the faithful embrace of God's promises in Jesus Christ. Such philosophy avoids speaking from a position of moral superiority, while maintaining its Christian ardour and perseverance.

Third, this philosophy will also be playful and inventive and creative and, thereby, prove its trust to be inspired and guided by the Spirit.

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