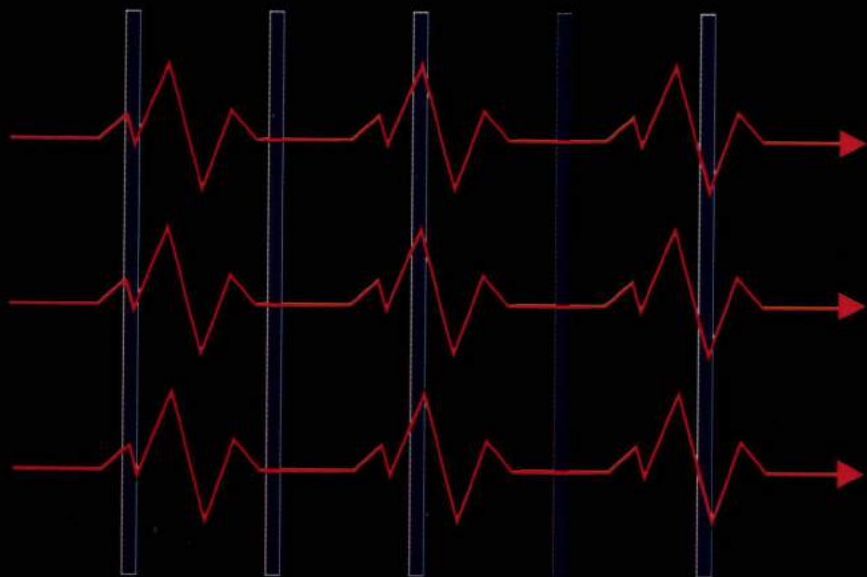


CONSTANCY & CHANGE

**historical
types and trends
in the passion
of the Western mind**



BJ van der Walt



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in the passion of the
Western mind**



**B.J. van der Walt
Potchefstroom
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PREFACE

In the contemporary world, philosophy in general has become a beleaguered discipline. Philosophy, having been considered in the early history of Western academic work the mother of the disciplines, has been decisively consigned to the margins of academic activity, in a world in which pragmatist and consumerist attitudes prevail and fundamental thinking about the world and the place of people in the world has disastrously diminished in significance. In this context, reflection upon the world and the place of human beings within the world has been relegated even further down the avenue of what is considered useful in a largely materialist world.

Bring into this the context at issue here, a Christian-focussed consideration of the world, the place of people in the world, and the way in which this reflection of the world finds expression within a broader worldview and philosophy, and one cannot but be struck by the crucial importance of a work such as this. Issue is taken with methodological concerns aimed at building a responsible, accessible and focussed methodology for dealing with the history of philosophy from a specific angle: An approach located in and informed by a Scriptural worldview and Christian philosophical spectacles with which to view life.

The book starts off with a consideration of how to portray the history of philosophy by exploring historiographical problems and methodologies, systematically unpacking different ways of looking at the more than 2500 years of Western philosophy. Following a careful critical consideration of various ways of looking at the history of philosophy, it arrives at convincing reasons for supporting the notion of a Scripturally-oriented perspective on the history of philosophy.

The second chapter picks up this narrative, and elucidates the reasons why a biblical perspective, bearing strongly on the worldview point of departure, is so fruitful in investigating the history of Western intellectual thinking. This approach is considered to be useful in circumventing some crucial weaknesses in existing historiographical methods. But the chapter also looks critically at some points of critique that can be levelled against this method itself.

The work of Vollenhoven, contextualised within his crucial contribution to a Christian worldview, systematic philosophy and the history of this philosophy, is used in the third chapter to enable the reader to better understand and thus categorise the different historical Christian worldviews.

The issue of the relationships between men and women remains a crucial one, and one that is often negated and ignored in considerations of this nature. Biblical perspectives are often interpreted in less than useful ways when it comes to a consideration of this vital aspect of human existence. In the final two chapters of the book this issue is explored in detail, the problem of limited perspectives is lifted out, as well as the problems posed by a lack of a thorough ontological-anthropological basis for such considerations. A strong case is made out for the usefulness of using the consistent problem-historical method in dealing with the divergent variety of view on the concepts of man and woman and their relations through the ages.

The author succeeds in demonstrating how an approach to philosophy such as the consistent problem-historical method can assist not only in philosophy but in other fields of the humanities as well. The academic value of this is immense, as it not only demonstrates to students and readers the interlocking nature of the concerns of the different disciplines, but a way of accessing the essence of these disciplines through the use of a well-developed and mature approach based in worldview and working with consistency and academic solidity.

Bennie van der Walt, the author, is first and foremost a philosopher. He has over many years, however, been dedicated to bringing philosophy, and more especially philosophy practised from a Christian perspective, to readerships wider than simply students and academics. He has a very wide-ranging knowledge and understanding of philosophical issues. But perhaps his importance and his contribution lie in the way he has over decades sought to make philosophical reflection accessible and understandable to his many readerships. The work contained in this book takes this focus of his work forward in significant ways.

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INTRODUCTION

The title of this book captures in a nutshell a philosophical historiographic method, known as the consistent problem-historical method. According to this method any philosophical conception basically consists of two aspects. They should be distinguished, but because of their mutual influence on each other, cannot be separated from each other.

Prof. D.H.Th. Vollenhoven (1892-1978) who originally developed this historiographical method, called these two elements "types" and "currents". He firstly identified a great variety of ontological and anthropological types or viewpoints on the structures of reality among the many Western thinkers. These types have been continuously recurring throughout the long intellectual history of the West and were/are therefore responsible for a certain degree of constancy and continuity.

Secondly, Vollenhoven also distinguished, in the viewpoints of the philosophers, different currents or normative directions, often represented in different methodologies and schools, following on each other. Since these trends keep on changing, they are responsible for a dynamic element in the passion of the Western mind.

The aim of the five chapters of this book is to provide an elementary, comprehensible introduction to Vollenhoven's complicated historiographic method. (In a separate volume to be published, *The cradle of a Christian philosophy in Vollenhoven, Stoker and Dooyeweerd*, the interested reader will find more information about Vollenhoven's life, work and his systematic philosophy.)

The readers I have in mind are mainly South Africans and academics from other parts of Africa. With this purpose in mind, four of the chapters, which had previously been published in scholarly journals in Afrikaans, were translated into English.

Bearing in mind that the five chapters originated from different articles in two different journals during 2011, 2012 and 2013, a certain amount of repetition and overlapping is inevitable.

For the convenience of readers an abstract is included at the beginning of each chapter. The following brief indications of the contents of each chapter may further assist one in deciding where to start reading.

Chapter 1 firstly provides an overview of various older as well as more contemporary ways of portraying the history of philosophy and, secondly, it identifies important weaknesses and lacunae in these approaches.

Chapter 2 firstly contains an overview of the consistent problem-historical method; secondly, it indicates in which ways this method could rectify the shortcomings of existing historiographical methods; thirdly, it also draws attention to some points of critique levelled at the method.

Chapter 3 tackles the question of how to categorise different Christian worldviews. Various efforts to do so are mentioned. However, by putting oneself in the shoes of Vollenhoven, different points of critique can be envisaged and an alternative typology can be developed.

Chapter 4 is concerned with the issue of sexual and gender differences and relations between men and women. A work by Sister Prudence Allen is analysed in detail, indicating its lack of a thorough ontological-anthropological basis, resulting in her limited perspective of merely three possible relationships between the sexes.

Chapter 5, a follow-up of the previous chapter, indicates how the consistent problem-historical method of philosophical historiography is better equipped to explain the many different views on and relations between men and women throughout the history of Western intellectual thought.

In conclusion, it should be mentioned that Vollenhoven's method is not only applicable to philosophy. It has already, albeit in adapted form, been applied in, for instance, theology, aesthetics, psychology, other anthropologically-based disciplines, as well as the history of many others. Therefore, the author's wish is that this book may be of value also to the readers' field of study.

Bennie van der Walt

Chapter 1

HOW TO PORTRAY THE HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY Exploring historiographical problems and methodologies

To design an appropriate methodology to study the about 2500 years of Western philosophy including many individual philosophers does prove to be quite a challenge. However, it is of vital importance since one's methodology predetermines one's final results. For example, the chosen method should, on the one hand, reflect a scholar's own presuppositions while, on the other hand, it should not force history into a preconceived scheme. Furthermore – for justice to be done to its wide scope of investigation – it should at least be both fully historical and clearly philosophical in nature. Philosophic historiographers of the past, however, tended to emphasise either the historical development or the philosophical problems or ideas. More stumbling-blocks on the way are for example: the influence of broader and narrower views on the field of investigation of philosophy on its historiography; criteria for determining either the importance or unimportance of a specific philosopher or school of philosophy; the choice between either the present-day relevance of its history or faithfulness to the ancient birth of Western intellectual thought in Greece.

In order to highlight their strengths and weaknesses, the second part of this essay provides a brief survey of various methodologies. Some textbooks on the history of philosophy, or anthologies containing selections from the writings of past philosophers, simply make a selection of those philosophers whom the writer/editor himself regards as of importance. A second group prefers to follow a chronological method. The third employs a kind of psychological-ethnic approach, taking the "soul" of a nation as their vantage point, dividing history into, for example, German, French, English and other national philosophies. Many others approach the history of philosophy from the perspective of different epochs and accordingly divide it into a pre-modern (ancient), medieval, modern and postmodern era. Others again, prefer a more detailed division into successive centuries, characterised for example as "the age of belief", "the age of reason" et cetera. Then there are those who further subdivide the centuries into minor, different philosophical currents. Apart from these synchronic methods, several diachronic methods have also been developed.

Examples discussed in the overview are various "history of ideas" methods, as well as a worldviewish approach.

In the light of the preceding discussion, the third main section of the chapter attempts to formulate essential criteria for a more comprehensive and appropriate historiographical method of research: (1) a historian of philosophy should openly and clearly state the relationship between his own philosophical viewpoint and his method of describing the history of philosophy; (2) it should be consistently philosophical in nature; (3) consistently historical and (4) problem-directed; (5) consistent in the terminology applied and (6) experimentally tested.

The whole exploration is concluded with a brief review as well as the preview of a follow-up chapter in which the origin, basic contours and critical appraisal of the consistent problem-historical method of philosophical historiography of prof. D.H.Th. Vollenhoven (1892–1975) and his followers will be discussed.

1. A particular challenge

Looking at the number of works published on the history of Western, Eastern and African philosophies, one would think it cannot be that difficult to write this kind of book. However, this is not at all the case, at least not if these works were truly to bring clarification instead of confusion.

Therefore this introductory section draws attention to the main problems with which any philosophical historiographer – who is worth his/her salt – is confronted. Some problems which are obvious are merely mentioned, while others are discussed in more detail. The intention is to draw attention to the obstacles and not to suggest solutions to them. However, the list of problems implicitly contains the requirements of certain criteria for good philosophical historiography. The outline is limited to Western philosophical history.

1.1 A long history with many philosophers

The very first problem is that Western history of philosophy, beginning with ancient Greek philosophers, has already been in existence for more than 2500 years and includes numerous philosophers (according to Runes, 1955:xxiii at that stage already 10,000).

1.2 Diverging views on what philosophy is and what history is

Before attempting to draw up a history of philosophy one should, in the second instance, have clarity on what one understands by "philosophy" and "history". In the first instance one should be aware that what one understands by philosophy will not of necessity be the view of other contemporary philosophers. Moreover, there may be a huge difference between one's own definition of philosophy and what one finds in the works of many others during the course of history. In such a case, does one select from the history of Western philosophy only what approximately tallies with one's own view?

In the second instance history (of philosophy) has a double meaning. First, there is the primary history as it came into being over millennia as a result of the contributions of hundreds of philosophers (the *field* of investigation). Secondly, there is a secondary history as recounted by the historiographer (the *result* of the investigation).

The main point here is that one's own ideas on philosophy as well as history will definitely colour the result of one's research.

1.3 The scope of the field of investigation of philosophy

Diverging views on how limited or wide philosophy should be regarded form a third obstacle. Should one limit philosophy to logic, epistemology or language analysis, it will probably be easier to write a history of philosophy seeing that the sphere of research is relatively restricted. But if one assumes that ontology (a view of reality), anthropology (a view of man) and the philosophy of society also lie within the domain of the philosopher, it becomes increasingly difficult to cover the whole sphere with appropriate methods. An example of how one's own view on the sphere of philosophy can influence one's historiography is found in the following critique expressed by Rorty (1990:49) in terms of analytic philosophers.

Analytic philosophers who have attempted 'rational reconstructions' of the arguments of great dead philosophers have done so in the hope of treating these philosophers as contemporaries, as colleagues with whom they exchange views... Such reconstructions, however, have led to charges of anachronism. Analytic historians of philosophy are frequently accused of

beating texts into the shape of propositions currently being debated in philosophical journals.

For instance, the ways the domain and task of philosophy are seen, differ hugely in regard to the older, more rationalist views and the later, more irrationalist ones. According to the first-mentioned view, philosophy was a science occupying itself with almost timeless, abstract (mainly epistemological) problems. According to the latter schools, philosophies are changeable, historical phenomena which need not be described and practised only according to theoretical thinking and methods.

1.4 Methodological presuppositions

A fourth important point is that any kind of historiography (political, economic and also philosophical) presupposes distinct methods. Thus it cannot merely consist of a factual and chronological collection of what happened in the past or what thinking philosophically was like. From the above it has already become evident that the historiographer of philosophy (because of the enormously long time span and wide field) will be compelled to select according to predetermined criteria. Clearly a method is not something neutral. By going about methodologically one inevitably wants the material one investigates to say something – and gloss over some other things. Moreover, each method is also determined by one's own deeper, philosophical points of departure – hence the great diversity of methodologies.

1.5 A criterion for significance/insignificance

A fifth remark is that a philosopher's own view and methodology also determine what he/she regards as significant, less significant and insignificant intellectuals, problems and ideas in the long history of philosophy. In this way, for example, only the "great" philosophers are discussed while others are omitted.

1.6 Start with the ancient past or the topical present?

One can for the sake of the relevance of the age-old history start with contemporary problems and work backwards into history. Or one can be of the opinion that the development of this long history is only comprehensible when one begins at the beginning. How does one answer this sixth issue?

Russell (1959:5) for instance advocates the latter view because contemporary philosophical ideas did not suddenly appear from the blue. He says: "In some

serious sense, all Western philosophy is Greek philosophy". Randall (1983:30,80) agrees with Russell that the philosophical systems of the great intellectuals from the past have had a lasting influence right up to the present. (Naturally this does not exclude formulating problems later on in a broadened and more penetrating way.) However, not all philosophers will agree with him.

In the book *Philosophy in history* (1990) three important contemporary philosophers struggle with this problem: Where does one begin with history? Rorty (1990:49) raises it and Taylor (1990:17) formulates the dilemma as follows: On the one hand there is the

...inspiration to sweep away the past and have an understanding of things which are entirely contemporary. The attractive idea underlying this is that of liberation from the dead weight of past errors and illusions.

On the other hand there is the following argument:

...philosophy and the history of philosophy are one. You cannot do the first without also doing the second. Otherwise put, it is essential to an adequate understanding of certain problems, questions, issues, that one understands them genetically.

MacIntyre (1990:31) also begins his contribution ("The relationship of philosophy to its past") by contrasting the two possibilities:

Either we read the philosophies of the past as to make them relevant to our contemporary problems and enterprises, transmuting them as far as possible into what they would have been if they were part of present-day philosophy, and minimizing or ignoring or even on occasion misrepresenting that which refuses such transmutation... or instead we take care to read them in their own terms, carefully preserving their idiosyncratic and specific character...

Applied to today the dilemma would run like this: As *philosophers* we define what philosophy entails in terms of the latest postmodern trends and only on our own conditions give earlier philosophers access to the philosophical debate. Whether it amounts to distortion or an anachronistic approach is not important! Or as *historiographers* of philosophy we will do our very best to understand the past as

thoroughly as possible. Should it make the past irrelevant to today or be regarded as antiquarianism is beside the point!

1.7 Emphasis on the historical or the problematic?

If one chooses a dilemma like the above-mentioned one for a historical approach, one faces still more problems – which constitutes a seventh point. Where then should we put the emphasis? Should the historiographer simply relate the history of Western philosophy chronologically (as it developed) according to the successive individuals? Should s/he attempt to classify it in periods or in schools? Should s/he report the history with reference to influential ideas or issues which surfaced during the course of time? As will become evident (under main section 2 below) these different approaches – each with their own advantages and lacunae – have already been tried.

1.8 Comprehensible and unambiguous terminology

A next, eighth challenge confronting the philosophical historiographer is the terminology he/she should use to describe the large number of problems and viewpoints as clearly as possible. The same concept is often used in different meanings by different historians. In fact, the confusion here is akin to that of Babel. Randall (1983:84, 85) for instance remarks: "We have suffered from the intellectual consequences of confused and ambiguous ideas, with no single meaning... in philosophy ...".

1.9 A clear prior stand needed

From the obstacles already mentioned it becomes evident amongst other things that one cannot do historiographical research in philosophy without taking a definite stand beforehand, even if it is only a provisional one. The so-called neutral approach of earlier rationalistic historians has been exposed by their irrationalist successors. But the irrationalist-postmodern approach according to which almost any viewpoint is acceptable is not satisfactory either.

Yet one finds both these trends in more recent books on the history of philosophy. In the preface to their work Solomon and Higgins (1996:viii) say, for instance: "We tried to keep our own biases out of the text – not always successfully".

An even more recent, widely used textbook (containing both excerpts from the writings of philosophers through the ages and commentary on them) is the one by Melchert (sixth impression, 2011). In his preface to lecturers he says that in the philosophical discourse with history the intention is to weigh up different possibilities by means of (logical) arguments. In his advice to students he likewise advises them that they have to be able to give "good reasons" for accepting or rejecting the view of a certain philosopher from history. At the end of the hefty volume he offers some suggestions to students on how to write a philosophical paper on the history of philosophy. According to Melchert (2011:733) students should decide, according to the well-known syllogistic logic (working from premise to conclusion), whether a specific philosopher's philosophy is acceptable or not. No recourse should be taken to an outside authority (cf. 734). His whole logistic-rationalistic attitude also emanates from the concluding sentence on the next page: "Writing a philosophical paper... is an excellent exercise for developing... a sense for what *rationality* is really like" [italics BJvdW].

It seems as if Melchert's method is limited to immanent critique. By means of this method as a modern (postmodern?) philosopher, he tries to escape total relativism. In his "Afterword" (p. 731 en 732) he does admit, however, that he could not solve the issue of relativism to the satisfaction of all his readers. Although it is an intractable issue, according to him it is impossible not to take a specific stand on it. However, he does not divulge what his own view is. Should "neutral" logical philosophy pass the judgement?

Denial of the earlier so-called neutrality idea in my opinion does not mean, however, that the only other option is relativism. At least not when one admits that one's prescientific faith has an essential influence on one's whole life – including one's philosophy. Seeing that every human being is by nature a religious being, such an attitude is normal. The only difference is that one's faith can be determined by two different normative points of departure: either theonomy or autonomy. (In a subsequent chapter it will therefore be shown that even an explicitly Biblically-oriented historiography of philosophy is possible.)

1.10 History of philosophy not negligible

In the light of all the afore-mentioned problems, would it not be easier just to forget about history? Even if it could be argued that modern technological and natural sciences can be practised without considering their history, the author is convinced that this is not possible in the case of philosophy. Rorty (1990:47) even says: "The history of philosophy is that part of philosophy which is sovereign over the rest of the discipline".

To this Randall (1983:76,77) adds: "... to fail to learn how to use the past of philosophy is to repeat the errors and the follies of the past. To use history is the only alternative to remaining its slave... we must understand the past. Only thus can we make it our servant... and not our master". Of course there are many more reasons why knowledge of the history of philosophy is important (cf. e.g. Van der Walt, 2010:158 et seq.). However, we will not go into that at this point.

After having done a brief survey in the first main section of the possible problems impeding philosophical historiography we now proceed to the second section. In this an outline will be given of the different methods already employed in describing the long and intricate Western intellectual thinking.

2 An outline of philosophical historiographical methods

Since there are literally hundreds of textbooks on the history of Western philosophy as well as numerous readers, we will here be making a rigorous selection. The outline begins with the most elementary and moves on to the more complex methods, involving both earlier and more recent works.

2.1 Important individuals as a criterion

Runes (1955) in his book simply arranges the approximately 400 philosophers he regards as important in alphabetical order, accompanied by selections from their works. Although this work might not be regarded as a history textbook, the question still remains what Runes's criterion was for selecting specifically these philosophers for his "reader". Besides, one could ask whether there is any relationship between the different philosophers. Edman and Schneider (1954:x), for instance say: "But the striking fact about the history of philosophical ideas is their recurrent character."

2.2 Chronology as a guideline

Although the selection of only fourteen philosophers done by Edman and Schneider (1954) can also be queried, at least they deal with the philosophers in chronological order and thereby suggest that they would have influenced one another. Although the following books also discuss the issues raised by various philosophers, they still mainly follow the chronology: Copleston (1953–1956), Sassen (1945, 1946, 1950, 1952, 1957) and Störig (1969). Apart from an *outline*, however, *insight* into the relationship between philosophers and schools is also important. Chronological approaches at least showed the insight that one should start one's description of history at the beginning.

However, some authors attempt to make their textbooks topical by starting with the present and then referring back to the past (cf. the issue discussed under 1.6 above). This is what Tarnas (1991:xii) for instance tries to do "... from the richly complex perspective of the late twentieth century". As a way of getting students' attention it is probably not wrong. Yet, as we have pointed out, such an anachronistic approach runs several risks. Are the contemporary issues the same as those from the past? (Emphasis on present issues may ignore or contort earlier ones.) Are not contemporary views then easily – but unjustly – read into the past? (In this way Plato has been labelled as the first existentialist.) Neither has the present philosophy of necessity reached the final truth.

2.3 A psychological-ethnographic approach

For many years the bulky four-volume work *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie* (1928) by Ueberweg (1826-1871) was regarded as the standard work on the history of philosophy. (An abridged English translation was published in 1872 already and the 1928 German edition was already the twelfth impression.) From which angle was this work written?

Volume 1 (on Ancient philosophy) more or less follows the chronological line. It seems as if volume 2 (on Patristics and the Middle Ages) uses (chronological) periods. Medieval philosophy for instance is divided into pre-, early, high and late scholasticism. However, volume 3 (on the later philosophy up to the end of the 18th century) uses a different method, based on a vague "Volkerpsychologie" (psychology of nations). Here the history is classified in the philosophies of Italy, Germany,

France and England. However, the question is whether the philosophies of the different countries really developed in such isolation from one another. In the case of volume 4 the methodology is not at all clear. But the great emphasis placed on epistemological problems and methods gives away Ueberweg's own late rationalist (positivist) presuppositions.

2.4 A division into broad periods

Many textbooks (e.g. Copleston, 1953-1956) divide the history of Western philosophy into three main periods: Ancient, Medieval and Modern. In the work of Le van Baumer (1978) we find a mixture of these broad periods (e.g. "the age of science" and "the age of anxiety"), climates of thinking, worldviews and themes. More recent examples are Solomon and Higgins (1996) and Ferry (2006) who had to add a fourth period to these, namely the postmodern.

The latter work also sees radical gaps between the different periods. Other authors admit that it is not that simple to determine boundaries between the periods so that some insert transitional periods as well. It can be questioned whether it is justifiable to place such long periods, which also yielded diverging patterns of thinking, under one label (e.g. "modern").

2.5 A century approach

This kind of textbook and selections prefer a more refined division into different centuries. An example of this is the series "Readings in the history of philosophy" by Allen (1969), Saunders (1966), Wippel and Wolter (1969), Popkin (1966), Beck (1966), Gardiner (1969) and Weitz (1966). A second example is the "Mentor series" by Aiken (1956) Berlin (1956), De Santillana (1956), Fremantle (1955), Hampshire (1956) and White (1955). In the case of the latter the different centuries are also labelled (e.g. as "age of belief", "age of reason", et cetera).

Like the division into periods this approach contains an element of truth. Simultaneously one has to ask whether a whole century is really characterised by such a specific uniform trend.

2.6 Divided into different schools

The work by Stegmüller (1979) is an example of this approach. Contemporary philosophy (only up to approximately 1970) is dealt with in about twenty main

schools (as for instance evidential, phenomenological, realistic and hermeneutic philosophies). With this approach Stegmüller still employs a more or less historical methodology (some schools follow the one after the other), but at the same time he moves away from the merely historical to typical philosophical phenomena, namely different normative ideas which for a certain period were accepted in the scientific-philosophical field.

2.7 An approach based on the history of ideas

Most readers will have knowledge of the extensive six-volume work edited by Horowitz (2005): *New dictionary of the history of ideas*. Although it sometimes comes in handy it is, however, not restricted to philosophical ideas but covers a great diversity of disciplines. Lovejoy (1952) employed this approach explicitly in the philosophical sphere. In for instance Lovejoy (1978:3) he explains philosophy briefly and then describes one specific idea ("the great chain of being") as it developed during the course of history.

This "history of ideas" approach was very popular for a long time (cf. the journal with the same title as well as Raeper & Smith, 1991), but it did not escape criticism. According to Randall (1983:36) Lovejoy classifies various ideas without paying attention to the traditions according to which they developed. "... he leaves the history of ideas as something self-contained and autonomous, just as Hegel does". Elsewhere: "The isolated unit-ideas of Arthur O. Lovejoy's very atomistic conception of intellectual history have always seemed inadequate to historians with a sense of how long-continued are the interrelations between certain ideas" (54, 55).

The way in which Venter (in e.g. 2011) deals with the method of the history of ideas, however, overcomes this one-sidedness. Einstein's philosophical ideas are dealt with in their historical context.

2.8 Problem-focused approaches

Since philosophy, as is often said in jest, has the questions to all the answers, in other words, grapples with the underlying problems of reality, it is to be expected that methods focusing on this would emerge. Boas (1957) describes the dominant themes of modern philosophy (up to approximately 1950). From his table of contents it is evident, however, that he does not limit himself consistently to themes. Themes,

philosophers, trends, traditions, schools, and different philosophical disciplines (like ethics and the philosophy of history) and more are dealt with in separate chapters.

A problem-directed method should treat a certain *issue* in a chronological way. One could call it a vertical or diachronic approach in contrast to the horizontal or synchronic methods (cf. above) directed more at *historical periods and schools*. (Cf. e.g. Bril, 1986:11 et seq. and 2005:23 et seq. who distinguishes Kuhn's idea of *paradigms* or types of philosophy and Foucault's idea of *epistemes* or currents.)

From the same period as Boas is the popular textbook by Windelband (1957 – in its fifteenth impression already), who in his historiography wants to emphasise “die Geschichte der Probleme und Begriffe” (*the history of problems and concepts*). However, he does not escape the danger of fragmenting the historical in his problematic approach. The above-mentioned work by Melchert (2011) could in some respects also be reckoned as falling in this category. According to him the great discourse among philosophers through the ages has been about how to choose between false and true problems by means of logical argumentation.

2.9. Different worldviews as a principle of classification

Expressed simply, philosophy is the scientific reflection on one's own and other people's worldviews. Western history in general was portrayed from a worldviewish perspective by Wells (1989). The history of philosophy was approached from this angle by amongst others Meyer (1946-1950) in a five-volume work on the different Western worldviews, namely the Ancient, Patristic, Medieval, the modern worldview since the Renaissance and the contemporary (up to after WW II). Once again the worldviews are categorised (cf. above) according to their great historical *periods* and not primarily according to differences of *content*.

A more recent effort on a similar pattern is the one by Tarnas (1991). He also justifies his “worldview” approach by stating that all philosophies pursue comprehension of the world. His categorisation does not differ much from Meyer's either: The Greek, Christian, Medieval and Modern worldviews.

In the case of Meyer his neo-Thomistic slip was clearly showing. However, Tarnas (1991:xii) claims that he approached his work in a neutral or postmodern way. “I have assumed no special priority for any particular conception of reality”. Such a

statement has to be queried since, as we have already argued, any method is based on underlying worldviewish and philosophical presuppositions.

By saying this we are not claiming that such a worldviewish approach to Western philosophy has no value. It strikes one that Christian philosophers, especially after the classic work of Niebuhr (1951), drew up typologies of non-Christian and Christian worldviews (cf. e.g. Sire, 1977 and for many more works in the same strain Naugle, 2002 and Van der Walt, 2008). This kind of approach can be useful to introduce students in an elementary way to the complex legacy of Western philosophy. In the form of a criticism of ideology it can also be applied to the socio-economic sphere as was done for instance by Goudzwaard (1984) and Goudzwaard, Vander Vennen & Van Heemst (2008).

2.10 The role of the historiographer's own presuppositions

As we have already mentioned, contemporary postmodern philosophy has justly queried the earlier idea of a neutral approach in science – including historical sciences. Therefore the question about what the historiographer's own presuppositions are – including the one who writes the history of philosophy – can no longer be ignored.

Should one confine oneself to the Christian approaches in this sphere, one would be able to point out a number of (neo-)Thomistic approaches. However, the Protestant Reformational angle yields but a few. We mention only one example here.

Dooyeweerd (1894-1977), a Dutch philosopher, treats the course of the history of Western philosophy according to three religious ground motifs: The form-matter motif among the Greeks, the theme of nature–grace during the Middle Ages and that of nature-freedom (or the ideal of science and personality) in modern times (cf. Dooyeweerd, 1959). Over against this he states a fourth and according to him the real Christian ground motif: creation, fall and redemption.

Dooyeweerd's approach has already been queried on several points so that there is no need to discuss it in detail again. We merely remark the following: In the first instance it is not clear exactly what Dooyeweerd means by his supra-individual ground motifs that prompt individual philosophers during a whole epoch. Secondly, one should note that Dooyeweerd with these foundational motifs follows the above-mentioned popular, broad division of Western philosophy into an Ancient, Medieval

and Modern period. Thirdly, the question can be raised whether this approach can even roughly do justice to the great diversity of philosophical thinking over two and a half millennia. A subsequent (fourth) issue is that Dooyeweerd departs from the supposition that there always is an irreconcilable tension between the two poles (form-matter, nature-grace, nature-freedom) of all three non-Christian ground motifs. Such a statement should also be questioned. Even Dooyeweerd's formulation of a Christian foundational motif as creation-fall-redemption has to be taken with a pinch of salt since it does not embrace the full riches of Scriptural revelation for philosophy.

As a pedagogic tool for introducing first year students to the much more complex history, Dooyeweerd's analysis may be useful but not for a sound scientific historiography.

2.11 Large-scale methodological obscurity up to the present

If there is one matter that has become all too clear, it is that up to the present there is no consensus but rather great confusion on philosophical historiographical methodology. Looking at the recent textbook (of a thousand pages) by Kenny (2010), one finds that (albeit with attention to the historical-intellectual background of the different philosophers) he simply treats the history chronologically. One principle of categorisation which he does follow, is dealing with the different sub-divisions of philosophy (like metaphysics, anthropology, epistemology, ethics, political philosophy).

As indicated by the title of his book, Mitchell (2007) attempts to help students to a quick orientation to Western philosophy and the most important philosophers. The work first deals with certain philosophical disciplines, then with various schools and sciences on religion. The history of philosophy only comes up for discussion in Section 5 and is then divided into three periods. Under his "time-line charts" a complete potpourri of individuals, schools and countries is presented. All thrown together, it creates a chaotic image of the history!

Thus Western man's struggle to make sense of the history of preceding philosophy continues in different languages... In front of me on my desk there are the German six-volume work edited by Speck (1972/1973), and the later six volumes by Totok (1964-1990), as well as the hefty Dutch work on contemporary philosophy edited by Achterhuis (2005) – all of them with different approaches.

3. A summary of the lacunae in common methods

In the two sections above certain gaps in a diversity of earlier and current methods of philosophical historiography were identified. Possibly all the shortcomings could be summarised under one label, namely a lack of consistency. The following six forms of consistency are applicable in this case.

3.1 *The historiographer should consistently apply his own point of departure*

The pivotal problem here is the relation between one's description of the primary history and one's own philosophical convictions. The reader of secondary histories is usually kept in the dark about this relation. With regard to this historiographers should openly place their cards on the table and also be aware of the implications (results) their own philosophical orientation has for their historical research and consistently apply it.

A justifiable fear exists among contemporary postmodern philosophers that one can force one's own view onto history – like a cookie cutter giving form to dough. However, this very real threat should not cause one to hold the supposition that one can read history without taking any preliminary stand.

3.2 *Consistently philosophical*

In the second instance it became evident that some of the methods applied to the history of philosophy are not actually *philosophical* methods. Naturally one can also employ as aids methods that are not strictly philosophical (like for instance philological, exegetical, psychological, culture-historical, et cetera). But none of these is specific and broad enough to do justice to a complete view of reality, the domain investigated in philosophy. Therefore the suitable method should be *consistently philosophical*, because we are concerned with the history of *philosophy*.

3.3 *Consistently historical*

If we are concerned with the *history* of philosophy the method at the same time needs to be *consistently historical*. It should start with the source or beginning of Western philosophy, instead of taking – for the sake of being topical – some or other contemporary philosophy as a point of departure. Furthermore, history means causal development (both negative and positive) so that history may not be treated as a

number of disconnected problems which are simply dealt with the one after the other.

3.4 Consistently problem-oriented

Every scholar, especially the philosopher, is concerned with problems. These problems entail all the basic questions on reality of the gods, cosmic reality as well as what the guidelines for human conduct should be. Therefore a method of philosophical historiography may not be anything other than *consistently problem-oriented*. Realising a truly problem-historical approach implies evading two hazards. On the one hand there is the danger of foregrounding the problems to such an extent that the history becomes fragmented or is not recorded in full because not all philosophers have reflected on a specific issue. On the other hand there is the pitfall of only emphasising the historical line with the result that important issues are relegated to the background.

3.5 Terminologically consistent

Much harm has been done and a lot of confusion created in philosophical historiography by the slipshod use of terms like "realism", "monism", "universalism", "subject" and "object" and hundreds of others. It is therefore vital that terms for describing issues and solutions are used in an unambiguous way and are also properly explained. As far as possible the philosophical terms should also be derived from history itself. Often, however, a certain term could have been so abused, and became so hackneyed and indistinct that it had better be replaced by a new one.

Philosophy is no exception in this respect. Each scholarly discipline uses specific terms or jargon, often hard to comprehend to outsiders, but these are nevertheless indispensable for accurate communication among colleagues.

3.6 Consistently applied

It also is desirable that when a certain method has been decided on, it is applied consistently to the *whole* history of philosophy. (We have shown above that historiographers sometimes use diverging approaches to different sub-divisions of Western philosophy.)

In requiring all these criteria, we do not mean that a method should be fully formulated beforehand. Rather, the contrary is true: A good method grows slowly as

it is employed. But one has to be certain before starting that (as we put it above) it suits the philosophical matter. Afterwards, however, it should constantly be adapted and refined by the hands-on practical treatment of the philosophical matter. In this way one can prevent one's own approach from impoverishing and distorting the rich and complicated intellectual legacy according to one's own presuppositions.

4. Looking back and forward

This investigation has in the first place pointed out the most important obstacles in the path of the philosophical historiographer. In the second instance it was shown how different methodological approaches have been developed to address these problems, yet were not wholly successful. The first and second steps made possible a third, namely formulating some important criteria for studying the history of philosophy. From this it became evident that a *consistent problem-historical* method could be regarded as suitable.

The question remains whether such an approach can actually be realised or if it may just be merely a philosophical castle in the air. The answer is: it is no dream. It really exists. It was designed in the previous century by the Christian philosopher, Dirk H.Th. Vollenhoven (1892-1978), from the Netherlands and was also employed by several of his followers. It was not mentioned in this contribution, since it deserves to be dealt with separately. In the next chapter we will trace its origin, what it entails as well as the reactions received to it.

Chapter 2

A SCRIPTURALLY-ORIENTED PERSPECTIVE ON THE HISTORY OF WESTERN INTELLECTUAL THINKING

The origin, contours of and questions about the consistent problem-historical method

Following the previous chapter on various methods available for the portrayal of the history of philosophy, this chapter focuses on the consistent problem-historical method of the late Professor Dirk H.Th. Vollenhoven (1892-1978) of the Free University in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. In three main sections its origin, contours and the reactions it elicited are discussed.

The first main part reveals that Vollenhoven derived his method from two German philosophers of the Marburg School of Neo-Kantian philosophy, viz. N. Hartmann (1882-1950) and R. Höningwald (1875-1947), who developed a "Problemgeschichtliche" historiography of philosophy, focusing on philosophical problems as they developed during the about 2500 years of Western thinking. Hartmann and Höningwald, because of their late rationalist, Neo-Enlightenment orientation, still believed in an objective, neutral approach in scholarship. Therefore they rejected the new irrationalist trends with relativist implications. Since Vollenhoven was a committed Christian, embracing the ideal of an integral, Scripturally-oriented philosophy, he modified the problem-historical approach of Marburg, rejecting both its rational dogmatism and the opposing irrational relativism. The implications of his unique stance were inter alia that he did not view (as his contemporary German fellow-philosophers did) the history of philosophy as a process of gradual progress, but from his Christian-religious orientation distinguished between pre-Christian (pagan) Greek philosophy, synthetic Medieval philosophy and subsequent anti-synthetic, secular philosophy.

In the second main section five criteria (formulated at the end of the previous chapter) are applied to test the validity of Vollenhoven's methodology.

Firstly, he developed his analysis of the history of Western philosophy consistently from his own, integral Christian-religious perspective. This was possible because religion of whatever kind, according to him, is not restricted to an earlier period in history, one's private life, church or theology. Religion is not something a person

"has", but what he/she "is", it is characteristic of being human – life in its entirety is religion. This stance enabled Vollenhoven to use the Scriptures (not in a biblicist way, but as his orientation) to enquire, firstly, about a philosopher's idea of God, secondly, about his/her view of normativity or law and, thirdly, about the thinker's perspective on the ontic structures of the cosmos.

Secondly, Vollenhoven also worked in a consistently historical way, starting his investigations with ancient Greek philosophy, the cradle of Western thinking. His Christian approach enabled him to determine in the "passion of the Western mind" its relationship towards God's revelation. Accordingly he divided the entire history, as already stated, into three main epochs: (1) pre-Christian, pagan Greek-Hellenistic-Roman philosophy (unaware of God's Word), (2) synthetic philosophy in the work of the Church Fathers and Medieval philosophers (combining pagan and Christian thought patterns) and (3) subsequently both anti-synthetic, secular thought (from the Renaissance) and anti-synthetic Christian thinking (starting with the 16th century Reformation). Vollenhoven's division into these four main periods thus included his implicit critique of the "progress" of Western philosophy.

Vollenhoven's method also passed the test of a third criterion, viz. being consistently philosophical by nature. He synchronically distinguished about sixty-six different consecutive normative currents, responsible for the dynamic, ever-changing nature of philosophising.

Fourthly, his method is also consistently problem-directed. He discovered and distinguished a vast number of ontological types (viewpoints of the structure of cosmic reality), starting from a few fundamental ones, moving to detailed anthropological and epistemological differences among philosophers, thus providing a diachronic view of history. Also in this respect his presentation of philosophical history included his implicit critique of various philosophical problems and their solutions.

The outcome of the last (fifth) test applied is also positive: Vollenhoven himself as well as his followers applied the method successfully with valuable results – not merely in philosophy, but also in the intellectual history of, for example, aesthetics, psychology and dogmatics.

The third main part of this exploration considers seven points of critique levelled against the method. (In each case a possible response is included.) They are the following: (1) Vollenhoven himself did not always provide a clear and final exposition of his method. (2) The method is considered as too specialised and complicated to be used. (3) It is biased due to its one-sided Christian perspective. (4) It is of a (too) selective nature. (5) It tends towards schematism. (6) The wide-ranging terminology it employs is too complicated. (7) Philosophical concepts are allocated dominant roles, while individual philosophies and the personalities of the philosophers and other scholars disappear in the background.

By way of a few metaphors the final conclusion highlights the enduring value of Vollenhoven's method. The author has already applied it himself and considers it as a viable method amid the present confusion in the historiography of philosophy. Since humilitas was regarded by Augustine as the main requirement for genuine philosophising – including a philosophia Christiana – Vollenhoven's unique method should not be regarded as the last and final word either on the very difficult issue of how to portray the history of the strange phenomenon called philosophy.

1. Introduction: problem and lay-out

In the previous chapter an investigation was done into various earlier and contemporary methods of philosophical historiography. Numerous lacunae in these methodologies were pointed out, in particular the fact that they are not applied consistently. This chapter attempts to work out the extent to which the consistent problem-historical method of D.H.Th. Vollenhoven (1892-1978) does meet the criteria formulated at the end of the previous chapter. In order to determine this, the following is dealt with successively: (1) how his method originated; (2) an outline thereof; (3) the reactions of others to his method and (4) a final perspective.

2. The origin of the consistent problem-historical method

Unfortunately for us Vollenhoven did not describe his method in detail. The only sources we have today are to be found in Vollenhoven (2005a:89-136) and even shorter in Vollenhoven (2001:20-46).

In a recent conversation with Dr. K.A. Bril (an expert on Vollenhoven's philosophy) he indicated that Vollenhoven worked more or less in the following way. First, he would work through the at that time comprehensive standard work of Ziegenfuss

(1949/1950) of 1700 pages to get acquainted with the most important Western thinkers. This was followed by an intensive study of the at the time main work on the history of philosophy in four volumes, viz. Ueberweg (1928). The next step was to ask his student assistant to borrow from the two university libraries in Amsterdam (or per inter-library loan from elsewhere) the available original works of a specific philosopher. With all these aids studied, he then tried to define a thinker's philosophical conception.

Vollenhoven's own summary (cf. Vollenhoven, 2011:20-46) provides the following information about his method:

- For different reasons he could not agree with the historiographies of W. Dilthey (1833-1911), G. Heymans (1857-1930) and W. Windelband (1845-1915). He was especially critical when a historiographer started from a contemporarily fashionable philosophy, reading its problems into past philosophies.
- Vollenhoven was convinced that one cannot separate one's own philosophical convictions from the way one studies other philosophies.
- A sound philosophical method cannot be *conceived* beforehand, but has to be *discovered* on the way with the interaction of the history.
- A correct method should distinguish – not confuse – the ontological anthropological *types* of philosophy from the various normative *currents* in the history.
- He calls his own method the *consistent* problem-historical method, since he did not intend to focus on only one problem, but wanted to study a diversity of conceptions throughout history.

Following these few flashes from Vollenhoven himself, we can now have a look at how others explained the origin of his method. Wolters (1970:2 et seq. and 1979:231) has shown that the idea of "Problem-geschichte" has its origin within neo-Kantian philosophy which was a dominant philosophical school during Vollenhoven's formative years.

2.1 Neo-Kantian historiography

In particular Wolters singles out two philosophers of the Marburg School of neo-Kantianism, namely R. Höningwald (1875-1947) and N. Hartmann (1882-1950). Vollenhoven, for instance, referred approvingly to the first philosopher's work

Philosophie des Altertums (Philosophy of antiquity) (1917) already in 1918 and later on too, and he regularly prescribed it for his students. Höningwald and Hartmann (the latter in various publications) both emphasise the systematic insight into the problems which emerged in the history of Western philosophy. (Objectivity, they believed, was guaranteed by the problems themselves.) Such an insight warrants the continuity and progress in history. In this way the historiographer is no mere writer of chronology or collector of facts.

2.2 Irrationalist reactions

However, in the rising wave of irrationalism, which laid great stress on historical uniqueness and thereby rather emphasised discontinuity, the approaches of Höningwald and Hartmann were questioned. Irrationalist philosophers like W. Ditley (1833-1911) and his followers therefore accused the two proponents of the problem-historical approach of being over-emphasising the philosophical problems as against the historical situations of the individual philosophers and their cultural backgrounds. Conversely, the rationalist champions of the problem-historical method were of the opinion that an irrationalist methodology would lead to vague relativism.

2.3 Vollenhoven's point of view

Since to Vollenhoven as a Christian philosopher such relativism would also be unacceptable he felt more drawn to a neo-Kantian methodology. Which does not mean that he accepted it completely. One reason is a radical difference in religious orientation (cf. Wolters, 1970:55,56). Hartmann was an explicit atheist and as a rationalist an advocate of a "neutral" approach to scholarship (cf. Vollenhoven, 2005c:167). Vollenhoven, on the other hand, was not only a convinced Christian but also wanted to establish a Christian or Scripturally-oriented philosophy.

The two diverging religious points of departure also influenced their historiographical methods. Hartmann, for instance, regarded the history of philosophy as a process of gradual progress. Vollenhoven does not hesitate to call ancient Greek philosophy pagan or to point out false problems in the work of secular philosophers. For instance, he rejects notions of human autonomy and different normative ideas that history has given birth to (objectivism, realism and subjectivism). Likewise he questions monism as well as dualism as explanations for the original state of reality,

as well as the various solutions to the issue of the relationship between the universal and the individual (cf. Wolters, 1970:48).

After this brief historical background we can succinctly explain Vollenhoven's own method. He calls his own method not only problem-historical but consistently problem-historical. In the same way that in the previous chapter different current methods were tested with reference to their consistency, this criterion is now also applied to Vollenhoven's method. Is it a clear implication of his own viewpoint, is it consistently philosophical, historical and problem-oriented, employing suitable and unambiguous terminology and has it been tested experimentally?

3. The main contours of the consistent problem-historical method

Because of lack of space only the main contours of Vollenhoven's method can be given here. For the uninitiated or persons who would like to gain knowledge on this in an easy way, we recommend Bril (1986:109 et seq.) in Dutch and Bril (2005) in English. Those interested in Vollenhoven's life history are referred to the biography (in Dutch) by Stellingwerff (1992 and 2001) or for a brief English version in Vollenhoven (2013) which describes Vollenhoven as "a person who combined direct clarity with deep insight, an analytical mind that mastered many distinctions".

This implies that Vollenhoven's own systematic philosophy and even more so his philosophical historiography takes time to be understood. According to one of his assistants, and an expert on Vollenhoven's philosophy (cf. Tol, 2005:xii), Vollenhoven combined beguiling simplicity with deep subtlety, sweeping generalisations with careful distinctions, brevity with clarity. One of his promovendi mentions his confusing simplicity, lingual scrupulosity and quiet biblical (not biblistic) earnestness and wisdom. Because of his style and lack of pedagogical skills many of his (graduate) students were left puzzled and perplexed, but Vollenhoven compensated by his unassuming and ingenuous personality and his openness towards his students and their circumstances.

3.1 Consistent from his own viewpoint

Already at the time he received his doctorate (in 1918) Vollenhoven showed that to study the history of philosophy one needs an own, albeit tentative philosophical view. Up until approximately 1940 he kept refining his own systematics and afterwards (until 1975) limited himself exclusively to his study of the history of philosophy.

(Vollenhoven, 1992 contains important texts and editorial explanations on both his own systematic philosophy and his problem-historical method. For a brief introduction into his systematic philosophy Tol (in Vollenhoven, 2005b:iii-xxxii) can be consulted.)

3.1.1 A *thetic-critical method*

He calls his method a *thetic-critical method*. (Cf. Vollenhoven, 2005b:6-8 and for more detail Tol, 2010:19-41.) "Thetic" denotes his own (preliminary) viewpoint. "Critical" refers to his approach to the history of philosophy. In this certain viewpoints have to be queried, but much can also be learned and one's own preliminary view can be broadened, enriched and even adjusted. Between these two facets of the method there should be constant interaction.

While Vollenhoven's *thetic-critical method* is very important, he himself did not elaborate on it. I, therefore, give the word to one of his followers, Kok (1998:8-19), who provides a detailed explanation of this method.

- Firstly, he notices the general tendency amongst Christian thinkers to define their own position on what they *negatively* reject. But sooner or later one will need a *positive* articulation of your own stance.
- To formulate your own position in terms of what you don't agree with is not enough:

Christians should approach the philosophical problems and questions they are confronted with from their own positively stated viewpoint... to work out a basic conception in line with Scripture, that affirms and articulates as clearly and succinctly as possible one's perspective on the matter in question... We should proceed boldly, articulating, clarifying and honouring the comprehensive framework of basic beliefs that Christians hold dear (Kok, 1998:12,13).

- This *thetical* side of the method should, however, always be accompanied by the *critical*. According to Kok (1998:13) this implies:

...to investigate seriously and, when necessary, meticulously, that is to get to know, question, analyse, size up, and re-evaluate with an eye to determining both the merits and faults... There is no knowledge without preconceptions and prejudices. Our task is not to remove such

presuppositions, but to listen, to test and evaluate them critically in the course of our enquiries.

- In connection to such a critical approach Kok (1998:17) adds the following important remark:

Criticism is certainly not equivalent to "negation", to "hypercritically just finding faults or pointing out shortcomings. To be sure, criticism can lead to a negative result: "I disagree with this, that and the next thing, for these reasons"... But even such a negative result has great value: tenaciously maintaining thoughts, words and deeds that constantly or implicitly clash with the main lines of one's framework of beliefs undermines its power and prevents one from asking good questions and acquiring results that speak more profoundly to the challenge of our age.

- The thetic-critical method therefore contains a double advantages: "...a reinforced *own position*, articulated in word and deed, and a more definite and accountable *rejection* of that which is inconsistent with it." (Kok, 1998:19)
- In conclusion Kok (1998:19) emphasises – like Vollenhoven – that the two sides of this method should be distinguished but not separated:

Zeal in one without the other spells big trouble. Their relationship is as follows: on the one hand every critical activity implies that one takes a thetical stand; and, in turn, a Christian thetical stance that leaves no room for listening to, thinking about, and communicating with others, will result in uncritical parochial dogmatism... When the relationship between being thetical and being critical is forgotten, Christians loose a real sense of what being different (as a Christian thinker) means practically... they lack a sense of direction.

3.1.2 *Life is religion*

It should be kept in mind that Vollenhoven's own point of departure has a profoundly religious base. Unlike most dualistic philosophers he also adheres to an integral view of religion. Vander Stelt (2013) describes it as follows:

For humans to be "religious" is not optional, but essential. It is something a person "is", not "has". Being characteristic of being human, it is not restricted to an earlier period, or phase in human history, or to something private in one's behaviour. Like the rudder of a ship in water, although it is invisible,

"religion" indicates the ultimate direction in which humans live and move. It is as deep and broad as everyday life... It is not confined to what Christians and non-Christians do in their private and public prayers, meditations, confessions, instructions and spiritual retreats, worship events or all sorts of theological reflections... Life is religion.

Although all of life is religiously determined, its direction can differ as Vollenhoven shows (cf. below).

3.1.3 *The three most basic questions and answers*

In agreement with his Christian starting-point Vollenhoven is of opinion that the three most basic questions which every philosopher should ask and answer, are: (1) In which *God/gods* do I believe? (2) What can I know about the *cosmos*? (3) According to which *criteria or norms* should I think and live? From his own Christian conviction Vollenhoven therefore looks for answers to these pre-scientific but very important questions in God's revelation in the Scriptures: (1) Who is the Creator of everything? (2) What has been created in a relationship with Him? (3) Where is the line of distinction between these two? (cf. Vollenhoven, 2005b:14).

In passing, please note that Vollenhoven advocates a biblically-oriented philosophy and not a biblicist one. Biblicism attempts to derive the answers to questions of vital importance from this one form of God's revelation, as if from a textbook. It does not consider his revelation in creation and in the Word incarnate. That is why a Biblicist usually first reads his/her own ideas into the Bible (called eisegesis) and afterwards again reads them from the Bible (called exegesis).

The answers Vollenhoven finds when putting his three questions to the Scriptures, are: (1) The living, sovereign God; (2) the creation (or cosmos) which totally depends on God; (3) the "boundary" which distinguishes between God and creation and simultaneously is the "bridge" connecting them, is God's will as expressed in his laws for the creation to which all creatures are subject. (For more detailed explanations, cf. Vollenhoven, 2011 as well as Tol 2011 and Bril, 1986.)

Therefore Vollenhoven does not exclude God from his worldview and philosophy. (He does warn against speculating about God, i.e. saying more or less about Him than He reveals about Himself in his Word.) Note also that Vollenhoven is of the opinion that every human being, as being inherently religious, cannot do otherwise

than regarding something as absolute, that is, as divine, and relying on it (e.g. human reason) when he/she denies the existence of the God of the Bible. In such a case something that is a part of creation itself is absolutised.

I regard Vollenhoven's simple triplet of God-law-cosmos as a masterly summary for the main contours of a philosophy that is committed to obey the Scriptures. As will subsequently become clear, this also is the perspective according to which he attempts to map Western philosophical thinking.

3.2 Consistently historical

Vollenhoven time and again emphasises that the philosophical historiographer should work strictly historically. Among other things this means that the chronology should not be neglected. This implies (as already mentioned above) that the researcher should begin with the roots of Western thinking, the ancient Greek philosophies and then describe the developments from there.

Since, according to Vollenhoven, philosophical thinking at heart is determined by religious convictions, he puts the question to each philosopher what his/her attitude is towards God's revelation in the Scriptures. He gets the following three answers to this (cf. e.g. Vollenhoven, 2005a:95, 2011:65 et seq.):

(1) The ancient Greek, Hellenistic and Roman philosophers (± 2500 B.C. - ± 50 AD) would answer to this question to the effect that they did not know the Bible. (2) The Christian Church Fathers and Medieval writers (± 50-1550) did know the Word, but blended it in a synthetic way with earlier pagan philosophies. (3) From about 1550 A.D., however, most philosophers broke with this synthesis philosophy for two diverging reasons:

(a) The Renaissance thinkers and their secular followers up to today reject synthesis philosophy because they reject the authority of the Word. Please note that this religious secularisation should not be confused with limiting faith (and morality) to someone's personal life as opposed to a neutral public society and culture. Religious secularisation means a radical and encompassing rejection of the God of the Scriptures, his revelation and his life-giving ordinations – in philosophical thinking as well. Such secularisation can, however, also lead to a separation of private-public life. (Secularisation in the sense of liberation of the rest of society from domination by

the church can also be the outcome of religious secularisation, but it should be seen as a positive development from the end of the Middle Ages.)

(b) The sixteenth century reformers broke with the Medieval synthesis philosophy for exactly the opposite reason. They did not like synthesis because of the pagan philosophical remains with which the Christian faith had become blended. They also rejected the Renaissance idea of an autonomous human being, born from its own strength. Their intention was once again to think and live in obedience to God's revelation only. The main reason why this ideal was not fully realised, was because the Reformers mainly focussed on a new reformed church and theology and did not develop a distinct Christian philosophy.

Thus Vollenhoven proposed a new principle of categorisation, namely pre-synthesis, synthesis and anti-synthesis. For this broad distinction he also offered a more convincing motivation than the popular categorisation into Ancient, Medieval and Modern philosophy.

As will emerge later from the other facets of his historiographical method, his method therefore not only gives an *account* of what happened in Western philosophy but also a Christian-inspired *critique*. Implicitly he rejects both Christian synthesis philosophy and secular anti-synthesis thinking.

3.3 Consistently philosophical

Vollenhoven concurs with other philosophers that there is a considerable dynamic or synchronic element in the history of philosophy, namely diverging currents or schools of thought (cf. Vollenhoven, 2000:31-34 and 2005a:153-156 as well as Vollenhoven, 2005c, which gives separate descriptions of these tendencies). These schools of thought (Vollenhoven distinguishes approximately 66 different ones) result from the diverging views of the orderliness in creation and the norms for practising philosophy and other forms of science. They offer different answers on how one should think and live. Great tension may exist between an older and a younger cultural-historical trend/current, therefore, are responsible for the dynamics in intellectual history. According to Vollenhoven's own distinction between God, law and creation they entail a response to the regularity which God imposed on his creation.

For lack of space we cannot go into this facet any further. We make only two important remarks. First the reason why the one school or current follows on the

other (the reason for dynamics in history) is that norms and values (as human and fallible formulations of God's creational order) are a product of their age, become out-dated and therefore have to be replaced by new – not necessarily the correct – directional pointers. Secondly Vollenhoven's categorisation into philosophical schools/currents also implicitly contains his critique. He shows how Greek philosophy had early on already lapsed into a subjectivist idea of normativity. According to Vollenhoven this means that they no longer made a clear distinction between the laws and the cosmic things which are subject to the laws. Things (which *are*) are elevated to *norms* (what *should* be). This subjectivist trend continues in different variations right up to the current postmodernism.

3.4 Consistently problem-oriented

Thirdly Vollenhoven also distinguishes a diachronic line in history. According to his distinction of God-law-cosmos, an answer should also be given in terms of the issue of how a philosopher sees cosmic reality, what it looks like structurally. In this respect Vollenhoven speaks about a great diversity of types of philosophy or ontic and anthropological categories. Since we do not have the space to discuss them all here, the reader is referred to Vollenhoven's various publications (1992:215 et seq.; 2000:260 et seq.; 2005a:29 et seq. and 2005c).

Once more we restrict ourselves to three observations. In the first instance a certain type, unlike a trend, is not limited to a certain period. Certain types (partly transformed as a consequence of a new normative current) can be found right through history and often denote how a later philosopher was influenced by a contemporary or an earlier philosopher. Secondly, once more Vollenhoven's typology contains his criticism. For instance, he rejects monism which believes that everything originally was one, but likewise dualism which starts with an ontological dichotomy. Thirdly, Vollenhoven retains strictly unambiguous terminology in his typification of the various issues and their solutions.

3.5 Experimentally tested

The proof for any method lies in testing it. In this respect Vollenhoven erred rather *per exessum* than *per defectum* – to the great frustration of his readers. With reference to the results of his investigation of history he had to change his own method (and terminology) at least five times on numerous significant points. (Cf.

Wolters, 1970 and 1979 who gives an overview as well as Zuidema, 1963:140 and Hart, 1964:9 who emphasises this aspect of Vollenhoven methodology.) Even by 1975, when he could no longer continue working as a consequence of old age, he still could not finalise his analysis of Western philosophy.

However, that which this philosophical detective committed to paper still remains invaluable. Therefore numerous students in both research and teaching have made good use of his method – even if in simplified forms. A few examples of doctoral theses written according to this method, are Hart (1966), Taljaard (1955), Runner (1951), Van der Laan (1968), Van der Walt (1974), Vander Stelt (1978) and Venter (1981). Applications thereof in various disciplines are to be found in history of art (Seerveld, 1993), theology (Van der Walt, 1968) and (Spykman, 1992), anthropology (De Graaff & Olthuis, 1978), ancient philosophy (Sweetman, 2007), psychology (Van Belle, 2014), mathematics (Venter, 2011) and human sexuality and gender (Van der Walt, 2014a, 2014b).

3.6 A schematic presentation

The schematic maps of Vollenhoven (2000) in essence and in one glance give the results of his method. They consist of horizontal and vertical lines which cross (forming squares). To the right of the horizontal lines (1) the history is divided synchronically in the above-mentioned three *main periods* (pre-synthesis, synthesis and anti-synthesis). The left side of the horizontal lines (2) gives the different philosophical trends or *schools*. In the squares drawn by the vertical line (as it crosses the horizontal) (3) the different *types* of philosophies of numerous philosophers are filled in. It presents their solutions to basic ontic problems, as for instance how the origin of the cosmos is explained, whether it originally was a unity or a dichotomy, what the relationship is between the universal and the individual as well as a whole series of anthropological issues (cf. Van der Walt, 2010:174). Vollenhoven's own systematic philosophy, consisting of the threesome of (1) God, (2) law and (3) cosmos, is thus clearly reflected in his historiography.

4. Reactions to Vollenhoven's method

In spite of the fact that Vollenhoven's method in the section above could pass the test according to certain criteria, it did not escape the critique of contemporaries and later philosophers. In some cases exactly what has just been proved in connection

with the method was queried. It is important to mention the possible lacunae that have been identified and where necessary, to respond to these.

Other objections, however, are based on one important misunderstanding. It amounts to this that more or different results were expected of Vollenhoven's method than he himself intended to reach. He himself admitted that his method could not or did not attempt to cover all facets of history. Surely no single method can accomplish this. And simply increasing one's methods is not a solution either. Then philosophical historiography becomes almost unmanageably complicated and consequently nearly inaccessible to the reader.

We first deal briefly with the less significant remarks on the consistent problem-historical method (afterwards merely called "method") before paying attention to objections of a more serious nature.

4.1 The method itself was not spelt out clearly beforehand and was often changed

It is true that one often has to reconstruct the method from the results Vollenhoven reached. However, the reason for this is clear. As we have already remarked, his method took shape in continuous interaction with his study of history. This also is the reason why Vollenhoven had to alter his method several times in order to do better justice to what his research had brought to light. However, for the users of his method it was rather disheartening!

4.2 Too specialised and time-consuming

Vollenhoven is a member of the Old Guard from the beginning of the previous century, inspired by among others the sound German "Kleinforschung" (detailed research). But the fine distinctions and relationships drawn by his method are not easily digestible to someone from our twenty-first fast century who wants to get a quick view of Western philosophical history with the help of a paperback or a network search. To avoid giving first-year philosophy students a permanent dislike for the discipline, it is therefore advisable to use a simplified rendition of the method (containing less detail) and to present it in full only when students have reached the post-graduate level.

4.3 Too Christian-oriented

Historiographers who are still convinced that a neutral approach is possible, could object to the Christian basis of the method. Irrationalist postmodernists would probably reject the method because it is based on a "grand narrative". However, I am of the opinion that, notwithstanding Vollenhoven's religious orientation, the results he achieved are of broader interest.

More significant objections against the method are the following four:

4.4 Too selective

De Vogel (1952:23) thought that Vollenhoven went about it in too selective a manner, since he did not pay enough attention to the "great" philosophers. According to her he placed giants of great significance next to dwarfs having, according to her, hardly any historical meaning. She felt that a distinction should be made between them otherwise the former's cultural-historical influence may be undervalued.

The fundamental issue here is the selective character of any method and the criteria according to which one determines which philosophers were important and which were not. As mentioned already, every method has its limitations – no method can present everything. However, as long as one is aware of the limitations of one's method – and Vollenhoven definitely was – it need not disqualify one's method. Vollenhoven's method is a *problem-historical* method, not a *cultural-historical* one. This is a case where more is expected from his method than he himself intended with it.

The critique that accompanies this, namely that the method is too strictly philosophical therefore, does not hold good either. Vollenhoven did not reject the use of aids (like for instance biographical works on the philosophers). But his focus was purely philosophical.

Hart (1965:13) on the one hand admits that someone who has only Vollenhoven's method at his disposal has little insight into the dynamics of the history of philosophy as a factor in the cultural history of the West. On the other hand he points out that the different philosophical conceptions elucidated by the method can deepen the broader cultural history since philosophy plays such a fundamental role in any culture. Philosophy actually articulates the essential, fundamental thoughts living in a particular culture and in the final instance determining its direction.

Venter (2013) agrees by drawing attention to two important points connected to Vollenhoven's view on types and currents.

Firstly, it is true that Vollenhoven's method primarily asks attention for the *types* of ontological and anthropological foundations of scientific thinking. However, since scholarship is not the simple product of nature, Vollenhoven's approach was already of a cultural nature.

Secondly, if one carefully looks at the (about 66) different *currents* or normative trends, which Vollenhoven distinguished during the Western intellectual history, the cultural shifts become evident. His method, therefore, is not anti-cultural, but the opposite: It reveals the philosophical-intellectual underpinnings of Western culture and explains why its normative viewpoints so often changed.

4.5 Too schematic

One of the most serious points of criticism of the method was that it is guilty of schematism. De Vogel (1951:225) states that Vollenhoven's method would amount to the following: "... beginning with drawing up a system of categories and subsequently classifying the matter still to be interpreted under these categories" [translated from the Dutch]. Besides, according to her, the relationships between the different philosophers, as uncovered by Vollenhoven, are artificial (cf. De Vogel, 1952:22,23 and also in 1950).

Even a like-minded scholar and colleague of Vollenhoven's wrote at the time:

The study of the history of philosophy has acquired something of detective work in the work of Vollenhoven, in any case the opposite of routine work and of copying from textbooks, even though sometimes a philosopher and his conception could unjustly be arrested and imprisoned in the apprehension cell (as a cross between a certain type and a certain current) prepared for him by Vollenhoven, (Zuidema, 1963:145).

This kind of critique was aimed in particular against Vollenhoven's *Schematische Kaarten* (*Schematic maps*) which were published in 1962 (reprinted in Vollenhoven, 2000). In these Vollenhoven typifies a few hundred philosophers diachronically according to ontological types and synchronically according to trends or currents. However, the *Schematic Maps* should not be identified with Vollenhoven's method

as a whole. The intention with it was only – as the title clearly puts it – to give an outline at one glance of the more basic information on a certain philosopher as well as on his/her relationship with others.

Although Stoker (1951:41-42) also points out Vollenhoven's "intricate schematism" and notes that "the fullness of philosophical thinking is more than a scheme and can hardly be summarised in a scheme", he also concedes that "problems, stated as logical distinctions do allow for being categorised in such a scheme".

About this fear that Vollenhoven imprison philosophers in cells or label them Hart (1965:11) says that, to his mind, this is a strange accusation since no philosophical historiographer can evade it. Of course caution should be observed against using a straitjacket. But, he adds:

...it is seldom taken into account that at the moment there are between 5 to 6 thousand squares available in Vollenhoven's method while most textbooks have only 3 or 4 labels at their disposal. It has always surprised me that modern philosophers always have to be either rationalist or empiricist. Yet no one has an objection against such a straightjacket but they do object against an increase in possible structures of thinking. The latter should, however, be seen as a definite advantage of the method [of Vollenhoven] [translated from the Dutch].

4.6 Too intricate a terminology

This point of critique (connected to the previous one) is also raised by De Vogel (1951:229). Popma (1952:123) answered her in a somewhat irritated tone that any science needs its own jargon – even if to outsiders it may sound like speaking in foreign tongues: "When a critic expresses himself in a bantering way on the terminology [of Vollenhoven] he reveals that he lacks scholarly seriousness and civilisation" [translated from the Dutch].

Zuidema (1963) also joins the fray to justify Vollenhoven's extensive terminology. He points out that Vollenhoven used to become disturbed when he noticed how much confusion and damage were wrought in the study of the history of philosophy by the casual and indiscriminate use of philosophical terms (like e.g. realism, materialism, universalism, monism, subject and object and hundreds more). It was precisely to prevent this large-scale confusion that Vollenhoven was so set on clear,

unambiguous terminology. To each new issue and the solution to it he attached a particular term not used for any other.

In a lighter vein Seerveld (1960:6-7) wrote:

Vollenhoven is a cautious thinker. He takes a word the way a Jew in Dickens's novels takes a coin, suspiciously. Feels it, taps it, bites it, and then accepts it dubiously. He is quite a cleancut thinker, Vollenhoven is exact... He likes to cut the brain apart and is a master at it. He takes the fun out of studying philosophy. It is no longer an amateur ballgame in the cow pastures, but something professional.

4.7 Individual philosophers become blurred behind their philosophical conceptions

Zuidema (1963:146) wrote that

...in this method the original philosopher of a certain conception is relegated so far to the background that his name is only used as an indication of his conception and – if this method should be followed more consistently – could be replaced by a mathematical sign [translated from the Dutch].

Is not the history of philosophy in the very first instance the history of people? Then it is unfair to give no attention to the individual who brought forth the philosophy. Does this method not produce a skeleton without flesh and blood?

Once again it has to be answered that in this way more is expected of the method than what it was intended to achieve. In Vollenhoven's method the *personalities* of the figures are not central, but their *insights* concerning ontological and anthropological problems. If biographical information is available and reliable (in some cases it is not) it can be valuable. But only *as far* as it throws light on the specific philosophy or the philosophical evolution of a philosopher.

The critique offered by Wolters, however, goes further than the personality of a philosopher. He writes that Vollenhoven's method deals

... with the history of philosophy exclusively in its strictly logical and analytic aspect... and that, as a method, it seems to be practically indistinguishable from that of the systematic logician and epistemologist... it is difficult to suppress the question: what then is the specifically *historical* of the

"probleem–*historische*" method, if the extra-logical factors in the history of philosophy, such as social, economic and political conditions are deliberately excluded? (Wolters, 1970:33).

Later on he (Wolters, 1970:54) reiterates his question concisely as follows when he says that the result of the method "...is that the abstracted, special world of logical problems and answers tends to become identified with the history of philosophy in its full concreteness".

This critique links up with the objection already discussed above under 4.4, namely that the method is extremely selective. However, it also explicitly focuses the attention on the conceptual, abstract character of the method.

In response one could, however, ask whether philosophy *qua* philosophy (like any other science) does not inherently have a theoretical-abstract nature. Furthermore one could argue that something that is conceptual, logical or analytical is not of necessity unhistorical. Above (4.4) there was a reference to Hart (1965:13) who argues that, because philosophy plays such a fundamental role, it is not detached from the historical-cultural, but rather gives a deepened view of it.

As is the case with many philosophers, also many fables one told today about Vollenhoven's method. We conclude this critique of his method on a lighter note by relating only two of them. It is told that the late Dr. Henk Hansma burned Vollenhoven's *Schematische Kaarten* (of 1962) because he could not agree with how Vollenhoven typified a certain philosopher! Another Dutchman initially thought that Vollenhoven must either be a fool (Dutch: "gek") or a genius (Dutch: "genie"). But when he took the trouble to study Vollenhoven's method carefully, he decided to prefer the last description – Vollenhoven to him became a giant amongst Christian philosophers!

Although the reader would probably like to raise more questions concerning Vollenhoven's method, we will have to abide by these seven points of criticism. (For additional, predominantly sympathetic reactions, we can refer to Hart, 1964, Seerveld, 1973, 1975; Taljaard, 1952 and Van der Laan, 1967, 1977.)

5. Review

To the reader it can be no secret after what was said above that I – in spite of the above-mentioned seven points of critique – am not only sympathetically disposed

towards Vollenhoven's method, but have used it myself in previous publications (cf. Van der Walt, 2009a, 2009b, 2011 and 2012).

Therefore allow me finally to explain in a few metaphors – something popular in contemporary philosophical circles – what it is that attracts me to this method. First, however, the following cautionary word: The word “philosophy” (derived from *philosophia*) literally means a love of or desire for wisdom. It reminds one that philosophy – including its history and the description of it – can never be more than a desire. This also applies to a Christian approach to this discipline. Augustine already realised it when he wrote that the first, second and third condition for a *philosophia christiana* is *humilitas* (humility or modesty).

The following are my metaphors for recommending this method:

- As if with a wide-angle lens the method offers a broad view of the history of philosophy: Cosmoscopically it investigates how different philosophers saw the ontic structures of the cosmos, nomologically it uncovers numerous conflicting normative schools or currents of thought.
- As a philosophical telescope it does not depart from a current philosophy for the sake of contemporary relevance or popularity, but looks far back into history to the cradle of Western thinking.
- While its view is wide and far, it does not neglect – seen as a philosophical microscope – the finer detail of different conceptions, the relationships between philosophers as a consequence of their influence on one another, nor the evolution in the work of some philosophers.
- As a road map did formerly and a GPS does today, orienting one to prevent one from losing the way, so this method helps the student of philosophy and professional philosopher not to lose their way in an intricate history of more than 2500 years.
- Further the method is – like an x-ray apparatus – penetrating. It uncovers the hidden “skeleton” of a philosophy which keeps its outer “body” upright.
- Therefore, finally, the consistent problem-historical method can be compared to a periscope. Though in no way infallible, it may provide a modest outlook above the stormy and troubled waters of the twenty-first century philosophical environment.

Chapter 3

FLYING ON THE WINGS OF VOLLENHOVEN'S RADICAL CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW

A reconsideration of the current typologies of Christian worldviews

This chapter investigates the traditional typology of (Christian) worldviews. From the perspective of the Christian philosopher, D.H.Th. Vollenhoven (1892-1978), the usual categorisation started by Niebuhr (in 1951), and adopted by Reformational scholars afterwards, are questioned as too simplistic, forcing Christian thinkers and schools of thought into five pigeonholes. Worldviews – also the Christian ones – are complex phenomena. They should not be considered, for example, as merely logical systems or aesthetic stories. Vollenhoven's systematic philosophy and historiography of philosophy (his thetic-critical approach) can provide some clues for a new way to approach and describe different Christian worldviews as well as to arrive at the outlines of a more radical Christian worldview.

The investigation follows the following steps. In the prescript the suggestion is made that a real Christian worldview should enable one to fly high, see far, wide and deep. It should also contain a doxological element of praise to God. The introduction (part 1) draws attention to the fact that during the past 75 years at Koers (published in Potchefstroom) and the Association for Christian Philosophy (ACP), established in Amsterdam, different personalities, against different contexts, in a variety of ways contributed to a Christian worldview and philosophy with a worldwide impact. Part 2 first explains (with the help of a few avian metaphors) the confused way Christians today look at and act upon the secular world around them. Secondly, it explains why a Christian worldview may be of assistance in providing new direction in this context. In part 3 I introduce Vollenhoven, to me the eagle amongst Christian philosophers. While neglected for some time, he is today being rediscovered. Because his academic philosophy may be a hard nut to crack for beginners, this essay briefly explains his

worldview, the basis of his philosophy. Part 4 contains the possible corrections Vollenhoven may have on current descriptions and categorisations of Christian worldviews. This is followed (part 5) by a fuller explanation of Vollenhoven's own thetic-critical method as well as his view on the historical development of Western worldviews. The next part (6) briefly mentions possible limitations in Vollenhoven's analysis. Part 7 concludes the exploration with a brief statement about the implications of a Christian worldview for education in general.

Prescript

Tendele Camp, Kwa-Zulu Natal, early morning, the first of January 2011. I am taking a long walk to Tiger Falls. It is nearly the end of our holiday in our beloved Drakensberg Mountains and I am already thinking ahead about all that has to be done in the coming year of our Lord 2011. Included in all of them is also a paper on worldview for the *Koers* 75 Conference. What kind of thing is a worldview? Is it a logical system or, as people say today, a story? Why does one need a worldview? For what purpose?

Next to the footpath dewdrops sparkle like small pearls on the grass blades. From far below I can hear the sound of the river. When I expand my gaze I see small waterfalls tumbling from the mountains. In the chinchis shrubs next to the path the cicadas start their amazing noise. Ants are hurriedly crossing my path, carrying pieces of grass to their nests. A dung-beetle is struggling to roll away what an eland has left to him. When I sit down in the shadow of a huge cabbage tree, the calling of different birds reaches my ears. And when I looked up again, two grey reedbucks are grazing peacefully among the shrubs not far away, unaware of my presence.

What a morning! The whole creation, from the inanimate dewdrops, to the plants, insects, birds and mammals, each in its own unique way are praising their Creator. I joined in with my own doxology:

When through the woods and forest glades I wander,
I hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees,

When I look down from lofty mountain grandeur
and hear the brook and feel the gentle breeze;
Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee:
how great thou art, how great thou art!
Then sings my soul, my Saviour God to thee:
how great thou art, how great thou art!

Why should a worldview only be a way of *looking* and *thinking* about the world? Why should it be merely regarded as an interesting *story*? Why can it not also be viewed as a song – a *song of praise and honour to our Creator*? Is this not both the essence and purpose of a real Christian worldview? But how can one acquire such a Christian worldview? What should it look like?

I was now searching the clear blue sky with my binoculars. Yes, there they are! Two lammergeyers are floating on the currents of the wind a few thousand meters above. Amazing birds, these black-bearded eagles! They can fly fast, far and high. And with incredible eyesight they can spot small details far below.

Eureka! I have it! Apart from a doxology, a genuine Christian worldview should also enable one to fly high and with sharp eyes to look far and wide and deep below.

1. Introduction: Commemorating two milestones

This introduction intends to briefly draw attention to the past, enabling us to understand the background of two important occasions during 2011.

In 2010 *Koers*, a journal for Christian scholarship (published in Potchefstroom, South Africa) was commemorated, having been published for the last 75 years (with its preceding names even longer). Not many scholarly journals survive three quarters of a century! In the same year the ACP or the Association for Christian (previously Reformational) Philosophy (in the Netherlands) could also look back on a life-time of 75 years. Not many Christian organizations last so long! Therefore it is a privilege to participate in 2011 in these joyous commemorations and by way of small contributions also express my own

gratitude to God for what He has given us in both of them. I mention only something briefly about the long and rich tradition both *Koers* and the ACP represent: their impact, different personalities, viewpoints and contexts.

1.1 A worldwide impact

Both *Koers* and the ACP were established with the idea to promote a Christian worldview, Christian philosophy and a Christian approach to other scholarly disciplines. Their existence for so long has proven that such an idea was not a freak or a fad that could impress people only for a few years. For the last 75 years already it has gained a legitimate existence (next to other philosophical currents and worldview traditions), providing biblically inspired, normative direction.

In the second place this movement for Reformational thinking is no longer limited to Potchefstroom or Amsterdam. It is acknowledged today in different parts of the world (cf. Van der Walt, 2010a:127-151). It binds together Christian scholars in different disciplines around the globe. It is also – perhaps too slowly – beginning to drop its Western garb to be contextualised in other cultures such as those of Africa, South America and the Far East.

1.2 Different personalities

At such commemorations one looks back for a moment to remember not merely a journal and an organisation, but also the human beings who wrote for and published in *Koers*, and who kept the ACP going through all these years.

In Potchefstroom some of them were my own teachers (Christian theologians and philosophers), like Proff. H.G. Stoker, J.A.L. Taljaard and P.G.W. du Plessis – to mention only the philosophers. Apart from their different philosophies, each one of them was a fascinating personality. The same applies to the Netherlands. Klapwijk (1987) has written an interesting book in which he portrayed the unique personalities of people like D.H.Th. Vollenhoven, H. Dooyeweerd and others. They were not birds of the same feather!

1.3 Different viewpoints

Critical outsiders sometimes think that Christian philosophers or academics in general form a clique, singing the same song. Or that present-day Christian philosophers are simply following "the master's voice" of, for example, Stoker or Dooyeweerd. This, however, is not true. They are not only differently "feathered", but – like birds – they also in the past "sang" and today still "sing" different philosophical songs.

Already the fathers (Vollenhoven, Dooyeweerd and Stoker) did not agree on everything (cf. Tol, 2011 and Van der Walt, 2013a, 2013b and 2013c). During the second generation (in the Netherlands) Zuidema, Van Riessen, Popma and Mekkes each had their own emphasis and made their unique contributions. The same applies to the next generation. To mention only four examples: Goudzwaard's emphasis was mainly on ideologies and their influence on socio-economic-political life (cf. Goudzwaard, 1984 and Goudzwaard et al., 2007). Klapwijk (1995) proposed his own transformational philosophy. Schuurman worked on the implications of a Christian worldview and philosophy for contemporary technology. Bril and Tol kept the heritage of Vollenhoven alive and relevant.

1.4 Different contexts

All the thinkers in this rich and varied tradition (for more details cf. again Van der Walt, 2010a:127-151) were not only influenced by their own times. They also challenged their contemporary cultural and philosophical context and its problems. Only a few examples are the following. Vollenhoven had to fight against the stagnant Reformed theological Scholasticism or Orthodoxy of his day (cf. Tol, 2010). Zuidema (1971) especially wrote in confrontation with existentialistic and pragmatist irrationalist philosophies. Klapwijk (1970) again faced the relativism of historicism. Smit (1987) struggled with complex problems in the philosophy of history. What I want to emphasise is that each one of them did not philosophise in the vacuum of an ivory tower. Every one of them tried to

give Christian philosophical and worldviewish direction amidst the confusion of the dominant worldviewish and philosophical tendencies of their times.

The same will again happen at this International *Koers-75* Conference as well as the International Symposium in Amsterdam. This *Koers-75* Conference aims at providing worldviewish guidance in education, while the Symposium (in August), with its central theme "The future of the creation order", will do the same on a philosophical level amidst rampant normative directionlessness. I am especially excited about this *Koers*-Conference, experiencing something similar to the many conferences organised by the Institute for Reformational Studies (closed down in 1999). May the legacy of the IRS be continued in new ways!

2. The relevance of a worldview approach in the context of present-day Christianity

Many beautiful African fables ascribe human characteristics to different animals and birds. I am not an avid bird-watcher, but allow me to typify contemporary Christianity with a few of our African bird species – especially to emphasise some of their attitudes toward our increasing secular environment.

2.1 Some current Christian attitudes towards their secular context

I do not think it is necessary to provide bibliographical proofs for the following attitudes among some Christians. With open eyes and ears one will be able to recognise at least some of them.

- The *innocent doves* resemble many faithful Christian churchgoers who seem to narrowly identify being a Christian with only attending church on Sundays and are unaware of a suffering, dangerous and secular world surrounding them.
- The *noisy hadeda ibis* makes us think about those Christians who loudly proclaim that "Christ is the answer!", but they do not tell us to which current problem(s) He provides an answer.
- The *secretive night owl* is blinded by the bright light of present-day scientific-technological-commercial culture. S/he intuitively knows that everything

that glitters is not necessarily good. But lacking normative guidance of a real biblical worldview, s/he does not know how to critically discern between good and bad in contemporary culture.

- The *jabbering parrots* can be divided in two groups. The one simply repeats what it picks up from its secular environment. The other Christian group is of the opinion that to solve every problem a Christian should simply repeat, in a biblicist way, what is written in the Bible. They don't realise that they often read their own preconceived ideas into the Scriptures. And they do not acknowledge that God also revealed himself in his creation and in his final incarnated revelation, Jesus Christ.
- The *isolationist woodpecker* prefers to lay its eggs in the deep bole of a tree trunk where it feed its chickens. Likewise some Christians today "emigrate" from the "world" to the "safety" of a cosy family and church life, unconcerned about the world outside.
- The *sociable weavers* may look different from the woodpeckers, but actually they confine themselves to their own species. In the same way some Christians today regard their ethnic loyalty, religious affiliation or political party as more important than their Christian faith. (Christians in South Africa, for instance, are today still divided because of their political alliances, while they should *together* get involved in politics from a Christian worldview perspective.)
- In the case of *another species of weavers*, during mating time the male changes the colour of his feathers into a brilliant yellow or red to attract the females. In a similar way some Christians simply change their "colour" according to circumstances and would even be involved in unchristian behaviour like corruption, fraud, immorality, etc.
- The *lazy red-crested cuckoo* thinks that she can lay her eggs, have them hatched and fed by another kind of bird without her offspring experiencing any identity or normative crisis when they grow up. Likewise some Christian parents

think they can send their children to secular schools without any damage to their development.

- The *violent, anti-thetical secretary bird* is our next example. With its strong legs it kicks a snake (the secular devil) to pieces, only – ironically – to swallow it afterwards because of the lack of the alternative of a solid Christian worldview.
- The *ingenious hamerkop* builds its large and strong nest in the fork of a tree (up to 50 kg and so strong that its roof can withstand the weight of a full grown man) from nearly any material available – sticks, reeds, weeds and all kinds of debris, including man-made artefacts. In the same way many Christians today eclectically construct their own personal worldview in a post-modern way from all kinds of bits and pieces derived from books, the media, friends, etc.

At the end of this metaphorical description of the confusion among Christians today about their place and task in the world, the question may be asked whether a worldview approach can help us out of the uncertainty and confusion.

2.2 A worldview approach as solution also for Christians

Where does the concept of a worldview come from and why should Christians use it?

2.2.1 Not an original Christian invention

A worldview idea was not an original discovery of Christian thinkers (cf. Wolters, 1989:15-16; part 1 of Bonzo and Stevens, 2009; and for detail Naugle, 2002), but was derived from the word "Weltanschauung". By the 1840s it had become a standard item in the German philosophical vocabulary, indicating a global outlook on life and the world, similar to philosophy but without its rational pretensions and therefore regarded as a relative historic-culturally determined phenomenon.

2.2.2 The Christian faith as a worldview

Christian scholars took over this idea to explain that also their Christian faith entails a worldview. Colson & Pearcey (1999:14,15) write:

Genuine Christianity is more than a relationship with Jesus, as expressed in personal piety, church attendance, Bible study and works of charity. It is more than discipleship, more than believing a system of doctrines about God. Genuine Christianity is a way of seeing and comprehending *all* reality. It is a worldview... The way we see the world can change the world.

Looking back on the question "What does it mean to be a Christian?" different answers have been given throughout the past 2000 years. For example: (1) A Christian is some-one who *believes or understands* correctly (orthodoxy); (2) A Christian should *do something or live correctly* (orthopraxis); (3) A Christian should *feel good or experience something*. Behind these three views the priority of reason (head), will (hand) and emotion (heart) as clearly indicated by Vander Stelt (2005).

On the surface these three answers may look innocent – which they are not at all. The supposition of the first is that one should and can know, not only the world, but even God rationally. One's primary duty is also to serve God with one's mind alone. The second view implies that knowledge of God, oneself and the rest of the world is to be obtained through activism. The third one-sided viewpoint is just as dangerous: one's feelings or inner emotions should offer one certainty about God and that we are his children. For this latest tendency the book by Van der Stoep, Kuyper and Ramaker (2007) offers worth-wile reading.

Today, however, we have come to realise that Christianity entails much more. If conversion does not include also a change at the worldview level, then the Gospel becomes the captive of a local culture and is interpreted in terms of an unbiblical worldview.

Hiebert (2008:11) writes:

Conversion must encompass... worldview. Christians should live differently because they are Christians. However, if their behavior is based primarily on traditional rather than Christian beliefs, it becomes pagan ritual. Conversion must involve a transformation of beliefs, but if it

is a change only of beliefs and not behavior, it is false (James 2). Conversion must include a change in beliefs and behavior, but if the worldview is not transformed, in the long run the gospel is subverted and the result is Christo-paganism which is the form of Christianity but not its essence... If behavioral change was the focus of the mission movement in the nineteenth century, and changed beliefs its focus in the twentieth century, then transforming worldviews must be its central task in the twenty-first century.

Also Runner (1982, cover page) emphasised that conversion should entail also revival and reformation.

A *conversion* is the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of a person so that he submits himself to the claims of Christ, our Savior and Lord. A *revival* is the renewal of faith of a number of persons within a particular part of the church at a particular time in history. A *reformation* is a revival so radical and wide-spread that it affects the direction of the culture and the structuration of society.

However, according to Runner, the impact of the many conversions and revivals in the history of Christianity were mostly confined to the private lives of Christians and the churches. There was no spillover to the larger context of culture and society. The main reason for this absence of real reformation was that the revivalists did not so preach the Word of God that its redeeming power was brought to bear on the entire life of the people of God. A truly biblical worldview could help to overcome this weakness.

2.2.3 Contextualisation requires a Christian worldview

Also Wolters (in the latest, 2005:142 edition of Wolters) emphasise that a biblically based – worldview fulfils a necessary mediating role in a Christian's calling. Appropriate contextualisation requires the conceptualisation of such a worldview (cf. also Bartholomew & Goheen, 2010).

One can understand why, since Abraham Kuyper (who transformed Calvinism from an initially theological system into a worldview at the end of the 19th century) numerous books have been written on a Christian or Reformational worldview and its application to various areas of life. (The bibliography at the end could only refer to a few of them.) It became a hit I think because a worldview enables one to make one's faith *relevant* and *practical* for all aspects of life (cf. Van der Walt, 2008). Faith is no longer confined to one's personal devotions or church life. (Since many definitions exist of what a worldview exactly is, I am not going to try a new one – most readers will know what I have in mind.).

3. Focus on Vollenhoven (1892-1978)

In this chapter I want to put the spotlight on only one of the many Christian philosophers of the past 75 years, one of the fathers of this movement.

First something on a personal note to explain my appreciation for Vollenhoven's ideas. As a young student, Prof. J.A.L. Taljaard introduced me to Vollenhoven's systematic philosophy and historiography (cf Vollenhoven n.d. (a) and n.d. (b).) Then I had the privilege (still as a student) to attend a series of 24 lectures Vollenhoven presented (during the second semester of 1963) as a guest lecturer at the then Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education, now the North-West University. (These lectures were only published nearly fifty years later in Vollenhoven, 2011.) In 1968 I wrote my masters' dissertation on Thomas Aquinas according to Vollenhoven's consistent problem-historical method. During my studies at the Free University of Amsterdam (1968-1970) I also followed the *privatissima* (private classes), which the retired and mature Vollenhoven gave to interested students. Afterwards (1975) also in my D.Phil.-thesis I used Vollenhoven's historiography of philosophy to analyse Thomas, Calvin and the *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae* (of 1625).

Now a few general remarks about Vollenhoven himself.

3.1 The African fish eagle of Reformational philosophers

Following the behaviour of the different birds (above at 2.1), I want to compare Vollenhoven to an African fish eagle (*haliaeetus vocifer*). I use it as metaphor because it can fly higher, see more sharply and widely than other birds and announces its presence with a distinctive voice.

The reader may detect that I am an admirer of – not an expert on – Vollenhovian thinking. He may well be the greatest Christian thinker yet. As a *Christian philosopher* (not a Christian doing philosophy) he has in my mind surpassed Calvin. (I can claim this because Calvin wrote a Christian *worldview* in his famous *Institutes*, but he did not develop a Christian *philosophy*.) Vollenhoven was a giant, but deep in his heart remained an ordinary child of God with a sincere faith and unsophisticated humility. He gave his heart to God and his Word and never his final trust in philosophy – not even his own. Philosophy was to him only a fallible aspiration towards wisdom. It should not deceive people by proclaiming a final truth. The word of God alone can answer our deepest questions and longings.

Many philosophers today act, as Socrates recommended, only as gadflies. Others can be compared to blind moles, digging around in dark, underground tunnels. But Prof. Dirk Vollenhoven to me is the eagle amongst the philosophers. He flew high – on the wings of God's threefold revelation (in creation, the Bible and Christ) and the winds of the Holy Spirit. He looked widely around him – his worldview. He did so with very sharp philosophical eyes – carefully detecting similarities, differences and relationships. His worldwiewish and philosophical voice was distinct – undoubtedly Christian. But, like any eagle, he did not keep flying high above our heads, but also returned to earth – his philosophy and worldview are also of eminently practical value.

3.2 Vollenhoven neglected

In spite of this, Vollenhoven's work was for many years only known and appreciated by a small group of Christian, mainly Dutch scholars. Many reasons for this state of affairs may exist. Perhaps the most important factor was that,

compared to Dooyeweerd, very little of Vollenhoven's oeuvre was till recently available in the *lingua franca* of today. (Dooyeweerd's major work, *A New Critique of theoretical thought*, was already published in the fifties of the previous century.)

3.3 New wings to Vollenhoven's philosophy

From the commemoration of Vollenhoven's birth a hundred years ago in 1992, however, new publications by him and about him started emerging. In Dutch some of his publications were edited by Tol and Bril (cf. Vollenhoven, 1992); Kok (1992) wrote a dissertation on Vollenhoven's early thought; Stellingwerff (1992) wrote a biography (in Dutch) on this reformer of philosophy; Kok (1998) was also responsible for a popularised version of Vollenhoven's survey of the history of Western Philosophy.

Since 2000 more momentum has been achieved. On Vollenhoven's consistent problem-historic method of historiography Bril & Boonstra (cf. Vollenhoven, 2000) edited and explained his *Schematic Maps*. Subsequently Bril edited a Dutch as well as an English version of Vollenhoven's historiographical method and history of philosophy (cf. Vollenhoven, 2005a, 2005b) as well as his many contributions on philosophy in the *Oosthoek's Encyclopedie* (cf. Vollenhoven, 2005c). A simplified version of Vollenhoven's historiography is provided by Van der Walt (2010b:152-182).

Simultaneously Vollenhoven's own systematic philosophy also got new wings through the following publications. Kok and Tol (cf. Vollenhoven, 2005d) edited his *Isagôgê Philosophiae* (Introduction to Philosophy) in both Dutch and English. Most recently Tol (cf. Vollenhoven, 2010) was responsible for a text-critical edition of the same work. Finally Tol (2010) also wrote an excellent dissertation on Vollenhoven's own philosophical development from 1918 to 1931 (for a summary, see Tol 2011).

3.4 Vollenhoven's style

Even to a Vollenhoven expert like Tol, Vollenhoven's philosophy is not easy – especially not for a novice. He (cf. Tol, 2010:60) says "Vollenhoven's thought is for many not an easy nut to crack". And (p. 41) he calls Vollenhoven's *Isagôgè* a challenge: "Vollenhoven guides without taking away the initiative from the student. The student and the reader need to think, and to think hard when following Vollenhoven."

Much of the difficulty is the result of Vollenhoven's brief and succinct style. "...brevity and succinctness don't always serve for clarity when there is need for explanation... On reading Vollenhoven, one soon realizes that his brevity of expression cloaks a complex process of thought", says Tol. "Vollenhoven's succinctness evidences a talent for combining beguiling simplicity with deep subtlety, sweeping generalization with careful distinction. Here Vollenhoven is at his best. He has an impressive grasp of details, but always with a view to the framework in which they fit" (Tol, 2010:26).

3.5 The focus on Vollenhoven's worldview

Because of the difficulties of *walking* with Vollenhoven's scholarly *philosophy*, this chapter is an attempt to *fly* with his pre-scientific, more basic *worldview*. I am of opinion that Reformational philosophy could have a greater impact if its beginners start at a worldviewish level. (At the worldview level there are also more agreement between reformational thinkers.)

3.5.1 Religion, worldview and philosophy

Already in his dissertation (of 1918) Vollenhoven was convinced that being a thinker and a Christian can be combined. This conviction remained unchanged throughout his career. According to Vollenhoven his Christian philosophy is the correlate, in science, of a Christian view of the world, which is non-scientific in character. Philosophy and worldview are therefore related but not the same. Philosophy is the scientific elaboration of a worldview. Limited space does not

permit a detailed discussion of the relationship between the two (cf. e.g. Wolters, 1989:24). Because of this close relationship one may deduce the worldviewish background from his *Isagôgê Philosophiae*, his main systematic work, as well as from his historiography of philosophy.

Both worldview and scholarship (philosophy included) in turn are built on a still deeper level, viz. that of religion and can therefore never be neutral activities. Tol (2010:255) therefore distinguishes first the religious level, secondly the worldviewish, and thirdly the level of scholarly endeavours, and summarises Vollenhoven's viewpoint as follows:

...philosophy is 'fed' by worldview (life-experience) and religious attitude (life-fulfilment), but ... philosophy "digests" these in terms of its own limited possibilities. Philosophy's food is meta-philosophical, but what its stomachs is philosophical (Tol, 2010:256)

3.5.2 *Encompassing religion*

In the light of the Scriptures Vollenhoven (2005d:78) describes religion as follows: "... the relationship of humankind to the God of the covenant in obedience or disobedience to his fundamental law of love". In this definition God's Word clearly reverberates (cf. e.g. Gen. 15; Ex. 19:5; Deut. 33:9; Ps. 25:10; 103:18; 132:12; Is. 56:4,6; Dan. 9:4).

Since Vollenhoven simultaneously sees a close *religious relationship* as well as a clear *ontological distinction* between God, his creation and his laws for creation, religion is not something spiritual, supernatural, ethereal or merely ecclesiastical – a *separate part* of human life. In an *encompassing* way, with our whole existence, here and now – in the simplest earthly things and activities – we have, according to his commandments, to walk *coram Deo*, close to God. Life in its entirety – worldview and education included – should be religion!

3.5.3 *Flying with Vollenhoven's worldview*

We will return to Vollenhoven's own ideas in more detail, but I now invite the reader to fly with me – like an African eagle – on the wings of Vollenhoven's

worldview. Unfortunately – because of a lack of space – we will have to confine ourselves mainly to the following: (1) Vollenhoven's possible corrections on the current categorisation or typology of Christian worldviews; (2) his own alternative; (3) possible limitations of his own approach; (4) a brief application of his worldview to education in general.

4. Vollenhoven's possible corrections on some Christian worldviewish publications

Vollenhoven was critical about different methods of describing and categorising Christian worldviews. First a few remarks about method in general.

4.1 Methods are not neutral

A method presupposes amongst others (1) an *aim* (e.g. a survey of or insight into a specific problem); (2) careful *planning* to enable one to reach the goal; (3) *execution* of the plan by a person or an apparatus controlled by the researcher; (4) with due consideration of the *material* that has to be studied, and (5) the *means* at one's disposal (cf. Stoker, 1969).

A real method, therefore, will not simply be collecting "facts" to put them in line next to each other. Method implies precision and planning, but also that one intends to get somewhere, to let the facts "talk", both separately and as a whole. A method could either let the data (information) say something or suppress them. But even more important: Every method is – whether one is conscious of it or not – determined by deeper presuppositions. No method (both scientific and pre-scientific) can be neutral, since it is based on epistemological, anthropological, ontological and religious assumptions.

Vollenhoven required of his own method(s) to be at least (1) conceived in the light of God's Word (Ps. 36:10) and (2) that they should be truly philosophical. He did not agree, for instance, that geographical, chronological, nationalistic (ethnic), etcetera methods could really study the history of philosophy correctly. (We will return to Vollenhoven's own method below.)

This contribution limits Vollenhoven's critique to the following three issues: (1) a worldview is not (as the word itself suggests) a relative view about *only the world*; (2) "creation, fall and redemption" cannot fully express the contents of a biblically based worldview; (3) Christian worldviews should not be categorised according to a nature-grace distinction.

Let us have a look at Vollenhoven's first critique on the character of worldviews and their classification.

4.2 A worldview is not something merely cultural or only a view about the world

In Vollenhoven's time the term "worldview" was for non-Christian thinkers primarily a term to indicate mainly cultural attitudes (cf. 2.2.1 above). It therefore also implied relativism: so many cultures, so many worldviews.

Vollenhoven would not accept this. As indicated already above, religion to him is the basis of both worldview and philosophy. Every worldview is religiously determined. Therefore the word "worldview" (with the emphasis on *world*) itself may be queried since it gives the impression that God, his commandments and the religious relation of mankind to him are excluded. A believing Christian, however, cannot understand the world outside its relationship to God and his ordinances.

According to Vollenhoven any philosophy worth its salt has to ask two basic questions: (1) What is or *exists*? (2) How *should* it be? The first is a *structural or ontic* question. The second a *directional or religious* one. The answer to the first reveals different more or less constant *types* of worldviews/philosophies. The answer to the second focuses on different normative, *spiritual currents* in the history of worldviews and philosophies. These spiritual streams do not stay the same but changes with time. *Types* and *currents* also have a mutual influence on each other.

Basic to Vollenhoven's thinking therefore is the distinction as well as the close relationship between *structure* (creation) and its (religious) *direction*. And after

the fall into sin two directions should be distinguished: good and bad or obedience and disobedience to God's law. The law provides a normative – directional element to a worldview.

Summarised: Vollenhoven's worldview does not only include the *world*, but also *God* and his *laws*. The human being is called by (1) *God* to an office to fulfil a task (2) in *creation* (3) according to his *laws*.

A second point of critique by Vollenhoven may be the following:

4.3 “Creation, fall and redemption” do not clearly enough express a Christian worldview based on God's revelation

To my mind Vollenhoven for the following reasons will not regard as satisfactory the summary of a Christian worldview as “creation, fall and redemption” (by Dooyeweerd, 1959, 1979; Stoker, 1967:13-41, 42-82; 1970:430 and many Reformational thinkers afterwards like Wolters, 2005; Walsh & Middleton, 1984:41-90; Bartholomew & Goheen, 2010 and Zijlstra in Runner, 1982:23-33).

Firstly, in line with what has been said already above, because the theme of creation, fall and redemption deals primarily with the history of *creation* and only implicitly with God and his norms. Vollenhoven describes this kind of thinking as “purely cosmological” – it focuses narrowly only on this world.

A student of Vollenhoven, Taljaard (1976), elaborates on Vollenhoven's critique of reducing biblical revelation to merely the “creation, fall and redemption” of the cosmos. According to Taljaard (1976:86) this idea already started with the Roman Catholic thinker, Thomas Aquinas, and can also be traced in the philosophies of Stoker and Dooyeweerd (cf. Taljaard, 1976:46, 85). Such a view has serious implications, like the fact that only theology has to do with God and his revelation, while (Christian) philosophical study is confined to the cosmos and therefore secularised. God's sovereignty over his entire creation can therefore not be proclaimed in a Christian worldview. Taljaard (1976:29) regards such implications as so detrimental that he would rather reject the word “worldview” to

be replaced by a pre-scientific view of the realities of God, the cosmos and his laws for created reality.

Secondly, Vollenhoven, who strongly emphasises the genesis or continued development of the world after its creation, would like to add a fourth element: its final consummation.

Thirdly, I don't think Vollenhoven would have liked the idea that redemption only implies a *return* to the original, perfect pre-fall situation. This was the viewpoint of Bavinck (cf. Veenhof, 1994), viz. *grace restores nature*, and perhaps also Wolters (2005) in his book *Creation regained*.

Fourthly, "creation, fall and redemption" tends to take into consideration only God's revelation in the Bible and not his revelation in creation. Given the threefold, i.e. creational, scriptural and incarnational facets of God's revelation, emphasising only one of them (e.g. the scriptural revelation of the Bible), or devaluating any one form of his revelation, undermines the two other forms. To minimise or ignore any part of God's complete revelation sooner or later also distorts one's relationship with God as well as one's role in the world. Biblicism, which wants to derive all guidance from the Bible only, easily results in a dualistic worldview of nature and supernature. (Vice versa: such a dualism is the source of Biblicism.)

This leads to a third possible query from Vollenhoven:

4.4 Categorising Christian worldviews according to the model of nature-grace is unsatisfactory

Some brief notes about Bavinck, Niebuhr, a few Reformational thinkers and Carter and Ramaker are important to understand Vollenhoven's possible critique. All of them apply only four or five "boxes" to categorise different worldviews.

4.4.1 H. Bavinck

H. Bavinck categorised different Christian worldviews according to the scholastic dualism of nature and grace. The Anabaptist's position was, according to Bavinck, *grace against nature*; the Catholics elevated grace *above nature*; the

Lutherans positioned grace *next to* nature; the Calvinist view was that grace *restores* nature.

Veenhof (1980:66) indicates that Bavinck struggled from the beginning to the end of his career with the problem of the relationship between creation and recreation, general and special revelation, nature and grace. Bavinck criticised other Christian worldviews (cf. Veenhof 1968:345-365; 1994 and 2006), but could never really solve the problem. His own viewpoint (expressed in Bavinck, 1888, 1904a, 1904b, 1908 and other publications) was that grace does not abolish nature, but purifies, renews, heals and restores it. Heideman (1959:196) writes: "... that grace does not abolish nature, but renews and restores it... may be called the central thought of Bavinck's theology".

I agree with Bavinck that God's salvation is *intended* for creation. But what exactly their *relationship* is difficult to tell if one views it from a basic nature-grace starting-point. I also do not see a radical difference between the viewpoint of Bavinck and that of Thomism which he criticised. (According to Vollenhoven 2000:51 and others, Bavinck's philosophical position was the same as that of scholastics like Thomas Aquinas, Suarez and Jungius.)

4.4.2 H.R. Niebuhr

Niebuhr (1951) followed a similar line: Christ (or grace) *against* culture (nature); Christ *above* culture; Christ *and* culture in paradox; Christ *transforms* culture (his own preference) and Christ *of* culture. He was afterwards criticised that he forced all Christian thinking into only five boxes or pigeon-holes.

4.4.3 Reformational thinkers

We find more or less the same later on with Reformational philosophers (cf. Olthuis, 1970:105-125; Wolters, 1990:189-203; Zijlstra in Runner, 1982:24-34 and to a lesser extent Walsh & Middleton, 1984). Wolters also discovers five categories of Christian worldviews in history: grace *opposes* nature; grace *perfects* nature; grace *flanks* nature; grace *restores* nature; grace *equals* nature.

The present author also adopted the same scheme (cf. e.g. Van der Walt, 2001:26) in the past.

4.4.4 C.A. Carter

Recently Carter (2006) has proposed to rethink this classic categorising of Niebuhr and his followers. His main argument is that the scheme was devised from the presupposition of a Christian world (*corpus Christianum*), which today no longer exists in the West. From his own background (historically Anabaptist and strongly influenced by the contemporary writings of Yoder) he argues for a *separation* between Christ and culture, which, according to him, can still be culturally creative. However, I get the impression that such a perspective finally boils down to salvation *from* creation rather than the salvation *of* creation. (I leave unanswered the question whether one's secular environment can become so bad that perhaps the only remaining option for Christians may be to withdraw.)

4.4.5 T. Ramaker

Most recently also Ramaker (2007:150-156) critically reviewed Niebuhr's division of Christian world views into five categories. Firstly he – correctly - discerns a dualism in the "Christ and culture" approach. Secondly he regards the idea of Christians being able to transform the contemporary dominating and powerful secular culture as too optimistic, belonging to a triumphalistic phase in the history of Christianity. Christians should rather approach present-day culture (of which they are part) in a critical-participatory way, in other words both accepting and correcting it. They should, as salt and light, be followers of Christ.

4.5 *The nature-grace method as the "vitium originis"*

The most important question is about the method which lies behind this traditional typology of Christian worldviews (see 4.1 above). What are the philosophical presuppositions (both structural and directional) supporting such a method? Is the method, for instance, devised in the light of God's (scriptural) revelation?

The main problem with *all* the above attempts to categorise worldviews is that they are based on the age-old dualism between nature (or culture) and grace (in Christ). The only *difference* between the (five) types of Christian worldviews is that they view the *relationship* between nature and grace differently. It may be in order if one accepts the distinction nature-grace as biblical. Unfortunately it is not the case. It has to be rejected in the light of Gods revelation (cf. Walsh & Middleton, 1984:41-90 as well as Vollenhoven in many of his publications).

What is even worse is that the nature-grace dualism historically prepared the way for contemporary secularism, when nature (the world) was divorced from grace to become autonomous and a completely secular domain.

According to Vollenhoven (2005a:65) the distinction between nature and grace was a method applied by Christian synthetic thinkers to combine pagan thinking (the lower sphere of nature) and God's revelation (the higher sphere of super-nature or grace). The result was synthesis thinking – which caused unimaginable harm to the Christian faith and robbed religion of its biblical, all-encompassing nature. Viewed from the one side, synthetic thought resulted in nature-grace method, and viewed from the other side, the nature-grace method facilitated synthetic thinking.

However, according to Vollenhoven, God *created* everything; Christ *indicates the direction* of life (according to his command of love) in *all* aspects of life; the Spirit *motivates, guides and calls to responsibility* in *everything* we do. Every human being is created, addressed and guided. From his side *every* human being (as prophet, priest and king) has a fulltime religious office to fulfil. Life – one's entire life – is religion!

4.6 A brief critique

The nature-grace theme is basically a confusion between the *structure* of the world ("nature") and its (religious) *direction* ("grace"). The *spiritual* antithesis (between obedience or disobedience to God's law) is given *ontological* status by defining some sectors, parts, aspects, realms or activities (like the church) as by nature good and others (e.g. politics) as less good and even evil. Some callings

(for example that of ministers) are regarded higher as and holier than others; celibacy is purer than marriage; evangelism more saintly than social involvement; theology more honourable than philosophy. Therefore some sectors of life are religious, while others (the "natural" domain) are religiously neutral; some activities or structures are redeemable, other only remotely so (cf. Spykman, 1992:67).

Spykman concludes about this kind of dualism: "...(it) is a deceptive attempt to reject life in the world (in part) while at the same time also accepting it (in part)... (it) disrupts the unity of creation order... legitimize the reality of sin in one or other realm of life... limit the cosmic impact of the Biblical message of redemption... confine Christian witness to only certain limited sectors of life" (Spykman, 1992:68).

4.7 Conclusion

The conclusion in the light of the above can only be that to categorise Christian worldviews according to the method of nature-grace (supernature) is biblically unacceptable. The proposed Reformational or transformational view of grace *transforming* nature seems to be basically not very much different from the classical Catholic position (cf. Wentzel, 1970) of grace *perfecting* nature (*gratia non tollit sed perfecit naturam*).

Wolters, in spite of his critique (cf. 2005:79:92) on two-*realm* theories (of nature-supernature), still seems to accept two *regimes* (81). I can agree with him if he understands "*creation regained*" in the sense that, according to the Bible, salvation (grace) does not stand *outside* creation (against, above or next to it), but is meant to renew creation *itself*. But if, from a sinful, fallen situation, one wants to *regain creation* (working backwards from a post-fall to a pre-fall situation) how can you be sure to have a real grasp on the structure and the laws governing the cosmos? (One is confronted here with the difficult problem of the noetic implications of the fall.)

It also seems to me the title of Wolters' book (with the emphasis on "*creation regained*") may imply another, a regressive element when he, for instance, writes

(p. 83): "Redemption then is a *recovery* of creational goodness... We *return* to creation through the cross..." [italics BJvdW].

It may be that I misunderstand Wolters since he meant "regained" in another sense. Nonetheless it remains an important issue to be investigated, bearing in mind the world-wide influence of Wolter's excellent book.

Recreation (paradise regained) can not simply be a *replacement* of the original *paradise lost*. Neither can it be a *restoration*. In both cases God's omnipotence becomes a problem. In the first case it seems as if He was not powerful enough to redeem the first creation and could only replace it – Satan has won the battle! In the second instance it looks as if God was not capable of preventing the fall and it is taking him millennia to regain it. The idea of a regained creation may, thirdly, imply a circular view of history which goes against the biblical idea of a linear development towards fulfilment. Perhaps the best we may say is that future redemption is not simply a *return* to creation but nevertheless *in line* with creation, viz. simultaneously containing discontinuity and continuity.

5. Vollenhoven's alternative

The preceding critique on the traditional categorisation of Christian worldviews will become much clearer when we now turn to the detail of Vollenhoven's own viewpoint, including (1) his method, (2) his division of history into three main periods and (3) its implications for a new typology of worldviews.

5.1 Vollenhoven's own method

It has already become clear that the question about which (philosophical) methodology one follows, is of vital importance, since one's deeper religious, worldviewish and philosophical starting-points are in fact "build into" your method (cf. 4.1 above). Vollenhoven was fully aware of this and paid elaborate attention to the correct philosophical method at the beginning of his *Isagôgè*. (See Tol, 2010 for the details.) In the preceding part of this chapter some glimpses of his method were already revealed. Because of its importance to follow the main

argument of this chapter, a closer look is necessary. Vollenhoven (2005d:6-8) calls his own method the thetical-critical approach.

5.1.1 A thetical method

"Thetical" implies that one cannot think from a vacuum or *tabula rasa*, but that it is necessary to have a (preliminary) viewpoint. Therefore Vollenhoven's own philosophy started with an answer to three basic questions (cf. Vollenhoven, 2005d:14): (1) Who is the Creator? (2) What is it that is created in relation to him? (3) Where does the line and bridge between them lie? The Bible's answers to these are: (1) God; (2) his creation, completely dependent on its Creator and subjected to his sovereign law; (3) God's laws, the boundary and bridge between God and the cosmos. This distinction of God-law-cosmos became the hallmark of Vollenhoven's systematic philosophy and worldview.

5.1.2 A critical method

Let me quote from Vollenhoven himself:

We who philosophize may not act as though our predecessors and contemporaries lacked philosophic insight. On the contrary, we must seriously consider their expositions. However, we also may not swear by the words of a human master or seek a solution in a patchwork, in which simply out of awe for people of authority we borrow something from each of them. We must always ask ourselves: 'Did they sufficiently appreciate the difficulties and did they pose the problem correctly?' And we must also, and repeatedly, ask the same question of the result that we ourselves have arrived at. (Vollenhoven, 2005d:6)

Vollenhoven is clearly not against an open dialogue, whether positive or negative, with other viewpoints and worldviews. Vollenhoven also emphasises that criticism is not necessary equivalent to negation. It can have a positive result of maintaining the position of another or oneself. Even a negative result has great value in obtaining new results.

5.1.3 A *thetical-critical method*

The *thetical* and *critical* elements are not isolated from each other, but should take place simultaneously. "The *thetical-critical* brings systematic reflection and historical alternatives in direct contact with each other" (Tol, 2010:31). In the words of Vollenhoven himself:

Every critical activity implies that one takes a *thetical* position. It is quite possible that this position will later prove to be untenable, but all that it means is that one has modified one's position somewhat... But whatever the case may be, all criticism presupposes, if it is worthy of the name, that one is confident in maintaining certain thoughts. (Vollenhoven, 2005d:7)

In an important following comment Vollenhoven then rejects the following methods: (1) philosophic nihilism, (2) a simple combination of viewpoints and (3) eclecticism, which simply supports a number of ideas encountered, without even bothering whether they are compatible. (Compare again my avian metaphors of different kind of birds at the beginning of this chapter in 2.1.)

He then summarises:

It is by maintaining that which is tenable in one's own position, by critically examining not only the result acquired by others but also the result of one's own thinking at an earlier time, and by having the courage to accept the implications of one's position, that one can make progress through struggle and attain a double profit: a reinforced *position* and a more definite *rejection* of whatever is inconsistent with it. (Vollenhoven, 2005d:8)

Vollenhoven remained faithful to this method throughout his life: He described his own *thetical* position (cf. Vollenhoven, 2005d), and by way of his problem-historical method of historiography he was *critically* involved with the ideas of others throughout history (cf. Vollenhoven, 2000, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c). According to philosophical historiography he distinguishes about sixty six different normative currents or spiritual *directions* in the history of Western thinking as well as many types of philosophy about the *structure of reality*. (Cf.

4.2 above and Van der Walt, 2010b for an elementary introduction.) His own systematic philosophy (founded on God's Word) enabled him to delve wide and deep into the history of philosophy, while the insights he gained from the history of Western philosophy in turn enriched his own philosophy.

5.1.4 Not anti-theistic but anti-synthetic

Vollenhoven, therefore, was not simply an anti-*thetic* Christian philosopher. (An attitude still present in Kuyper). On this point even other Reformational thinkers may have misunderstood Vollenhoven, cf. Tol, 2010:61, footnote). He did not put his own viewpoint anti-theistically – as the only correct one – over against non-Christian perspectives – all of them regarded as wrong. Vollenhoven thought anti-*synthetically*; he was against any kind of synthesis of biblical and unbiblical ideas. And his anti-synthetic thinking was not of a *secular* nature (ignoring God's revelation), but *Christian* (obeying God's revelation).

5.2 Three methods employed in Christian synthetic thinking

Vollenhoven's own method is totally different from the three methods employed in Christian synthetical thinking.

The first method which enabled Christians to combine unbiblical and biblical perspectives was the method of nature and grace (cf. 4.5 above). Pagan philosophy was regarded as a preamble to the supernatural sphere of God's revelation in the Bible.

Apart from nature and grace as a method of synthesis, Vollenhoven (2005a:62-63) also mentions the method of eisegesis-exegesis or biblicism, according to which unbiblical ideas are read *into* (eisegesis) the Word of God and *read out* (exegesis) again – now biblically sanctioned.

Thirdly, Vollenhoven (2005a:65) mentions the method of paradox. The early Christian thinker, Tertullian, for example, accepted both pagan (Greek) conceptions and the Bible as authoritative. He realised that these two were at odds at more than one point, but he did not want to abandon either of them. So he arrived at a paradox, viz. that both the one and the other are true. Obviously

this is an untenable viewpoint, but at least somewhat clearer than the two other methods in the sense that an unbiblical, pagan philosophy or worldview could not just be read into Scripture and in this way then be sanctioned by God's Word.

5.3 Three main periods in the history of Western worldviews

Vollenhoven then (cf. again Vollenhoven, 2005a:29) takes synthetic thought (achieved by the above three methods to achieve a synthesis between biblically grounded ideas and unbiblical ones) as a dividing point in Western thinking: (1) The *pre-synthetic* period (Greek, Hellenistic and Roman thought) stretched from the beginning of Western thinking (about 2500 BC) to approximately 50 AD. (2) The *synthetic* period dominated the centuries from 50 AD to about 1550 AD. (3) The *post-synthetic* period covered the time after 1550.

In the post-synthetic period two different trends are distinguished: anti-synthetic right (or Christian) and left (or secular). Both of them have in common that they reject a synthesis between biblical and unbiblical ideas. Their reasons for doing so, however, differed. The Christian movement (originating in the 16th Century Reformation) rejected synthetic thinking because it wanted to get rid of the pagan element it contained. The secular trend (starting with the Renaissance) did so from an opposite motivation: it disliked the biblical element of synthetic thinking and (as least initially) wanted to return to Greek and Roman philosophy as guides to a new era in history.

Also in this respect Vollenhoven is not outdated today. On the one hand secular thinking and worldviews are overwhelming us today. On the other hand many Christians think that they can overcome secularism by returning to the synthetic thinking of the past (cf. the new Radical Orthodoxy movement). Or in a biblicistic way (as of old) they simply read into the Bible contemporary secular ideas and sanction them with *sola Scriptura* (a strong trend among Reformed theologians today). Synthetic Christianity is also dominant on the African continent. Bediako (1992) identified similarities between early, Patristic synthetic thinking and contemporary African theologians. And Van der Walt (2011) draws attention to the dualistic worldview among Evangelicals in Africa.

5.4 An important clarification

Before we turn to the implications of the above (a new typology of worldviews), it should be noted that (as far as I could ascertain) Vollenhoven himself never employed the word "reformational" or "transformational" to characterise his own worldview or philosophy. These terms were used by some of his followers after his death. I guess the reason why Vollenhoven himself simply wrote about a *Christian* or a *Scripturally obedient* worldview/philosophy was that he did not intend – in a triumphalistic mode – to re/transform the *secular* worldviews/philosophies of his time. Perhaps he was aware that such a mammoth mission was impossible or not even the task of a Christian. His intention rather was to indicate *synthetic tendencies amongst Christian thinkers themselves* in order to be more obedient to God's revelation. This fact may serve as a warning to Vollenhoven's followers – including the present writer – to be careful about how they call their own worldview. It may liberate them of an impossible burden, viz. the idea that they will be in a position to transform the "outside" world.

5.5 Towards a new typology

As personal *retractationes* (reconsidering my own previous position) I would therefore recommend to drop the usual typology of Christian worldviews as proposed by Niebuhr and his followers – also those in the Reformational tradition. This traditional categorisation of Christian worldviews into five different types includes some truth, and may also be a handy pedagogical way to orientate students, but its methodological presuppositions make it suspect.

5.5.1 New questions to be asked

In the light of the preceding discussion the five different relationships between the Christian and the world/culture should be replaced by much more basic and more complex questions like the following: (1) Is this worldview (or philosophy) synthetic, trying to accommodate both God's revelation and unbiblical ideas? (2) If so, what kind of method does it imply? (3) Can this worldview/philosophy be described as secular anti-synthetic (or post-Christian), deliberately excluding the light of God's revelation? (4) Or is this Christian worldview an honest attempt to

be faithful to God's revelation (in other words anti-synthetically Christian)? (5) How does the *structural or descriptive* side of a particular worldview (the *type* of worldview in Vollenhoven's terms) look like? (6) What is its basic *normative direction* (= *current* in Vollenhoven's terminology)?

Many concrete examples of worldwiewish and philosophical positions that Vollenhoven characterises in a more refined way than the usual categorisation can be found in Vollenhoven (2000, 2005a).

5.5.2 No final Christian worldview

The answer to question (4) above does not imply that – at last – one has identified a perfect, final *ex cathedra* Christian worldview or *philosophia perennis*. It will still be fallible and incomplete. And because all of us are children of our own times, it will not be purified of every bit of synthesis. However, one should clearly distinguish between a kind of *spontaneous or unintentional* synthesis and a *deliberate, conscious* practice of synthesis-thinking.

5.5.3 Conclusion

Analysing and categorising worldviews – including Christian worldviews – seems to be a much more complex and difficult task than many popular books with only four or five "boxes" suggest. It even seems to me that the uniqueness of a "Reformational" worldview as well as other Christian worldviews has not being fully identified yet. If so, this fact invites for further thorough reflection. Such reflection should of course also include being critical of Vollenhoven's alternative as described above.

6. Possible limitations of Vollenhoven's radical Christian worldview

The following brief remarks may be made about possible limitations of Vollenhoven's own worldview. (In some cases I will give my own brief response, while others will be left to the reader's reaction.)

6.1 He still worked from a Eurocentric-Western perspective, wrote for a Western audience and confined himself to the history of Western worldviews/philosophies. Klapwijk (1995) therefore emphasised the need for contextualisation in other cultural surroundings. Mouw and Griffioen, (1993:16-19) distinguished, like Vollenhoven, *directional pluralism* (a variety of religious directions), and *associational pluralism* (a diversity of social structures). But they also added (like Klapwijk) *contextual or cultural pluralism*. (All three pluralisms could be descriptive as well as normative.) These three kinds of pluralities should be distinguished, but are closely related and influence each other reciprocally.

6.2 Some (post-modern) Christians may also regard Vollenhoven's worldview and philosophy as too intellectualistic or rational, its main aim being to understand the world. To our irrationalist age this statement may be true. But Vollenhoven (1933:311) did not regard the emotional as something dangerous. Because of the close relationship between all human modalities, intellectual work includes an emotional aspect. There is also no religion without emotion. (Emotion without religion, however, does exist: many feelings are not directed at God.) I don't think Vollenhoven would have minded that I have indicated (cf. Van der Walt, 2008:6-7) that any religion and worldview participate in or reflect all fourteen modalities distinguished by Vollenhoven himself. It is thus not to be viewed simply as a logical and/or emotional construct or system.

6.3 Not enough attention is given to the suffering of the world. Walsh (1992:10) writes: "... any worldview, if it is to be both biblical and illuminative of what human life is really like, must be a worldview that comprehends our brokenness and suffering". Vollenhoven clearly distinguishes between good and bad directions, but did he pay enough attention to the evil surrounding us? Is his worldview not perhaps too optimistic? (Cf. Ramaker, 2007 under 4.4.5 above.)

6.4 Vollenhoven still lived and worked in a more or less Christian environment. How can his worldview help us to live and think in our increasingly multi-religious and secular societies? (A possible answer will be given in 7.4 below.)

6.5 Vollenhoven did not write much about human sexuality or gender and about different theories in this regard, like sexual polarity, sexual unity and sexual complementarity (cf. e.g. the works by Allen, 1985 and 2002). At his time these were not yet such burning issues as today. But Vollenhoven did criticise both *anthropological* dualism (according to which both men and women contain something transcendent or divine) and *andrological* dualisms (according to which only men participate in the divine) and in this way rejected the inferior position of women. (See also chapter 5 of this book.)

6.6 From the side of Postmodernism one may expect criticism like the following: a (Christian) worldview is or may deteriorate into a totalitarian intellectual system; it usually has a claim to universal validity; it simply promotes the power of the own group.

6.7 From the Christian side I have heard the following: A Christian worldview may silence the Scriptures, damping its inspiration and dynamics; it may try to replace a personal relationship with God; with many Christians a gap exists between their worldview and real way of *life*.

6.8 From a recent book of Bonzo & Stevens (2009) I pick up the following comments on a Reformational worldview: it must be more hospitable; it is used as a yardstick for orthodoxy; it has the tendency to pigeonhole others. Rather than providing rational justification, it should encourage genuine spirituality; more emphasis should fall on its pre-scientific character than on worldview as a theoretical system.

6.9 Vollenhoven's philosophy is only another effort at schematism or to put worldviews and philosophies into different "boxes". He has gone around arresting people, labeling them and shoving them into a previously prepared cell. The imprisoning mesh is woven of type and trend, and the person arrested will be regarded guilty until he had proven the opposite!

This, however, is rather true of many other textbooks about worldview and philosophy (cf. e.g. Dooyeweerd's (1959 and 1979) four religious ground motives; Tarnas, 2000 and Ferry, 2006) that have only a few labels at their

disposal. Vollenhoven's much more nuanced approach allows several thousand possibilities to distinguish worldviews and philosophies. If his approach has to be called a prison, then it is a rather liberal one!

Some of these suggestions and accusations, however, deserve further attention, but it will have to wait for another time. We have arrived at the last part of the present chapter:

7. A few implications of a radical Christian worldview for education

Keeping in mind the central theme of this *Koers 75* Conference, something has to be said about worldview and education. However, so much has already been written on this issue that I confine myself to a few general statements.

7.1 Every human being is a religious being, with a specific worldview which influences every aspect of his/her life – education included.

7.2 Education, therefore, cannot be something neutral (cf. e.g. Walsh & Middleton, 1984:163-174; Clouser, 1991; Garber, 1996 and part 4 of Bonzo & Stevens, 2009). It is either directed in obedience to God's revelation and will or disobedient.

7.3 We have a *calling* from God to *walk* with Him in love. He appointed each one of us to an *office*. Our *task* is to create *structures* ruled by his diversified love command (truth in marriage, care in the family, justice in politics etc.) The *culture* we create is the result of our responses to his diversified but foundational law of love. Part of this cultural activity is education.

7.4 The Vollenhovenian distinction and relationship between structure and direction should also be applied to society and education (cf. McCarthy et al., 1981).

Structural plurality advocates different societal relationships with each its own, unique task and authority. A school is not the same as a church. And the state should not rule over schools, colleges and universities.

Confessional plurality teaches that religious and worldviewish convictions should be allowed to give direction to the different societal structures. The ideal is that

Christian, Muslims, Secularists, etc. should have the right to establish and govern their own schools and institutions of higher education, political parties, labour unions, etc.

7.5 A reformational approach therefore rejects the idea of public, secular schooling and institutions for higher education as the only option. It also rejects the basic distinction between "private" (where religion and worldview may still play a role) versus "public" (where religion and worldview – except the secularist type – is excluded).

7.6 Let me finally, in the light of the above, try to give a simple definition of what I think Christian education should be. (I have tried to include into it some ideas of De Graaff, 1966:112, 120 and Van Dyk, 1990:156-161.)

Education is a multidimensional, formative and worldviewishly determined activity, which gives normative direction to a person's development by guiding, unfolding and enabling her/him to understand and accept her/his place and calling in God's world.

8. Conclusion: a time for action

By way of a final conclusion, three brief remarks.

8.1 Christians should work together on a worldviewish level

I do hope that this chapter does not give the impression that I am using a worldview approach as a yardstick to judge Christians as orthodox or heterodox. (For too long all kinds of confessional and dogmatic differences already divided Christians.) What I actually have in mind and hope for is that Christians, in spite of their many ecclesiastical differences, will in the future be willing to take hands and on the *much broader perspective* of a radical Christian worldview, solidly based on God's revelation, tackle the many burning issues of contemporary life, education being one of them. Only with an own Christian *worldview* will we be able to challenge the dominant *worldview* of secularism.

8.2 Still time to act

Not only from a principal Reformational perspective (cf. 7.4 above), but also constitutionally we as Christians in South Africa (still) have the right to let the voice of a real Christian worldview be heard – also in education. The brief glimpses on the worldview of the eagle amongst Christian philosophers have again inspired us about our important place, calling and task in God's all-encompassing kingdom. May this African fish eagle's worldview in the future also fly over the African continent.

8.3 A clarion call

Vollenhoven has assisted us in obeying the Word of God to test the spirits (1 John 4:1) – even of differing Christian worldviews. Let us start flying higher, looking more sharply, widely and deeply and let the world clearly hear our distinctive Christian voice. The silenced "voice of Potchefstroom" (since about 2000) needs to be revived. May *Koers* continue to light a small candle of hope in a rapidly secularising North-West University. And the voice from Amsterdam should be amplified to reach countries far away, outside the small Netherlands. Or in the terminology of our contemporary technological world: May a radical Christian worldview and its philosophical correlate in the future be empowered to fly like a satellite around the globe!

Chapter 4

THE CONCEPT "WOMEN"

A feministic historiography of the relation between male and female

This chapter analyses the presuppositions underlying the feminist philosopher, Sister Prudence Allen's important book, The concept of woman (1985), on the history of the idea of woman and women's relation to the other sex. Following the method of the history of ideas, she investigated the viewpoints of about sixty male and female Western thinkers during the period of 750 BC to AD 1250. She discovered three basic models in the relation between female and male, viz. gender unity, polarity and complementarity. However, apart from other issues, the writer highlights two major problems with her historiography. Firstly, she did not indicate clearly enough how different ontic-anthropological philosophical starting points determined the differing viewpoints on the two genders. Secondly, instead of accepting a norm from outside, she looked for a directive on the relation between male and female (in a subjectivist way) in the relation itself. Such an approach is the consequence of her dualistic division between a supposedly neutral philosophy and Christian theology. She also did not succeed in applying her nature-grace distinction consistently in her review of history. Furthermore, Allen's preference for the idea of complementarity is questioned. To stimulate further reflection, attention is asked for a few contemporary Protestant views on the same issue. In conclusion a follow-up contribution is envisaged which will indicate that a consistent problem-historical method of philosophical historiography might provide answers to the two main shortcomings identified in Allen's otherwise captivating and ground-breaking study.

1. Orientation

At the outset it is advisable first to mention three reasons for the lasting topicality of an investigation like this one, and secondly that the exploration is of a philosophical nature. Thirdly, a look is taken at the limitations imposed on it, and the fourth instance there are important terms that need explanation.

1.1 Lasting topicality

A study on the concept "woman" (or "man") needs no motivation. Mary van Leeuwen (1993:xv) writes:

There is not a person alive who does not participate in shaping and being shaped by gender roles and relations, and there is arguably not a single aspect of our lives that is not influenced by the results of that shaping. Child-raising practices, education, language, law, health care, dress, work, worship – these and all other areas of our lives are variously nuanced, enriched, and distorted by our assumptions about gender and the practices that result.

Add to this statement the author's own interest (cf. Van der Walt, 1987; 2006a, b, c and d, 2011), and further motivation would be almost superfluous. However, three additional reasons are given here.

1.1.1 Many questions still unanswered

In the first instance any author who writes on the concept "woman" in ancient Greek and Medieval philosophy – 2500 years ago – should supply reasons for still regarding such an antiquarian-archaeological activity as being of current importance. Why not rather write on contemporary post-modern feminism?

The answer to this is that reflection on the issue of gender was not something that only started in our own time. According to Allen (1985) the ancient Greeks already held three basic theories on this, namely polarity, unity and complementarity between men and women. And when one consults Chanter (2006); James (2005); Verkerk (1997) and Storkey (2001) one draws the conclusion that the different contemporary feminist schools still grapple with more or less the same problems. This will become clear from the following simplified outline.

Up until about 1950 it was mainly the polar relation between the male and female genders that was emphasised by feminists. From about 1960-1980 the emphasis shifted to unity or equality. And after that (in postmodern feminism) it was emphasised that women have to (re)construct their own particular identity – over against that of men – themselves. So it would seem as if one is here confronted by an age-old unsolved issue for which there are only a limited number of solutions. But which is the correct one?

1.1.2 Little reflection in Protestant churches and theology

A second reason for digging in history, is to find out why women still have to put up with an inferior role in many Protestant churches. Mary van Leeuwen (1990:11), for instance, laments the fact that Calvinist scholars have so seldom dared to study the issues surrounding gender. They have limited their thinking to reflection on the issue of the leading role or authority of men over women – particularly in the church – while the great volume of literature on sexuality and gender has passed them by. In Van Leeuwen (1993:13) she even speaks about “Protestantism’s preoccupation with the ordination of women”. Such views (as well as male authority and power) cannot be solved in a biblicist way by merely having recourse to certain texts in the Scriptures.

What Christina Landman (1984:23) wrote at the time, namely that the debate on women in South Africa has not moved on from the issue as to whether women may serve as elders and ministers, has in fact changed since then, but not, for instance, in my own church – the Reformed Church (Gereformeerde Kerk) of South Africa.

Since times immemorial the reformed tradition has been trapped in a sexist-paternalistic paradigm, as can for instance be seen distinctly in the work of two of its fathers.

John Calvin (1509-1564)

In her recent doctoral thesis Alida Sewell (2011) points out how the Platonising anthropological view of the human body held by John Calvin (1509-1564) also determined his view of women. He interprets the Bible texts in such a way that he approves male superiority and female submissiveness, as being in conformity with “nature” (cf. Sewell, 2011:178). Calvin therefore calls on women not to act contrary to their own “nature” outside marriage and the home. Women are the weaker sex, tend towards nattering, being jealous and cannot keep their emotions in check by reason (cf. p. 185,185) – all the old stereotypes!

Since Calvin regards the kingdom of God as something spiritual – not of this world – it does not bring him to change his view on the position of women either.

The headship of male over female continues for him to be a creational given, and any inequality that this entails is not set aside by the redemptive implications of being in Christ... His insistence on the inviolability of the

natural order of the subordination of women to men... secures the bolt to the door of the patriarchal prison for women. (Sewell, 2011:190).

The Reformation of the sixteenth century did redeem woman from the convent (as saint) and the bar (as whore), only to confine her again to the bedroom (as wife), to children (as mother), the kitchen (as housewife) and church (as second-rate believer).

Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920)

The view of women held by Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) – 400 years later – shows no improvement on that held by Calvin. In his work *De erepositie der Vrouw* (*Woman's position of honour*) (1913, 1932) she does not get a position of honour at all. According to him men and women are two different kinds of human beings (!) with completely different natures. The reason for this is firstly their physical appearance (cf. Kuyper, 1932:39, 40). The weaker female body is among others built in such a way that she can have children. In the second instance women are also psychologically completely dissimilar to men (cf. pp. 23, 35, 41). Women are emotional and do not dispose of the intellectual capacity of men. In the third instance therefore women are unfit for public life (p. 49). For more on Kuyper's viewpoint the reader can consult the article by Van Leeuwen (2013).

1.1.3 Reformational philosophy no help either

The next (third) reason for this investigation is that, apart from Reformed theological tradition, one is also disappointed by later Reformational philosophy. Janet Wesselius (1997:61) justly writes about one of the fathers of this school, Herman Dooyeweerd (1894-1977): "... being an early twentieth-century European, he never discussed gender in his philosophical arguments..." The same could be said about the two other fathers of Reformational philosophy, Dirk Th. Vollenhoven (1892-1978) and Henk Stoker (1899-1993).

1.2 A philosophical approach

Femininity can be approached from many angles, as for instance from a psychological, biological, or religious angle, and many more. (For a general outline cf. Chanter, 2006 and for an example of the first-mentioned perspective cf. Buijtendijk, 1975.)

As we have already suggested, this contribution (as well as the following chapter) attempts to fathom the philosophical foundations of the various “solutions” to the view of and the relation between the two genders. It attempts to uncover the deeper ontological and anthropological views which lie at the root of the different viewpoints.

1.2.1 Two basic questions

Two simple but important questions should be asked by every thinking human being – particularly by the philosophising *homo sapiens*. The first is: *Who am I?* (Am I a woman or a man? In what ways do we differ from each other, and in what ways are we similar?) We call this an *ontic* or *structural* issue. The second basic question is: *How should I think and live?* (This also includes my relations with the opposite sex.) This second fundamental question concerns the *normative direction* of one’s life. It is an issue of direction.

Although one can distinguish between these two questions and their answers, they may not be separated. The following concise outline will serve as an explanation.

1.2.2 Growing subjectivism

Putting it very simply, one can say that up unto approximately the Medieval philosophy the ontic facet of being human was still being emphasised. The structural sides of a human being – man or woman – were emphasised and regarded as more or less unvarying. This had already been the case in Greek philosophy while the Christian Middle Ages moreover stamped it with divine sanction. People, men and women, had received an essential nature from God (called “essentialism”) which also had to determine their relation. (Cf. Calvin’s position described above.)

In the period after the Middle Ages and the Reformation (broadly termed the “modern age”) however, ever-increasing secularisation took place. God and his ordinations were increasingly neglected. So new norms for doctrine and life had to be found. This subjectivist tendency is growing all the time: what *is* more and more becomes what *should be*. This also happened inside feminism.

Feminist philosophy can be sub-divided into different schools in several ways. (Cf. e.g. Ackerman, 1998; Keane, 1998; Landman, 1984 and 1998; James, 2005 and Chanter, 2006). We here make use of the classification by Elaine Storkey (2001). She differentiates between three normative tendencies. Initially (up to approximately 1950) it was *biological differences* that determined femininity. As a created state of

affairs it determines gender. (Storkey calls this the pre-modern view.) Later (plus-minus 1960-1980) emphasis shifted from the biological-sexual "nature" of women to feminine "gender", to the *cultural environment* which was supposed to determine the essence of being a woman. (Storkey calls this the modern view.) Simone de Beauvoir (1964, cf. also 1962 and 1965 on the history of her life), for instance, teaches that a person is not *born* a woman but is *made* one by her cultural environment. Within postmodern feminism (after 1980) this subjectivist normativity took a further step. Female philosophers reject (deconstruct) the pre-modern and modern views and have to *reconstruct their own gender* – unlike that of the man – in an autonomous way themselves. In opposition to De Beauvoir the postmodern feminist, Luce Irigaray, writes that she was indeed born a woman, but still has to realise it (cf. Olthuis, 2005).

1.2.3 Postmodern relativism

Christian feminist philosophers justly see a great threat of relativism in this postmodern feminism.

... postmodern feminist risks undercutting the entire feminist project. For if there is only diversity and pluralism, who can dare to say what is 'right' and 'true' for all women? If all thought and values are relative... who can ever say that oppressive patriarchy... is any less valid than a feminist vision of mutuality and gender justice? (Van Leeuwen, 1993:69)

Storkey (2001:125, 126) adds to this:

... the weaknesses of postmodernity are centred inevitably on its relativism, for we are compelled to ask, "Where do we deconstruct *from*?" What is our starting point? Since postmodernity has no foundational starting point, it always has to deconstruct from a position of deconstruction. And when constructs are relativized, it is from a position of relativism.

She continues with sharp critique:

But this leaves a large internal problem with the formulation of the postmodern position. What does it mean to say, "Everything is relative"? If the statement itself has merely a relative status, it cannot be in any sense binding, for it is not making any claim to truth. But if "everything is relative" has an absolute status and claims truth for itself, then it negates its own

formulation. Yet, though the claim to relativism cannot be articulated, it still tries to be prescriptive. It continues to insist that nothing is fixed, and we may not make categorical statements. In fact, relativism is at best an absolutization of indifference.

In what follows we will have to investigate further the above-mentioned two important philosophical issues (the structural and the normative) mentioned under 1.2.1.

1.3 Limitation

There are thousands of articles and thick volumes that could be consulted for this investigation. However, not all are equally valuable, neither are all of them of a philosophical nature. Within the limited length of a chapter only one main source is used (Allen, 1985) on which a commentary will be given. For secondary sources as many feminine authors as possible are used, preferably the few who have voiced their opinions from a more or less Christian perspective. In this way the reader is assured of hearing not only "his-story" but also "her-story".

1.4 Terminology

A last explanation concerns the contemporary terminology used in this field.

1.4.1 Three concepts

Mary van Leeuwen (1990:19) first distinguishes between *sex* and *gender*. The first-mentioned is concerned with purely biological facets of the two sexes like genes, hormones and brain anatomy. The latter denotes learned, socialised, encultured differences in conduct. A third concept, *Sexuality*, she describes as follows:

... that complex of feelings, thoughts and behaviours that constitutes sexual attraction and arousal in each of us, from its first stirrings to its final resolution. (Van Leeuwen, 1990:210)

Elaine Storkey (1995:87) also regards this distinction as important:

...sexuality is the way we relate to ourselves and others subjectively in the biotic sphere, and gender is the way our sexuality is shaped, directed and positivised within the social, historical, aesthetic, economic and even pistical. It prevents us from confusing *cultural* responses to male-female relations with the *creational givenness* of our sexual humanity.

1.4.2 *Caution desirable*

In particular due to the tendency today to reduce everything to sex, this distinction is significant. In a subsequent writing, however, Storkey warns against a too rigid distinction between sexuality, as something created by God, and gender as something cultural which we ourselves create according to the dominant culture:

... if we believe in a God who has created a normative structure for relations, we have to believe in a God who is as interested in our gender as in our biology, for the way we shape our gender is also part of our human response before God. (Storkey, 2001:128)

Allen (1985:xx) further points out that the distinction between sex(uality) and gender has only been in general use since approximately the seventies of the previous century. In the late eighties the two concepts were separated under postmodern influence. She also concurs with Storkey that the distinction sexuality-gender could lead to a dichotomy in a human being, while she herself would like to see a human being as a unity. (Nevertheless she replaced the word "sex" used in an earlier edition of her book with "gender" in the later edition.)

After this lengthy introduction we will now examine our main source. Although we use Allen as our source, it does not mean that in all respects she offers a complete version of Western philosophy on the feminine sex. An important female philosopher like Christine de Pisan (born 1364), from the fourteenth century is not given a place in her study, while she was one of the most important early philosophers who wrote against contempt of the female sex (cf. De Pisan, 1984).

2. Allen on the concept "woman"

Attention is given in succession to (1) Allen's main issue, (2) her philosophical method, (3) her feminist approach, (4) history of ideas, (5) three basic ideas on the relation between the two genders, (6) the anthropological roots of the various ideas, (7) her one-sided emphasis on relations, (8) that gender complementarity is taken as her norm and, finally, (9) the question of what exactly she means by gender complementarity.

2.1 The central issue

Do men and women differ from one another? If so, where exactly do the differences lie? Does the difference also imply the inferiority of one to the other? Or are the two genders perhaps equal, the same, merely human beings? But since they clearly are different, what constitutes their similarity or likeness?

Such questions give rise to different theories or models on gender. If the differences in gender are not important or relevant to somebody, it easily leads to a theory of *gender equality* or similarity (also called "unisex"). If the differences are regarded as important and are also valued positively, the idea of *complementarity* stands to reason – the differences should complement each other (like the two opposite poles of magnets). If the differences are over-emphasised they can also be interpreted negatively as *gender polarity*, according to which the one gender (usually the feminine) is then regarded as inferior to the other, and the one should try to dominate the other.

One could call the above the central complex of issues in the work of Allen (1985). Contrary to what the title of her book suggests she is not only concerned with the concept "woman" but with the relation between the two genders. As a professor in philosophy at the Concordia University in Montreal, Quebec, Canada, sister Prudence Allen tells the fascinating story of the concept "woman" from 750 BC to 1250 AD. (In Allen, 2002 the story is taken up to 1500 AD.) It is a magisterial work: It contains an analysis of the original writings of more than sixty male and female philosophers.

This chapter cannot discuss the whole hefty work (583 pages). We are concerned with her own points of departure and method – which determine her findings. (It could possibly be an aid to determine within which model or paradigm many people and the churches are still imprisoned.)

2.2 A philosophical method

Fortunately Sister Prudence does not keep her reader in the dark about her own points of departure. She considers her work as philosophical by nature and also as essential because philosophy can offer a perspective of its own on the issue of the identity of the genders (cf. Allen, 1985:1). She uncovers the "fundamental structures of thought" or basic concepts in a philosophical way.

According to her, philosophy uses only human reason and observation as its means (p. 1). Later (p. 5) it becomes clearer why this is the case when Allen deals with the relation between religion and philosophy. She separates the following two spheres to concentrate only on the philosophical:

Arguments defended by an appeal to faith, to the scriptures, or to religious authorities... have generally been excluded. On the other hand, arguments that appeal to the evidence of the senses, the reason, or to ancient philosophical authorities have been included. (Allen, 1985:5).

In this quotation Allen's Catholic orientation clearly comes to the fore: Philosophy (in the natural sphere) is something neutral-rational, while only theology (in the supernatural sphere) has to do with faith and religion.

Within the Reformational tradition such a dualistic viewpoint is unacceptable. Later on Allen herself has problems in maintaining her division consistently (cf. what she adds to the words quoted above). This can for instance be clearly seen from her analysis of particularly the Church Fathers and philosophers from the Middle Ages. Their philosophies definitely influenced their theologies, while at the same time their Christian faith also influenced their philosophical views. Instead of the separation she advocates, there was in fact a great extent of interaction between philosophy and religion – even as early as in the works of the Greeks.

2.3 A feminist approach

As a feminist Allen brings feminine identity into prominence. This is the reason why – unlike the way it is in standard philosophy textbooks – she deals with different feminine philosophers. However, she clearly sides with a specific nuance in feminist philosophy. She says (p. 5) that, while academic philosophers are caught up within the choice between gender polarity and unity, the feminist philosophers of her time are entangled in the dilemma of *reversed* gender polarity or unity. She therefore does not support the earlier feminist idea of gender polarity, nor the later feminism which attempts to deny gender differences. Clearly she is not yet a postmodern feminist either, for she prefers gender complementarity. (The different genders should complement each other.)

2.4 A history of ideas

As mentioned above, Allen is concerned with a specific concept, namely that of woman. She calls her work the first systematic study in this field and it is concerned with "how the concept of woman itself emerged, developed and influenced western philosophy" (p. 2). It would seem that this concept influenced Western philosophy, instead of the other way round, namely that philosophy was the foundation of certain gender concepts.

A later statement offers greater clarity on the specific historiographical method followed (cf. Allen, 1985:7). Conceptual history to her means "history of ideas". Lovejoy (1952) was the father of this way of recording Western history of philosophy. A certain idea is described the way it developed during the course of history.

For some time it was a popular method but later on became less acceptable, in particular because the different ideas were regarded by Lovejoy and his followers as more or less autonomous phenomena, confined within themselves, isolated from the mutual relation between all kinds of other concepts. Therefore Allen (1985:7) had to defend herself against younger contemporary historiographical methods, which were considered to be more sensitive to the specific historical-social context of a philosopher. However, she sticks to an approach by which she systematically investigates different structural views of woman to determine how certain patterns of thought occurred right through the course of history.

In the light of the two basic questions which every philosopher should answer (cf. 1.2.1 above) the following two critical remarks can be made.

In the first instance Allen's idea-historical approach most probably is the reason why she does not give adequate attention to the ontic and anthropological foundations of the different views of woman and her relation with man. The concept "woman" is as it were elevated above and to an extent detached from the foundations on which it rests.

In the second instance her greater emphasis on the *concept* of woman (rather than on the *history*) also leads to Allen's not giving adequate attention to the important normative differences between the ages during which different philosophers lived and philosophised. She merely highlights the continuity of a certain type or pattern of thinking. Important intellectual trends – playing a role in the determination of the

various views of woman – are not distinguished. An example is the clearly religious directional difference between the *pagan* Greek philosophers and the *Christian* Church Fathers and Medieval scholars.

2.5 Three basic ideas

As we have already mentioned Allen (1985:3) uncovers the following three fundamental ideas on the *relation* between the genders running through the history of 2000 years. (1) Gender *unity* which teaches that the two genders are equal, because there are no meaningful differences between them; (2) the idea of gender *polarity* which holds that there are important differences between the genders and which has the (negative) consequence that the male gender was usually regarded as better, higher or superior to the female; (3) a *theory* of gender *complementarity*, convinced that there actually are meaningful differences between the two genders, but having the (positive) purpose of complementing each other.

Between the first and second theories above she inserts the following two intermediate positions. *Gender neutrality* (1a) links up with theory (1) but differs in this respect that the differences between man and woman are regarded as so insignificant that they can be ignored in order to focus on the unity only. *Reversed gender polarity* (2a) only emerged later in history (during the 16th century). It also teaches (as position 2) that man and woman differ in important respects but then (unlike in 2) comes to the conclusion that not man (as in 2) is the superior one but woman.

The question that presents itself is whether these three (or five) “models” exhaust all the theoretical possibilities offered by history. Do not these three ideas imply an unjustifiable generalisation? Could they not easily degenerate into a straitjacket into which a much richer history is forced?

2.6 The fundamental anthropological causes

As a philosopher Allen (1985:4) realises very well that the wrong *relations* (positions 1 and 2 above) must have deeper anthropological roots. However, in both cases, according to her, an incorrect view of the bodily side of a human being is the only cause. According to her the unity view devaluates the bodily, while the polar view over-emphasises it.

If stated in a broad generalisation, the dichotomy between soul and body was a continuous theme of the period in history dealt with in Allen's book. At the same time this period of 2000 years provides hundreds of different views on how philosophers regarded soul and body and the relation between the two. One example is that not only the view of the body, but also of the different parts of the soul played a role in the evaluation of woman. The *intellect* was considered the highest facet of the soul. In this case it was the higher, reasonable, universal soul qualified as male, which was contrasted with the female, so-called lower individual *emotions* of the soul.

Genevieve Lloyd (1984) deals with this issue. For instance, she writes:

...our ideals of reason are in fact male... ideals of Reason, far from transcending sexual difference, have helped to constitute it. That ideals of maleness have developed under the guise of supposedly neutral ideals of Reason has been to the disadvantage of women and men alike (pp. 108, 109).

Thus a problem with Allen's historiography of the concept woman is that she did not investigate deeply enough the ontological and anthropological roots which led to the different theories on the two genders and their relation. A basic, ontic problem not addressed by Allen is, for instance the one of the unity and/or diversity of reality. The way one views this problem (e.g. in a monistic or dualistic way) will determine one's anthropology. And the way one sees a human being, man and woman, will eventually determine the way the relation between them is seen.

2.7 Merely relations and their implications

Allen is primarily concerned with different *relations* between the genders. "Is it a relation of hostility, of indifference, or of fulfilment?" (Allen, 1985:9). But, one could ask, can one determine any relation if there is no clarity on the *nature* of the two entities one tries to see in a relation or to compare?

Apart from the three basic possible relations she distinguishes, Allen also employs three additional categories in evaluating each philosopher. The first deals with the roles played by the father and the mother in procreating offspring (i.e. at a biological level). The second deals with how man and woman are assessed with respect to the ideal of wisdom (i.e. at an intellectual level). In the third instance the issue is whether the two genders are capable of the same virtues or not (i.e. at an ethical-moral level).

One could comment that these three categories only spell out the *implications* of the main theories on the possible relations between man and woman. Thus the reader is taken even further away from the fundamental ontological-anthropological foundations. Why so much emphasis on relations? This brings us (next to the first structural question: Who am I?) to the second fundamental question, to which every philosopher should give a response, namely: How *should* I live? – also in my relation to the opposite gender (cf. again 1.2.1 above).

In this respect, Allen sees the following development in Western philosophy: (1) the ancient philosophers determined the nature of man and woman in a *metaphysical* way; (2) since the fourteenth century the emphasis was laid on the contrast between individual *character traits*; (3) later the emphasis shifted to the human being as a *person*; (4) today (the end of the 20th century when she was writing) the accent is on the *relation* between the genders.

Allen most probably associates herself with the latter more irrationalist-relational view. (Focusing on the underlying ontological-anthropological bases would, according to her, amount to “metaphysics”.) To her the point of departure is relations. In my opinion this implies subjectivism (cf. 1.2.2 above). For no relation can in itself be normative. It has to be assessed normatively.

Genevieve Lloyd (1984:103-105) would also differ from Allen on this point. She says that the differences between the two genders should not be seen as norms and she would probably have thought the same about relations. Further she justly comments that the usual differences associated with the male-female distinction is not merely a descriptive classification, but the expression of a value assessment. According to her this is inevitable, since authority and power also come on the table when talking about relations.

2.8 Gender complementation as a yardstick

However, Allen is not yet a relativistic post-modernist: from among the different kinds of relations she chooses one to be normative. This is the relation of complementarity. According to Sister Prudence (1985:5) this viewpoint offers a solution to the basic issue in both the other theories, namely either the devaluation or the over-emphasis of the bodily-material facet of being human. Complementarity would offer “an integrated view of the place of materiality”.

Although she attempts to separate philosophy and faith (theology) (cf. 2.2), she could not resist the temptation of adding that it was no coincidence that the Christian philosophers she discusses, were the first to defend the theory of complementarity. The reason is that this model links up perfectly with the fundamental Christian theological convictions on the (divine) creation of the human being and the resurrection of the body. (As a Catholic philosopher she apparently accepts a dichotomy of soul and body – without regarding the latter as inferior.)

Allen's preference for this specific relation clearly determines her interpretation of history. For instance, the reader's attention is repeatedly drawn to the "mother" of this model, namely Hildegard van Bingen (1098-1179).

2.9 The meaning of complementarity

A theory of complementarity can of course be understood in different ways. Either the man would complement the woman (since she would be only half human), or the opposite (since the man would be an incomplete human being), or they would have to complement each other mutually (since both genders are incomplete human beings). However, can one maintain that being man/woman implies being incomplete? If not, does not then the whole idea of complementarity rest on false suppositions?

Genevieve Lloyd (1984:105) is conscious of the hazard if women would for instance have to complement men. "Making good the lack in male consciousness, providing it with a necessary complementation by the 'feminine', is a large part of what the suppression and the correlative constitution of 'womankind' has been all about".

To determine exactly what Allen understood by the complementarity model, we have to find out how Hildegard van Bingen thought about the relation between the genders. Therefore in the following section we first look at Allen's analysis of Van Bingen's view and then at some other individuals. This section simultaneously serves as a test to determine whether Allen's distinction between three main types of relations correspond with the actual viewpoints of the specific philosophers from history.

3. A spot check from history

Apart from Van Bingen and after looking at her view (complementarity), we also take note of two important earlier Greek philosophers, Plato (according to Allen an

advocate of the unity view) and Aristotle (who advocated a polarity between the genders), as well as the well-known Medieval Christian philosopher, Thomas Aquinas, who only came on the scene after Van Bingen.

3.1 Hildegard van Bingen (1098-1179 AD)

Right from the beginning of her exposition it would seem as if Allen cannot label Hildegard's viewpoint as complementarity without difficulty. She admits (cf. 1985:295) that Hildegard's theory on gender identity is not consistent. Sometimes there are indications that Hildegard holds a kind of paradoxical view: both gender polarity and reversed polarity. She regards woman at the natural level as the weaker gender, but at the level of grace as being superior to man.

As we have suggested earlier, Allen now is no longer able to carry out her resolution consistently to deal with woman purely philosophically (in a natural manner). In Hildegard's work the philosophical (in the natural sphere) and the theological (in the supernatural sphere) are too closely interlaced.

Because Allen herself most probably (as a Catholic philosopher) accepts the nature-grace distinction, she simply makes the following statement: "However, Hildegard balances her intermittent references to this paradox with a thorough and far-reaching defence of the equality and significant differentiation of woman and man" (Allen, 1985:293).

In the subsequent schematic summary Allen therefore differentiates between Hildegard's view of gender complementarity in heaven and on earth. These two could, however, not be separated in a watertight way, for God is involved in the case of the supposed complementarity in the sphere of the world (nature). He gives the human soul to both genders, who therefore bear his image.

In heaven there could, however, be even greater complementarity, since at the resurrection the two genders will be different yet equal and the same would happen in the case of female as well as male saints.

My impression is that at the supernatural level of grace Van Bingen's theology teaches true complementarity, while at the natural-philosophical level she inclines to a theory of polarity. Only in the life hereafter will men and women not only be dissimilar, but also similar (equal).

Later on (cf. Allen, 1985:297, 298, 309) it becomes clearer why Allen is of the opinion that Hildegard holds a theory of complementarity. To Van Bingen God is both male and female and in their souls people reflect this bisexual nature of God. God's male features are courage and power and his feminine traits are mercifulness and grace. For being completely human both features are necessary. Therefore men have to start with their natural traits (courage and power) and also develop the two feminine features. Women should do the reverse.

This tallies with what was already mentioned above (2.8), namely that the model of complementarity presupposes incompleteness in one of the two genders or in both. According to Hildegard both man and woman are incomplete human beings and therefore need to be complemented by the other gender to be a whole human being.

It has been mentioned that Allen is of the opinion that either the disparagement or overrating of the body was the main cause of wrong views on gender. Hildegard's so-called new, original theory of complementarity is attributed by Allen to the fact that Van Bingen fully integrated soul and body. However, I cannot see how she can come to this conclusion since Hildegard teaches (cf. Allen, 1985:299) that the seed coming from the man is warmed by the woman, after which God plants a soul into the embryo. (The well-known creatianistic theory.) To my mind it remains a dichotomist and therefore non-integrated anthropology.

A step back into history could perhaps bring some clarification.

3.2 Plato (428-355 BC)

Plato is discussed here since he is, according to Allen, the father of the theory of gender unity. In her schematic outline of Plato's philosophy (cf. Allen, 1985:58), however, she sees a distinction between Plato's thinking at a *cosmic* level, where he propagates gender polarity, and *earthly* level where gender unity is supposed to prevail. I surmise that with "cosmic level" Allen refers to Plato's teaching of ideas (in a separate world) from where the human soul is also supposed to come.

According to Allen (p. 80) Plato clearly maintains a soul-body dichotomy. Seen from their (genderless) souls the two genders are equal. But seen from their bodies the woman is the inferior. (To be reincarnated in a woman, is seen by Plato as punishment for an earlier immoral, cowardly male soul.) Plato in general depreciates

the material world (over against the world of ideas) and in particular the human body (cf. Allen, 1985:68–70).

When Allen discusses Plato's doctrine of virtues, Plato's anthropology emerges somewhat more clearly. Apart from the body he distinguishes three parts in the human soul: reason, the will and desires. One could also call this a classical ordering, for it comes to the fore later on in numerous philosophers – even Christians – right through the ages, often also as the differentiation between head, hand and heart. Vander Stelt (2005) discusses this kind of anthropology in detail and Lloyd (1984:7-11) also points it out in the work of Plato and Greek philosophy in general.

A higher-lower division of human powers of the soul usually leads to a disparagement of the lower. Then the inferior position of woman cannot be attributed only to the underestimation of the body (Allen's hypothesis), but also to the fact that the male gender's soul is associated with reason and will and the female's with desires, emotions and feelings. Just like Van Bingen to my mind does not clearly advocate complementarity, I do not think that Plato can be regarded as the founder of an explicit model of unity either.

3.3 Aristotle (384-322 BC)

In contrast to the two previous philosophers, Allen (p. 83 et seq.) most clearly describes Aristotle's philosophy underlying his view of the man-woman relation. He holds a hierarchical ontology which runs from the highest being (the divine) down to the lowest (pure matter). Everything cosmic consists of form (the actual and the universal) and matter (the potential and the individual). Form is the most important, and matter is a lack of form.

Although both man and woman are made up of form (soul) and matter (body), the woman is associated with matter. At conception the soul therefore comes from the man and the body from the woman.

Aristotle also differentiates between three parts of the soul: the rational, the sensitive and the vegetative. While the man disposes of the higher, divine, intellectual capacities of the soul, the woman only has a part in the lower emotional or irrational (sensitive and vegetative) ones. It is on this basis that Aristotle makes his well-known derogatory statements on the female gender: women are malformed men, lack masculinity, are irrational, submissive and confined to the private life (cf. Allen,

1985:121). Aristotle also says (cf. Allen, 1985:118) that, while men are perfect human beings, women cry easily, are jealous and querulous, given to scolding, being despondent, without shame or self-respect, deceitful, insincere, slower to take action and also need less food! In my opinion Allen correctly characterises Aristotle : There can be no doubt that he advocated a polar relation between the genders.

3.4 Thomas Aquinas (1224/5-1275)

Would this well-known Christian philosopher from the Middle Ages perhaps have had a higher opinion of the fairer sex? Unfortunately not. Allen (1985:410) justly notes that an important reason for this was that Thomas had decided to take Aristotle's philosophy as the foundation for his Christian theology. (Does she now no longer separate philosophy and theology?)

Thomas was a synthesis philosopher. And, as emerges clearly from Allen's work (1985:387 et seq.) with his nature-grace method he brought about an accommodation between the pagan philosophy of Aristotle and the Christian faith. In the sphere of nature Aristotle's philosophy was the norm and in the sphere of grace the authority of the Bible was accepted.

Therefore Thomas holds a double view of woman. In the sphere of nature he adopts Aristotle's condescension towards women and therefore holds a standpoint of gender polarity. (Woman is a false, half-breed man, the birth of a girl is unfortunate, the female gender is imperfect compared to the male, etc.) We once more find the same hierarchical ontology: The nearer to God, the more divine a human being is. The divine is again linked with the rational part of the soul which supposedly characterises the male gender, while femininity is associated with the lower parts of the soul (the sensitive and vegetative).

In the sphere of the supernatural the picture of course differs completely because here Thomas attempted not to listen to Aristotle but to the Bible. Allen (cf. her scheme on p. 386) in this respect even mentions complementarity in the work of Thomas, because he teaches that at this level both genders have access to divine wisdom and theological virtues, and both will one day share in the resurrection of the body.

This supernatural "consolation prize" of course only applies when, like Thomas, one divides reality in a dualistic way into natural-supernatural spheres. It certainly is no biblical viewpoint.

4. Evaluation in review

Without doubt Allen made a huge contribution to a better understanding of the concept "woman" during the first 2000 years of Western philosophical thinking. Simultaneously we can have considerable comment on her work. There is no need for repeating all of it here. We confine ourselves to the two important questions with which we started above (cf. 1.2.1). The first was the structural question: Who *am* I as a man or a woman? The second was the normative question: How *should* I live as a man or a woman? Formulated in a different way: How does one understand man and woman (first question) and *how should* it be expressed in a normative way in their mutual relation (second question)? To what extent did Allen adequately answer these two basic questions?

4.1 The structural-anthropological foundations

Being human is not something that is isolated from the rest of the cosmos. How one sees creation in general, therefore, also determines how one sees a human being. And how a human being is viewed again is determinative for a person's perspective on being man and woman. From ontology to anthropology to gender and finally to the relations between the two genders is therefore the appropriate way to go.

Allen is inclined to reverse this path. This is not of necessity a wrong method. But then the anthropological and ontological foundations of the different views of gender also have to be uncovered explicitly. In this she does not succeed very well, as we have shown.

The dichotomist anthropology which is probably Allen's too, does not equip her to offer a more profound critique on the anthropologies of the philosophers discussed by her. According to such a view of being human a human being consists of two substances, namely soul and body. As explained, the soul can further be divided (from higher to lower) into an intellect, will and emotions. Reformational philosophy on the other hand rejects a dichotomy of soul and body. Additionally it also distinguishes many more (15) facets or modalities in a human being than merely intellect, will and emotion. Among these different sides of being human some are

also not more important or higher than others, or characteristic of being a man or a woman only.

4.2 The normative direction

From the above the normative question also repeatedly emerged. Can it be attributed to God who created woman with a specific nature? Or to the man to whose authority the woman has to bow? Is it controlled by human biology (the body), which determines women? Is the contemporary culture the norm which woman cannot evade? Or should one accept the postmodern viewpoint according to which every woman construes her own feminine identity – but which leads to normative relativism?

Allen is not very clear on this point, although she at least says that she does not consider the last option. She probably attempts to solve the issue by not focusing on the human and feminine *identity of people* but on their *relation*. Human relations evidently become her norm. However, we have already pointed out how problematic such a view is because a relation depends on *who* the persons are who are in a relation. (Although it still does not offer a norm, the structural question can therefore not be evaded.)

From among the five possible relations she distinguishes, Allen's own choice is for the relation of complementarity as norm. However, as pointed out, this brings about further complications without actually reaching a distinctly normative guideline.

Apart from this, one could add that man and woman can be in many different kinds of relations to each other. The question is whether complementarity can be applied to all the various religious, ethical, aesthetic, juridical, political, social, economic, occupational, lingual, logical, psychic, biotic and physical relations. Are they not all relations with features of their own which have to meet *unique norms*? Relations between man and woman in marriage, the family, church, business and state are surely not the same – just as the relations of authority in each one of them are differently qualified.

5. Finally: Continued reflection needed

One could easily close this chapter – especially if the author is a man – with the following poem by C. Louis Leipoldt (then applied to gender) which translated from Afrikaans reads as follows:

*You ask me what the truth is?
Friend, do you think I have forgotten
Pilate asked the same?
It bothered him a lot
And yet he never knew it.
Can I answer this?
Do I possess such wisdom?
In ignorance I go my way
Ignorant I turn old and grey
Never will I know it.*

By way of conclusion we draw attention to two matters. First, we mention briefly how other contemporary Christian philosophers thought about this issue. Secondly it is pointed out that the problem-historical method used by Vollenhoven (mentioned in passing above) has more success in uncovering the ontological and anthropological underlying different views of a human being.

5.1 Further reflection

The anthology edited by Mary van Leeuwen (1993) in many instances pleads for equality and mutuality between the two genders which seem to be required as the norm for all relations. In other instances there is an argument that "shalom" (peace) is God's will in this sphere. But is peace not rather the *consequence* of obedience to God's norms?

The solution offered by Olthuis (1997:245), too, is mutuality. (Likewise in the work of Susan Bouwer (s.a.:8).) God's creation, full of differences, was *good*. However, human beings can use these in the right way (acknowledge them and rejoice) or wrongly (regard them as shortcomings or opposites). Therefore, according to Olthuis the differences between the two genders mean neither distance (polarity), nor fusion (unity), nor dominance, nor being dominated. "Mutuality" according to him does not mean the same as Allen's complementarity according to which the other gender has to complement me or I have to complement the other. Neither does it mean sinking into a vague uniformity – in both these cases there will be no "other" (man or woman), only similarity.

Olthuis takes recourse to the well-known double commandment of love in the Scriptures ("You should love your neighbour as yourself") as the norm. In mutuality love should be given and accepted unconditionally.

Verkerk (1997:209 et seq.) regards gender as one of the many responses by the human being to God. (In other words a responsible duty and not merely a cultural product.) In this situation the two genders are interdependent and involved with each other. This seems to be very near to the viewpoint of Olthuis.

Finally we refer to Storkey (2001:129-131) who distinguishes four paradigms for the relation between the genders in the light of the Scriptures (she refers to numerous Bible texts in support of her argument): (1) difference, (2) sameness/ similarity, (3) complementarity and (4) unity.

However, she is conscious of the confusion likely to accompany these four concepts and states clearly how she understands each one of them. Furthermore she points out that all four these biblical themes should receive attention simultaneously. Unless this is done, the biblical guidelines are warped. (One-sided emphasis on unity can easily lead to similarity, while full attention to diversity can mistakenly be understood as separateness.) Together, however, they offer the full biblical revelation and space to give form to the relation between the two genders in obedience and in a creative way.

5.2 Follow-up necessary

As we have mentioned, we cannot confine ourselves to this chapter. The next chapter will investigate to what extent Vollenhoven's historiography of philosophy could cast light on the anthropological and normative presuppositions underlying different views on sexuality and gender. Although, like Dooyeweerd, he did not occupy himself explicitly with these problems, the results of his historiographical research do hold important implications which can be spelled out.

Chapter 5

THE IMPLICATIONS OF A CONSISTENT PROBLEM-HISTORICAL METHOD OF PHILOSOPHICAL HISTORIOGRAPHY FOR GENDER DIFFERENCES AND RELATIONSHIPS

Reconnoitring the possible implications of the consistently problem-historical method of Dirk H.Th. Vollenhoven (1892-1978) to attain more clarity on the issue of gender and gender relations is the main aim of this chapter. It also indicates in passing how the results obtained by this Christian philosopher's meticulous analysis of Western ontologies and anthropologies may fill the gaps, in the otherwise ground-breaking study done by Sister Prudence Allen, discussed in the previous chapter. The introductory section explains how Vollenhoven himself viewed the difference and relation between God, his laws and his creation. The next section discusses the main contours of his historiography of philosophy, viz. his division of the history into three main periods (pre-synthetic, synthetic and anti-synthetic), a diversity of normative time-currents and three basic cosmological problems (consistency versus change, unity versus diversity and universal versus individual). From the great number of anthropologies, the third section selects a few examples to illustrate their possible implications for the problems related to sexuality and gender. The conclusion tries to pinpoint Vollenhoven's own anthropology in order to ascertain why he, in spite of his thorough and profound exposure of the ontological and anthropological foundations of Western thinking, did not more explicitly express himself about their implications for gender issues.

1. Introduction

Some explanations are needed beforehand. In the first instance on the lasting topicality of the investigation. Secondly a reminder of the merits and shortcomings in the work of a feminist philosopher (Allen 1985), discussed in the previous chapter. Thirdly, to fill the lacunae in her work, we will look for more clarity on the anthropological foundations of the problems surrounding male and female gender from the strong points of another philosophical historiographer, Vollenhoven.

1.1 Lasting topicality

Animals are simply animals, stones are stones and trees are trees. They do not ask: Who am I? Only man cannot escape himself. We are constantly moved to reflect upon ourselves. We are our own greatest puzzle... we ask ourselves: What does it mean to be human or inhuman? (Olthuis & DeGraaff 1978:1).

There is strong consensus that this question and the answer to it is of essential importance. For how a human being is seen, determines the practice of living: The way one deals with the earth, raises children, rules a nation, how one treats bodily and emotional illnesses, practises religion and many more. Views of being human determine the work of educationists, social workers, psychotherapists, ministers ... It also determines one's view of the male and female gender and their relations.

Although everybody agrees that the *questions* Who am I? And what should I do? are of the utmost significance, there is no generally acceptable *answer* to them – rather numerous, even contradictory opinions.

This survey can of course not nearly offer an outline on the great variety of views on the human being. It merely wants to show, with some examples, how one's philosophical view of *homo sapiens* also has implications for his/her view of male and female gender. This chapter supplements the previous one. In it the ideas of a feminine philosopher, Sister Prudence Allen (1985) on gender were discussed. In the present chapter I put myself in the shoes of a male philosopher, Dirk H.Th. Vollenhoven (1892-1978), in an effort to show what implications his analysis of Western anthropologies has for one's view of gender.

To refresh the memory and have reconnoitred the way ahead, we will now briefly mention some strong and weak points in the work of these two philosophers (a Catholic and a Calvinist) on the subject.

1.2 Merits and shortcomings in Allen's work

Thorough philosophical works on human gender are not plentiful – especially not writings working from primary sources and offering an outline of the history of ideas of the past 2000 years on the concepts "man" and "woman" and their possible relation. Besides, in her investigation Allen not only deals with male but also with female authors. Chapter 4 already discussed this fascinating and ground-breaking

study. I here just mention some shortcomings to which Vollenhoven's philosophical historiography might offer a solution.

In the first instance Allen's philosophical point of departure of a basic distinction between nature and grace is a stumbling block. According to this dualism she has to exclude God and his revelation (regarded as supernatural) from her philosophical historiography (located in the so-called natural sphere). According to her, philosophy may not appeal to faith, and has to study earthly reality only with rational means. To her way of thinking a "Christian philosophy" is impossible

However, if God as the Creator is excluded from one's philosophy, the question is whether one can truly understand his creation (including man and woman). Moreover, if one excludes God as Lawgiver, his ordinations (also those applying to the relation between the two genders) have to be found in creation itself. This gives rise to the following two lacunae in Allen's work.

It is not merely the case that her own anthropology is not spelled out clearly. She does not have the necessary ontic and anthropological categories available either to explain why there were different views of the two genders. Most probably she is still caught up in a type of anthropology in which she departs from a higher-lower distinction (e.g. between soul and body) and then attempts to devise some unity between the two supposed components of being human.

For the same reason she sometimes finds it hard to decide whether a certain philosopher held a view of unity, polarity or complementarity. Her typology of only three main types – from among a much larger diversity of views of being human during the course of history – is applied too easily to a philosopher.

Furthermore Allen is searching in vain for a normative guideline for being man and woman and their relation, because she looks for it (in a subjectivist way) *in* a certain relation (that of complementarity) – instead of *outside* the human being, so that it could have real validity.

1.3 Shortcomings and merits in Vollenhoven's work

Vollenhoven's intention with his consistently problem–historical historiography was "to make visible the lay-out of basic problems of thought through the whole history of Western philosophy" (Vollenhoven, 2013). Please note that he was not concerned with *one* issue only, as in the case of Allen (the concept of woman), but with the

ontological and anthropological *fundamental issues* of Western philosophy in general. (Cf. Vollenhoven 2011:45 for what he regarded as foundational issues.)

However, to Vollenhoven a philosopher's view of gender seems not to have been such a fundamental issue. Storkey (1995:1995:85, 86) remarks about a like-minded Christian contemporary of Vollenhoven, Herman Dooyeweerd (1995:1995:85, 86), that he neither discusses the views of other philosophers on women, nor himself focuses on the feminine dimension in his own anthropology. This statement could also be made applicable to Vollenhoven. Among the large number of philosophers dealt with by Vollenhoven in his various publications I could not trace more than four of the feminine gender.

In spite of Storkey's remark on the gaps or lacunae in Dooyeweerd's work, she does find that some of his philosophical insights (e.g. his doctrine of modalities) can offer a valuable contribution to explain amongst other things the difference between sexuality (the biological) and gender (the supra-biological aspects of being human). This chapter intends doing something similar in the case of Vollenhoven's philosophy.

We intend to show that, although he did not publish *explicitly* on sexuality and gender, Vollenhoven's foundational ontic-anthropological investigation of the history of philosophy *implicitly* is an undeveloped goldmine. This contribution intends bringing this to the surface.

1.4 Focus, approach and set-up

With a view to this aim it will be necessary, first to explain Vollenhoven's historiographical method since it is relatively unknown; secondly to infer from it the possible implications for the issue of gender; thirdly to remind the reader constantly of how Vollenhoven's approach is an improvement on that of Allen.

In order to make the chapter accessible to a wider readership, the exposition of Vollenhoven's intricate approach will be set out as simply as possible and will also be confined to the main lines, avoiding the finer detail. (Interested readers can consult e.g. Bril, 1986 and 2005 as well as Kok 1998:1-178 for intelligible explanations of his method. To those with a command of Dutch, Vollenhoven, 1992 is recommended. Chapter 2 of this booklet also provides an introduction.)

In succession we will now deal with: (1) Vollenhoven's bilateral method; (2) his own ontology; (3) three main distinctions in his historiography (main periods, trends and types of philosophy); (4) three important ontic points of departure; (5) the great diversity of views of being human which he differentiates and finally (6) Vollenhoven's own view of a human being and of gender.

2. Vollenhoven's bilateral method of philosophising and his own ontology

Many people, including Christians, attempt to explain their own viewpoint by stating (negatively) what they do not agree with. Practising a Christian philosophy would entail such a person saying that he/she does not agree with one view or another. However, this way of going about it makes a philosopher's view (negatively) dependent on what he/she is opposing.

2.1 Vollenhoven's alternative of a bilateral approach

Vollenhoven justly prefers not to think merely antithetically, but to begin with a thetical statement of his own viewpoint.

2.1.1 Thetical first

No philosophical knowledge is possible without giving an account of one's own viewpoint. From his own positive view – not merely antithetically and negatively – a philosopher has to confront the philosophical problems which history presents. Vollenhoven presents his own points of departure or systematic philosophy in Vollenhoven (2005a) and the text-critical edition thereof edited by Tol (Vollenhoven 2010). The way his own method and viewpoint gradually developed, is described by Tol (2010 and 2011).

2.1.2 Second, critical

However, a predisposed thetical view does not imply the final answers to all issues – a critical element should also be added to the thetical. Among other things it entails that the philosophies of opposite-minded people should also be studied, queried and evaluated carefully regarding their merits as well as their shortcomings and errors. Such a study can also serve to find the blind spots and lacunae in one's own thetic points of departure.

Therefore the results of a critical approach can be of a double nature. On the one hand there is a critical, but well-considered, rejection of insights contrary to one's

own basic philosophical systematics. But on the other hand there is also either a strengthening and enrichment or a correction of one's own preliminary insights. Thus a critical approach is not in itself something negative – even negative results can be valuable.

2.1.3 *Thetic-critical*

It is most important that Vollenhoven's bilateral method comprises two facets to be distinguished but not separated. For each critical evaluation an own thetic view is a requirement – otherwise one lapses into relativism. But, conversely, a Christian-thetic method should always have the openness to listen to the opinions of others – otherwise it degenerates into dogmatism.

So favouring only one side of the thetical-critical method is sure to cause problems. Kok (1998:18) writes:

When the relation between being thetical and being critical is forgotten, Christians lose a real sense of what... being different means practically... lack a sense of direction... become mindless eclectics.

He adds that millions of "born again" Christians' view on current affairs in this way shows no difference to those of their secular compatriots.

This brings us to the question of what exactly Vollenhoven's own thetical view entails.

2.2 *Vollenhoven's own ontology in a nutshell*

Vollenhoven openly puts his own worldview or ontology on the table, so that one knows exactly what the presuppositions are from which he approaches the history of philosophy. (He did not *devise* his historiographical method on a certain day, but only *found* it – after about five attempts – and after a protracted study of Western thinking.)

2.2.1 *A Christian philosophy*

He calls his philosophy a Christian *philosophy* which is something completely different from *Christians* practising philosophy. By this he means that one should obey and follow Christ even in one's philosophy. Being a philosopher and a Christian to him is not incompatible (cf. Tol 2010:386). Hence his other designation, namely Scripturally-oriented ("Skrifmatige" in Dutch) philosophy, which denotes listening in obedience to God's revelation in creation, Scripture and in the Word incarnate.

On this point, by the way, he differs radically from Allen for whom a Christian philosophy would be impossible. According to her nature-grace dualism only theology could be Christian.

2.2.2 *The essence of the contents*

But what is it that makes Vollenhoven's philosophy Scriptural, what is its substance? He does not find the answer in a biblicist way, but by means of a broader, guiding orientation to the threefold revelation of God. For there are two reasons why one cannot simply infer a Christian philosophy from the Bible. In the first instance the Word of God is not a kind of scholarly philosophy, but God's revelation in prescientific language. Secondly the Scriptures do not relieve a human being of the difficult duty of investigating by himself God's creation philosophically (cf. Tol 2010:257, 399).

Negatively defined it renders Vollenhoven an opponent of a hierarchical ontology which encompasses God, universe and human being and which consequently finds merely relative differences between God, his law and creation.

Seen positively his own ontology can be summarised as follows:

Vollenhoven's primary distinction was that of the triune God who *is*, the law for the cosmos that *holds*, and the created cosmos, which is entirely *sustained* by God. (Vollenhoven, 2013 – cf. also Vollenhoven, 2005a:14 and 2005c:76 and Tol, 2010:489)

2.2.3 *Spelled out further*

This basic idea, derived from the Bible, Vollenhoven developed further in his *Isagôgê Philosophiae* (2005a) and later he explains it briefly again (Vollenhoven, 2011:29, 30). According to him, a complete ontology should take into account three radically different and yet inseparable realities: God, his law and his creation.

Taking God into consideration also in his philosophy – without speculating about Him as in many theo-ontologies which regard God as the object of their study – was an almost revolutionary step. (In this respect his ontology also differs radically from Allen's.) According to Vollenhoven one cannot regard the universe as a creation without belief in a Creator. And without God as the Law-giver, laws become mere subjective human fabrications. However, Vollenhoven is very clear about it that his

distinction between God, law and creation does not mean that God also is a part of his ontology. In this distinction God's *existence* is simply acknowledged in faith. It is not suggested that Vollenhoven wanted to philosophise about God as a "Being".

Therefore a secular one-factor worldview (recognising only the universe) or a Christian two-factor view (acknowledging only God and creation) is not complete. There are three realities to be acknowledged. For "between" God and his creation there is God's will as laid down in his laws for creation.

This "between" reality has neither a divine nor a created character, nor is it a combination of both. No, Vollenhoven says, "over against" God there are his laws and creation. This "over against" is not meant in a hostile sense, but denotes that both the law and creation are dependent on Him. For the law was *laid down* by Him and the universe was *created* by Him. Therefore the law is *valid* and the universe is *subject to the law*. There is no sense in speaking about a law that does not *hold* for something or about something created that does not *fall under* God's ordinations. (For particulars, cf. Tol 2010:392-408).

2.2.4 Threefold law

Up to now we have been using the term "law" in a wide sense. However, Vollenhoven distinguishes law in a threefold sense:

... the structural law is situated within creation [is related to creation]. The law of love stands between die Creator and humanity as the command of God's covenant. The positive law is neither situated within creation, nor can it be identified with the law of love. It is the bridge which comes into existence by being built in a given situation for the sake of a specific societal structure, in and through the office concerned with that social structure. It is built so as to connect the commandment of the law of love to human life in a structure battered by sin. (Vollenhoven 2005b:15, 16. Also cf. Tol 2010:424)

Vollenhoven (2011:30) provides further explanation. First there are God's *structural laws* as the creating command (cf. Gen. 1 and Rom. 4:17b). He brings forth the diversity of cosmic things by just speaking a word. Implied in God's creating command there are the fifteen different modalities and the development of the four kingdoms of matter, plant, animal and human being. The creating command therefore is a structural law.

Secondly there is the *commandment of love*, which is not a creating command but a commandment in the sense of an appeal to the human being that already exists. The commandment of love is not a commandment that determines the *structure* of things, but a commandment directed at the heart of the human being to guide the *direction* of his whole life for the best. To Vollenhoven religion encompasses everything a human being thinks or does (cf. Tol 2010:450, 482).

In the third instance there are *positive laws*, concretisations of the commandment of love by someone in a position of authority for a specific time and circumstances in a specific sphere of life. In contrast to the ever-valid commandment of love, human concretisations or norms therefore are only valid for a limited time, place and sphere.

An example (given by Vollenhoven himself) is that of a member of parliament. As a politician he/she will not give a sermon on God's commandment of love in parliament – this is a minister's work. But he will act as a Christian by concretising love in the form of impartial justice (in for example the laws of a country). Such laws are not infallible and divine, but they are normative.

Enough has now been explained about Vollenhoven's own philosophy to make possible understanding of his approach to the history of philosophy.

3. The main distinctions in Vollenhoven's philosophical historiography

Vollenhoven's clear distinction between three entities, God-law-cosmos – the hallmark of his own philosophy – emerges again in his philosophical historiography. He differentiates three *main periods* (as responses to God's revelation), *different trends of the times* (as the embodiment of different normative ideas), and a variety of *types* of philosophy (advocating diverging views of creation in general and of human beings in particular). Together these three elements present the *conception* of a philosopher.

3.1 Three main periods

In the first instance Vollenhoven departs from the question what the attitude of Western philosophers and other scholars was towards God's revelation in his Word.

3.1.1 Pre-synthesis philosophy

During the period before the coming of Christ many ancient Greek, Hellenistic and Roman scholars did not know God's Word. They lived and thought as pagans. This

is merely stating a fact. It is not meant to stigmatise or condemn these philosophers. This period of purely pagan thinking lasted until approximately 50 AD.

Does such a view of ancient philosophies not entail extreme partiality or prejudice? To this Vollenhoven answers "yes" and "no".

Yes in so far as one cannot risk advancing one step in this direction without having already chosen for or against Christ – Who ever since the Fall into sin has been and ever remains the centre of world history – in the great battle that encompasses all of history and therefore also philosophy. No, insofar as one transcends all partiality, exactly by making a choice here, even though not all Christians are aware of the partiality inherent in all conceptions of current philosophy (Vollenhoven, 2005b:19). (Cf. also 3.1.5 below.)

3.1.2 *Synthesis philosophy*

The second main period (approximately 50-1550 AD) is characterised by Vollenhoven (2011:25) as synthesis philosophy. (In the light of this, he calls the first period pre-synthesis thinking.) This era starts with the preaching of the Gospel all over Europe. The result was that some of the heathen remained faithful to their pagan beliefs, while others accepted the message of redemption.

Of course the greater majority of young Christians were not philosophers. However, the few philosophers among them had already been well trained in contemporary pagan philosophical trends. Because they also accepted the Scriptures as authoritative and wanted to think in a Christian way, they spontaneously and involuntarily read their accepted, pagan philosophical ideas into the Scriptures (*eisegesis*), for they were of the opinion that the Scriptures taught similar ideas. By means of *exegesis* these ideas – which were by no means biblical – obtained divine sanction.

The consequences of this were tremendous: Already in the age of the apostles a bitter controversy raged in the early church – and for many ages to follow. (According to 1 John 4:2-7 some scholars were, for instance, of the opinion that Christ was not really a human being, while according to 1 Cor. 15 others denied the resurrection.)

3.1.3 *Anti-synthesis philosophy*

During the third phase (from approximately 1550 AD) this synthesis mentality was gradually rejected. The main trend became anti-synthetic, although for two diverging reasons. Secular anti-synthetic philosophers regarded the Bible as a myth, an outdated fable, and banned it from their philosophical thinking. However, there also was a Christian trend (e.g. the 16th century Reformation) which did not distance itself from the Word of God, but intended to grant it the final, sole authority. The accommodation which the Church Fathers and thinkers from the Middle Ages attempted to bring about between pagan philosophy and divine revelation was, according to this Reformational tradition, a futile attempt doomed to failure.

Vollenhoven himself also wants to be a Christian anti-synthesis philosopher. It has been explained above that this is not the same as (negative) antithetical thinking.

3.1.4 *Differences with Allen*

In this respect, too, there is a vast difference between Vollenhoven's historiography and Allen's. As a Roman Catholic synthesis philosopher she attempts by means of a nature–grace method to reconcile heathen and Christian thinking – even though to her they exist on two levels. She does not think in an anti-synthetic Christian way like Vollenhoven – to her philosophy is a neutral, rational matter.

The implication of Vollenhoven's viewpoint is that neutrality also in philosophy amounts to self-deception. Moreover: Who and what a human being is at bottom (e.g. a creature of God, a religious being with a heart which has to listen to God's commandment of love) can only be revealed by the Word of the Creator.

3.1.5 *More than just a Christian attitude*

Vollenhoven emphasises that he is not concerned with a mere Christian *attitude*, or to prove that *he himself* is a Christian by, for instance, making a few critical remarks or quoting a text from the Bible. He says:

... the issue "Christian or non-Christian" is located *in the matter*. It also is hidden in the authors studied. Plato and Aristotle were pagans. During the Middle Ages one is dealing with Christian people, and nowadays it has to be asked with whom one is dealing. With a Christian or with a non-Christian? One has to keep this in mind and it has nothing to do with an attitude of the

researcher. This (the correct attitude) also has to be there ... but it is a question of direction in the matter which has to be identified, otherwise one turns Plato into a Christian ... And that is something that definitely does not promote the reflection on the history of philosophy (Vollenhoven, 2011:20, 21) [translated from the Dutch]. (Cf. also 3.1.1 above.)

Thus Vollenhoven replaces the arrangement in the standard textbooks on the history of philosophy under ancient, medieval and modern philosophy with an entirely new periodisation. These three main periods in history are sub-divided further by Vollenhoven, since during the course of history numerous different philosophical normative trends or currents emerged.

3.2 Different normative currents

From among Vollenhoven's distinction between three realities (namely God, law and universe) the second, namely the idea of law also takes an important part in his analysis of the history of philosophy. From each philosopher the question should be asked, not only what his relation was to the Word of God and the God of the Word, but also what his/her view was on the authority of laws, criteria or norms for theory and practice (cf. Vollenhoven 2005b:13 and 2011:46). Apart from the *ontic-structural* question on what everything is (and their relations), every philosopher therefore also has to reflect on the *normative-directional* question how one should think and act. The answer to the first question gives rise to a certain *type* of ontology while with the answer to the second question a philosophical *current* can be identified (Vollenhoven, 2000:404).

3.2.1 Various normative views

Vollenhoven discovers a great diversity (about 66) normative trends (cf. Vollenhoven 2005b:153-155 for a complete outline). These cultural-historical trends or philosophical currents entail the human response to the orderliness of the cosmos. Since the human positivation of the God-given ordinances for his creation is fallible and time-bound, new norms for human thinking and acting continuously clash with the older ones and replace them. In this way – over against the recurrence of various types of philosophy (see below) – the ever-changing currents are the reason for a dynamic element in the intellectual history of the West.

Here follow only three examples seeing that it is impossible to go into detail.

Plato (in his final phase) holds the idea that the laws exist separately from visible reality as things (Latin: *res*, hence the designation for his normative idea as "realism"). However, they are mere examples for thinking and doing and therefore not real laws which apply, deserve to be obeyed in obedience to Someone and incur punishment when transgressed.

However, Plato's realistic duplication of reality did not satisfy those after him and a new trend began fascinating the Greek philosophers, namely subjectivism. This means that the laws and the things to which they had to apply, were no longer clearly distinguished – the laws were looked for "in" the things themselves. What *is*, is regarded as what *should be*. (Pleasure or power, for instance, becomes norms instead of being assessed normatively.)

An even later development during Hellenistic philosophy, transferred the normative guidelines, up to then looked for *outside* a human being, in an *a priori* fashion to *within* the human intellect. This paved the way for later rationalist ideas (1600-1900), which absolutised the human intellect to an autonomous reason, a law-giver in itself, an idol.

All of Western philosophy up to today's postmodernism still holds some or other subjectivist idea about normativity. However, since it cannot truly lend normative security, the trends or currents keep following one after another. (Cf. e.g. Venter, 2011:108-143, who describes various such modern philosophical trends.)

3.2.2 Differences from Allen

From the previous chapter it clearly emerged that Allen also finds the norm for gender relations in a subjectivist manner in a specific relation (that of complementarity). The central commandment of love does not come up in her work, nor its concretisation in a specific sphere.

Allen's version of history further does not take into consideration how the various normative tendencies influenced philosophers' views of woman. For instance, she points out the ontic similarities between Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, but does not take into consideration that they lived in completely different periods and trends of thought which co-determined their views of being human.

Although Vollenhoven does not explicitly go into the influence of various philosophical currents on philosophers' views on gender, implicitly it is there.

Rationalists were, as a consequence of their deification of the human intellect, for instance clearly in favour of the superiority of man (regarded as a rational being), while the existentialist irrationalists took human, subjective freedom – also the woman's – as the norm.

We will now proceed to the third main element in Vollenhoven's philosophical historiography.

3.3 Different views of the cosmos

The last element of Vollenhoven's distinction God-law-cosmos also determines his historiography. For apart from the normative question about what *should* be thought or done (i.e. the *direction* of human life), one should also pay attention to the question of what the universe or God's creation and human beings, *are made up of* (how they are *structured*) and how everything coheres.

An analysis of the different cosmic structures result, according to Vollenhoven, in different *types* of philosophy. Different from the continuously changing normative currents, these types may again and again recur during different periods and trends and amongst different thinkers. Therefore, while the changing currents are responsible for the dynamics in history, the types, to some extent, guarantee its continuity. However, current and type do interact – a new current may transform an old type. Taken together, current and type describe the conception of a specific philosopher.

3.3.1 Basic cosmological issues

Early on in history already, at the cradle of Western philosophy in Greece, the following three basic issues emerged: What is the relation between (1) stability/constancy/fixity and change; (2) unity and diversity; (3) the individual and the universal? (cf. Vollenhoven, 2011:45).

As will become clear from what follows, all these fundamental ontic problems also lead to different views of the human being and also of the duality – not dualism – of human gender.

3.3.2 A lacuna in Allen's work

Before explaining what these problems entail, first another remark on the side on the work done by Allen. She focuses only on the higher-lower distinction between the

soul and body of a human being. According to her this was the cause of either the disparagement of women (associated with what is bodily) or to her being overrated. The three basic ontological problems mentioned above – which are determinative for the different anthropologies – are not dealt with by her.

4. Three significant ontological points of departure

In this section we therefore explain what these three issues entailed before paying attention to their anthropological implications (cf. also Bril, 1986 and 2005).

4.1 Constancy or change?

For lack of space one viewpoint is here omitted, namely the mythologising or theogonic-cosmogonic thinking, which speculated philosophically about the way the gods and the universe came into being. Vollenhoven (2005c:273) rejects this since the Scriptures reject polytheism and furthermore teach that the universe was created by one God – it did not develop by itself.

4.1.1 Structuralism

Considering the question of what is constant, stable or fixed in reality and what changes, the first group of philosophers emphasised its constancy. Since they over-emphasised structures or the structural side of reality, they are designated as structuralists. Vollenhoven (2005c:238) also calls them purely structural or purely cosmological philosophers. They merely concentrate on the universe as it *is* and avoid any explanation of its *development* or coming into being.

To a human being such a view implies that he/she has to abide by the predetermined order, the nature according to which they have to live has been predetermined. Such a deterministic view also inclines towards a fixed order for being man and woman.

4.1.2 Geneticism

Other philosophers, however, placed the emphasis on genetic development. Vollenhoven (2005c:216) calls them cosmogono-cosmological philosophers – they attempted to reflect logically on the genesis of the universe as well. According to these philosophers the cosmic structures are not fixed but nascent, fluid, moving, changing. Structures are in a manner taken up in a process, the future is not determined, but open.

According to this anthropology, human beings are considered to be responsible for their own behaviour. (Therefore it is the opposite of structuralism which promotes passivity and resignation.) Neither is there a fixed order, but a tendency to regard normative guidelines as being preliminary and a product of a certain age. Geneticism mostly also implies that gender differences are not regarded as important as by the structuralists. Male and female "natures" and their relations are in a process of formation, incomplete.

A second basic issue through the ages was that of

4.2 Unity or diversity?

Any discerning person should be struck by the rich diversity in the universe. But, it could also be asked, does all of it cohere in some way? Is there also unity in the midst of the enormous diversity? Does the diversity have an origin? Does unity mean the same as similarity and does diversity perhaps imply separateness?

According to Vollenhoven (2000:117) the Bible teaches that God is the Origin, He created everything. Thus God's revelation teaches neither an original unity of everything (for then the difference between God and his creation is obliterated), nor an original duality. Therefore the correct viewpoint is not unity *and/or* diversity, but unity *in* diversity. Otherwise unity can easily become similarity and diversity becomes separateness.

In the history of Western philosophy, however, there was a constant struggle between the former, monistic view and the latter, dualistic viewpoint. Since both viewpoints attempted to offer a solution to a false problem (viz. whether unity or diversity should be considered to be primary) they could never reach a final solution, nor could the one party convince the other. (Cf. Olthuis & De Graaff, 1978:15-17 for a detailed explanation.)

4.2.1 Monism and dualism

The monistic philosophers were convinced that there had to be a fundamental, original but also final unity in reality (cf. Vollenhoven, 2000:340). They, therefore, search for the sense or meaning of human life by reclaiming and realising this primordial unity in the midst of all the diversity.

Dualistic philosophers, on the other hand, believed that there was a fundamental, irreducible disunity, division or separateness which has always been there and would always remain. According to Vollenhoven (2000:294) the higher part of this duality was normally called the transcendent and the lower the non-transcendent. Therefore diversity is primary and not of a secondary nature (the way monism considers it). Dualistic philosophers, therefore, have to bring about a degree of cooperation or integration between the higher and lower elements – a unity which is in principle impossible.

4.2.2 Estranged twin brothers

In studying a philosophy one should therefore be careful not to label it as monism the moment "unity" is brought to the table. Or immediately come to the conclusion that someone is a dualist when he/she writes a lot about "diversity".

The issue of unity is a dualistic problem. How can one, while departing from a duality, reach unity again? The other way round the monistic issue is at bottom how to explain diversity. So dualists usually do not spend a lot of time discussing their point of departure of a duality in reality. Seeing that to monists the unity is a given, it likewise mostly functions only implicitly in their philosophy.

4.2.3 Good and evil

How then do monists explain the plurality? They regard the diversity as higher and lower divisions or sub-divisions of the original unity. The dualists in turn have to offer an explanation for the unity. They attempt to do this by in some way bridging the divide between the original duality of the transcendent and the non-transcendent so that they can reach a relation with one another.

These two viewpoints will oppose each other as a consequence of their different views of good and evil. To the monists unity is better, more perfect and good, while the diversity derived from it can be less good or evil. Unity means deliverance from evil. But since to dualists the higher, transcendent is more perfect or better than the non-transcendent, salvation to them means that the lower has to be suppressed or overcome while the higher has to be pursued as the ideal – the non-transcendent has to aspire towards the transcendent or divine.

4.2.4 Anthropological implications

A subsequent issue – another false problem – was of course how one as a monist had to picture the relation between the higher and lower sub-divisions (derived from the original unity). Various answers have been devised. They can, for instance, contradict one another, the higher can be seen as more important than the lower, there could be an interaction between the two; they could have no contact whatsoever. Further speculation will have the result that in every one of these four possibilities still more distinctions are possible (cf. lower down).

Likewise the dualists also had to speculate on exactly how the relation between the higher and lower is structured in a human being. For instance, is a human being an entirely non-transcendent, cosmic being or could his soul/spirit be of a transcendent origin? (Allen holds the latter view which is designated a dichotomist anthropology.)

Then a subsequent false issue arises: Do only men have a reasonable, transcendent soul or women as well? Some of the dichotomist philosophers regarded only reason as the higher (transcendent) part of a human being. Others included emotions also. In the first instance Vollenhoven therefore speaks of andrological dualism (only men participate in divine reason) and in the latter case of anthropological dualism (both men and women contain something transcendent or divine). (Cf. Vollenhoven, 2000: 268, 419, 2005c:117.)

4.2.5 Back to Allen

If one takes as examples the four types of monistic ontic-anthropological theories mentioned above it becomes much clearer why Allen could distinguish three different relations between the two genders in the course of history. The first (in which the higher and lower are supposed to contradict each other and yet coincide) she could regard either as polarity or as unity. The second (the doctrine of priority) would clearly lead to the superiority of the male (her theory of polarity). In the case of the third (theory of interaction) Allen's model of complementarity would characterise the relation between the two genders. From the fourth (parallelist anthropology) Allen would be able to derive more than one kind of relation between men and women.

4.3 Individual or universal?

A third basic ontic issue to which answers were sought during the long Western history has been what precisely the relation would be between the individual (this

human being, man or woman) and the universal (being human, being man or woman). Which of the two was the most important?

4.3.1 *A question wrongly phrased*

This question, too, is considered by Vollenhoven as a false problem. He does not want to speak about *the* individual and *the* universal, since they are merely *facets* of the same created things. Furthermore it is not a case that the universal facet is taken to be more important than the individual. Man and woman display individual differences but also universal similarities (both are human beings). But even in each of the two genders there are individual differences up to the genetic-biological level. Neither do individual differences imply inferiority or superiority. (The universal-individual distinction is not applicable to God either.)

However, during the course of history the universal *sides* of things were made into *things* or *parts* of things (cf. Vollenhoven, 2000:354-355 and 2005c:313). Since laws are universally or generally valid, the universal was often identified with the law – another confusion.

4.3.2 *Different theories*

The opposition between universalists and individualists runs through all of history (cf. Vollenhoven, 2000:354). The former taught that the universal was the primary, while the individual was taken to be mere branches of it. Contrary to this, the individualists were convinced that the universal (as the secondary) only had an existence by the grace of the individual.

The partial universalists devise a kind of intermediate viewpoint because they have perceived that the universal and individual cannot be separated from one another as *things* – they had to be *parts* of the same thing. However, they could not reach consensus among themselves on exactly how this was the case.

Some saw a *horizontal* relation between the universal and the individual. As the major and the minor who resemble each other, the universal and individual would appear *next* to each other. Everything in the one (great) world is present in the (small) diversity of human beings and other things, as well as the other way round. It is the well-known *macro-micro-cosmos doctrine*. As partial *universalism* the universal, however, remains more significant than the individual. (Think of a drop of water in an ocean.)

But other partial universalists were of the opinion that the universal and the individual do not exist *next to* but *under* one another in the same thing – a vertical theory, therefore. This is the well-known *form-matter doctrine*. However, here, too, disagreement occurs among themselves: To some the higher (form) was the universal and to others the lower (matter).

4.3.3 Anthropological implications

This third ontological issue also has consequences for how human beings are seen as men and women. Allen does not deal with this. She does deal with Aristotle and Aquinas, both advocates of the form-matter doctrine, but does not notice the deeper problem (to which it offers a solution).

Although once more Vollenhoven does not indicate everything contained in his more profound investigation, it is easy to guess what it entails for the issue of gender. Take as an example the vertical partial universalism. According to this theory the form is the highest, universal and active principle, the nearest to the divine, which is taken to be pure form. It stands above the lower, individual, mere potential matter, which is farthest removed from divinity. Moreover, form is associated with masculinity, reason and normativity and femininity with passive, merely potential matter. In such a philosophical view – and not in mere misogyny – lies the deeper ontic-anthropological causes for the disparagement of the feminine gender by Aristotle and Aquinas – and many others.

For many understandable reasons, e.g. the ideal of virginity, many Medieval female philosophers felt drawn to (semi)-mysticism. Allen's chosen feminine philosopher, Hildegard van Bingen (1098-1179) was a semi-mystical philosopher. According to Vollenhoven (2005c:377) this pre-supposes a dualistic ontology with a dichotomist anthropology – the highest part of the human soul is of divine descent and should strive to return to a mystical, ontic unity with God. In such a view good and evil cannot be seen as a religious conflict between obedience and disobedience to God, but as a conflict between a higher soul or spirit and lower, bodily needs.

4.4 Summary review

His method enabled Vollenhoven (2000:184-259) to summarise the whole intricate puzzle of Western history of philosophy schematically and in outline. Diagrammatically it consists of vertical and horizontal lines crossing one another and

thereby forming squares in which the conception of a specific philosopher appears. On the right side of the horizontal lines different lines are put together to classify the whole under three main periods (pre-synthesis, synthesis and anti-synthesis thinking). On the left side of the horizontal lines each space between two lines represents a new trend or philosophical normative current. The vertical lines and the squares formed by them from top to bottom first denote the broad ontological view (structuralism or geneticism, monism or dualism, universalism, partial universalism or individualism) and then the different anthropological viewpoints.

Note that these *Schematic Charts* do not pretend to be anything more than what the name itself says. It is only meant for when one quickly wants to trace a philosopher's conception(s) or the influence of one philosopher on another.

Up to now we have only shown by way of examples what the anthropological implications of three ontological views could be. Subsequently we will focus explicitly on different anthropologies.

5. A huge variety of views on being human

It has transpired clearly that a philosopher's worldview or ontology decisively determines what his view of being human or anthropology will look like. (Of course many philosophers do not disclose their ontology beforehand so that one has to infer it "looking back" from their views of being human, or even try and reconstruct it from their epistemology.) The debates between structuralism and geneticism, monism and dualism, between individualism, universalism and the various forms of partial universalism form an ontological foundational structure with a pattern or constellation of themes cohering with it. Such a philosophical tradition leads to specific views of being human (cf. Vollenhoven, 2000:367). Monists, for instance, are inclined towards genetic philosophy, while dualism is usually linked with structuralism (cf. Olthuis & DeGraaff, 1978:21).

5.1 Jointly determined by various currents

As mentioned earlier (cf. 3.2) views of being human are not only determined by ontological problems, but also jointly determined by the specific normative schools or currents within which a philosopher finds himself (for an outline of the numerous schools and their representatives, cf. Vollenhoven, 2005b:153–156). While the ontic types describe the *structure* of the universe and human beings, the philosophical

currents or schools are concerned with how one *should think and act* according to certain criteria, in other words with the course or *direction* of life.

A certain type of philosophy (e.g. monism or dualism) can therefore appear all through history and in different successive currents. It therefore imparts a degree of constancy and continuity to Western philosophy. A time current, however, is something that occurs once, is of a transient nature and responsible for the dynamics of history. Since norms are usually looked for in a subjectivist way in the things themselves, an almost infinite number of schools or directions are possible. (Cf. for instance how in our days everything is commercialised.) Usually such a new trend to some extent transforms an old type of philosophy.

Therefore it is possible to distinguish between structure and direction, but not to separate them – in anthropologies as well. For lack of space the examples of anthropologies now to be discussed will only be viewed from their structural side.

Above we already mentioned an example when we pointed out that dichotomist views of being human occur both in the work of mythologising dualistic philosophers and of cosmogono-cosmological philosophers because either it is believed that all people have something transcendent (e.g. a higher soul) – the anthropological type – or the opinion is that only men have a transcendental “part” – an andrological dichotomy.

Because of the huge diversity of anthropologies we are compelled here to limit ourselves to examples of monistic, cosmogono-cosmological anthropologies and finally to make just a few comments on dualistic, purely cosmological anthropologies.

5.2 Examples of monistic cosmogono-cosmological anthropologies

The reader is reminded that cosmogono–cosmological philosophy is a genetic and not static, structural philosophy, and further that monism departs from a supposed primary original unity of reality which divides into a secondary plurality.

Vollenhoven (200:419-420) here differentiates four main groups (with additional sub-variations) with reference to the way a philosopher sees the relation between the higher and lower divergence from the unity. They are the following: a coincidence of contradictory divergences, a doctrine of priorities, a theory of interaction, and parallelism. (Cf. also Olthuis and DeGraaff 1978:23-30 and Bril, 1986:127-134 for valuable diagrammes for visualising the differences. A concrete example is the

characterisation of the psychotherapist, Carl Rogers, as a genetic monist, done by Van Belle, 1980:94.)

5.2.1 *The theory of "coincidentia oppositorum"*

This anthropology is probably the most intricate of all the monistic views of being human. This teaches that, simultaneously with the process of division from the unity to a higher and lower dimension, the opposite process also takes place back to unity. The relation therefore is a unity of opposites (Latin: *coincidentia oppositorum*). This two-way process is inherently contradictory and perpetual.

In addition the direction away from the unity (that of dividing) is a temporal direction, while the direction back to the unity of origin is regarded as eternal, universal and holy. The human being is involved in this universal, deterministic process. According to Olthuis and De DeGraaff (1978:29) good and evil, masculine and feminine and all other contrasts are merely regarded as successive moments in the unfolding of the universal, divine process.

5.2.2 *Variations within the doctrine of priorities*

A subsequent form of genetic monism is the idea that the higher bifurcation or branching off from the primary unity is favoured above the lower. There is only a one-way traffic. The higher does need the lower, but it rules the lower, uses it as a tool and influences it. The lower has no influence on the higher. This anthropological idea is therefore named the theory of priority.

Four different types

As usually happens, a basic anthropological viewpoint is gradually worked out in different variations. These sub-theories depend on where the borderline between higher and lower splitting off from the original unity is placed (cf. Vollenhoven, 2000:371-373 as well as Bril, 1986:128-129 for clarifying sketches).

If the physical-organic (the kingdom of matter and plants) is regarded as the lower divergence, there is a tendency to look on the lower with little respect, only as a tool of the higher. Such an anthropology is thus called an *instrumentalist doctrine of priorities*.

In a following type, the *vitalistic doctrine of priorities*, the lower divergence includes, apart from the physical-organic, also the vital element and the higher divergence

contains the soul (psychic) and spirit. In this case there is greater appreciation for the lower bifurcations than there is in instrumentalism.

Other philosophers, however, devised a still newer (third) anthropological theory – an *occasionalistic doctrine* of priorities. According to this idea there is supposed to be not only a higher soul but also a lower (bestial) soul besides the body. The lower therefore offers the opportunity (Latin: *occasio*) for the higher to get a grip on the lower and keep it in check – like a horseman steering his mount.

A fourth doctrine of priorities is *ennoetism* (derived from *en=in* + *nous* = thinking spirit). According to this anthropology there is a “thinking spirit” or mind in the higher, while the lower consists of soul and body. Although the soul does influence the body, the higher thinking spirit – in contrast to occasionalism – is not involved with the lower in a directive manner but merely in a contemplative way, which leads to a great degree of passivity in the human being.

Implications

Olthuis and DeGraaff (1978:25) say that all forms of the doctrine of priorities tend to localise evil in the lower bifurcation. For instance, when a distinction is made between intellect, will and emotions in a human being the (lower) emotional life of a human being is regarded as suspect and should be held in check by the intellect and the will. So instead of seeing the distinction between good and evil as the right or wrong *normative direction*, it is located in the *structural composition* of the human being. If femininity is therefore identified with the emotional, the implications are clear – the masculine gender then has to rule the inferior feminine.

5.2.3 Theories of interaction

Another group of philosophers reject the different doctrines of priorities because they are of the opinion that the lower is not subject to the higher, but that there is an interaction between them. From the interaction between the two life unfolds, and the lower (e.g. biological and psychic) can consequently also play a more positive role so that passivity will (no longer) be a characteristic as in the doctrine of priorities.

Variations

Like the previous types of anthropologies this main type also gives rise to various sub-types. Vollenhoven (2000:414) initially distinguished only three such variations,

but later on some more. The differences between them again are dependent on where the link or point of bifurcation between higher and lower (from the original unity) is placed, and consequently what the contents of both would be. We here confine ourselves to Vollenhoven's earlier differentiation between only three main types.

The *phytological theory* of interaction (derived from the Greek *phuton*=plant) taught that there is no essential difference between plants, animals and human beings (one could call it "biologism"). According to the *zoological type*, however, it is thought that human beings and animals (in contrast to plants) both have emotional lives (one could call this "animalism"). However, the supporters of an *anthropological theory* of interaction were convinced that there is a fundamental difference between a human being and an animal.

A peculiar type

Under the new types of theories of interaction which Vollenhoven (2000:9) discovered later on we mention in addition only the pneumatistic (derived from the Greek *pneuma*=spirit) with a view to the conclusion of this chapter (cf. 6.1). According to this anthropology there is a vertical divergence from the origin to a higher and lower ontic level, but alongside this there also is a horizontal differentiation and integration from the centre. This centre is the *pneuma* which directs or guides being human from the inside.

5.2.4 Parallelism

As the name indicates, in this anthropology there is no interaction between the higher and lower bifurcations from the primary origin. An event in the higher goes parallel with or is synchronised with the same event in the lower. To parallelists it is therefore more important than to other monistic theories discussed thus far to regain the original unity – without which their theory would end in dualism (cf. Olthuis & DeGraaff, 1978:27). Therefore they pursue coordination, harmony and balance.

What would the implications of such a theory be for the issue of human gender? According to Allen's terminology it could probably imply a model of complementarity. However, if one takes into consideration that even among parallelists there are two sub-types (limited and unlimited parallelists) the implications are not so simple.

5.3 Dualistic purely cosmological anthropologies

Seeing that this chapter is not meant to offer a full exposition of all the many anthropologies Vollenhoven discovered in history, but only attempts to point out how anthropological points of departure also influence one's view of gender, this group will be dealt with briefly only.

As mentioned already, these philosophers think in a structuralist way, in terms of static, fixed structures while change and development are regarded as of minor importance. As dualists they also depart from two original entities, namely a higher or transcendent and a lower, non-transcendent entity. The transcendent is identified with unity and eternity, the non-transcendent with diversity and temporariness.

From this starting point, too, quite a number of views of being human emerged. Vollenhoven (2005b:158-9) distinguishes the following seven main types (with additional variations on each of them): empiricism (consistent and non-consistent), semi-mysticism (with three subtypes), monarchianism (a Platonising and a non-Platonising, with more subtypes), subsistence theory (a Platonising and a non-Platonising), vinculum theory (an intellectualist and voluntarist type), and semi-materialism (with and without dichotomy). For an explanation of what each of these views of being human entails, Vollenhoven (2000:260 et seq.) comes in handy.

After an outline of this great number of anthropologies produced in the course of history one would like to know what Vollenhoven's own anthropology looked like, for it has become clear that his method is critical of all of the others.

6. Vollenhoven's own anthropology

Vollenhoven repeatedly changed his method to do justice to the great diversity of philosophical ontologies and anthropologies of the 2750 years of Western philosophy. Even towards the end of his life he was still busy with important revisions which, unfortunately, he could not complete. He was so absorbed in the history of philosophy that after 1945 he could not elaborate further on his own view either. A way of finding out in retrospect more about his own anthropology would be to ask whether at least there were one or more historical anthropologies with which he could more or less concur.

6.1 A degree of kinship

Vollenhoven had a relative preference for the monistic-pneumatistic theory of interaction (mentioned above under 5.2.3). Without being a supporter of this, Vollenhoven (2005c:440) was of the opinion that such an anthropology did the most justice to created reality. He found this anthropology in the work of Gregory of Nazianze (329-390 AD).

From Van der Walt (2010a:302-304), it transpires why Vollenhoven sympathised with Gregory's view. Probably because according to the pneumatistic theory of interaction the human, inner spirit (Greek: *pneuma*) would have a directive influence on the external, bodily side – without denying the reverse influence of the external, physical-biological on the inner self. This agrees with the central, religious role ascribed to the human heart by Vollenhoven.

However, Vollenhoven could not fully agree with Gregory because the latter was still a synthesis philosopher; because he rejected Gregory's monism; because Gregory still wrote in dichotomist terms about a human being's inner and outer side; since this Church Father had not yet understood the heart as the religious centre of a human being.

6.2 Not completely obscure

Van der Walt (2010:305 et seq.) subsequently discusses the following features of Vollenhoven's own anthropology.

6.2.1 Higher-lower replaced by inner-outer

It is clear that Vollenhoven rejects the higher-lower schemes of both the monistic and the dualistic anthropologies, since they inevitably cause something in a human being to be over-rated while other facets are disparaged. He replaces it with an "inner-outer" model.

Likewise he rejects views which group some functions of a human being (the psychic to the aspect of faith) as a separate "part" of being human over against a so-called lower component (the arithmetic to the organic).

6.2.2 The human heart and encompassing religion rediscovered

Although according to this view a human being has many more facets than for instance only intellect, will and emotions, and also is a much more complex being

than an animal, he/she is not just a functional being. To Vollenhoven the inner heart is something prefunctional. It is the religious "core" of a human being from which his/her whole life is directed (cf. Van der Walt, 2010a).

Vollenhoven (2005a:78) defines religion as "the relationship of humankind to the God of the covenant in obedience or disobedience to his fundamental law of love". From this the central position taken up by the commandment of love in Vollenhoven's thinking emerges once again. Furthermore Vollenhoven believes that, even if someone does not obey God or his law, he/she still is and will always be a religious being – merely his/her religious *direction* will be different.

6.2.3 A new view of the image of God

Moreover, Vollenhoven has a unique view of the biblical revelation that a human being is created in the image of God and, that after the fall into sin, one can once more be restored to it by the grace of God (Van der Walt, 2010b). In the Christian tradition – to this day – the image of God has been viewed by many as something ontic and semi-divine in the "higher" part of a human being. According to Vollenhoven this is another misconception which detracts from the radical distinction between God and human beings. The image of God is not somewhere *in* a human being. No, the complete human being *exhibits* the image of God to the extent to which he/she obeys God's law of love towards Himself and the neighbour.

6.2.4 A new philosophy of society

As mentioned already (cf. 2.2.4 above) a human being is called to concretise the divine law of love in conformity with the structural laws for specific spheres of life.

This also applies to the different possible relations between the two genders as well as different relations of office, power, authority and responsibility in which men and women can find themselves. All human relationships – including those between the genders – are qualified. They are, for instance, of a religious, ethical, judicial, economic, social, emotional nature and so forth. Distinguishing, as Allen does, only three general, unqualified kinds of relations between men and women thus constitute an unacceptable limitation.

In short, therefore, Vollenhoven offers a much broader and deeper view of being human and of gender. Wikipedia (cf. Vollenhoven, 2013) characterises this Christian

philosopher very well in the following words: "Vollenhoven was a person who combined direct clarity with deep insight. He had an analytical mind..."

6.3 A last question

At the end of this investigation one could say

"Very well, it is true that Vollenhoven made a magisterial contribution to uncover the ontic and anthropological foundations of being human. But the question remains why Vollenhoven did not *explicitly* speak out on the issue of human gender."

On this we can only guess. Some (feminist) philosophers will probably attribute it to Vollenhoven's – as a typical male philosopher – still thinking in a sexist way. Others could argue that exactly because he did not think in a paternalistic way he did not consider it an important issue. A third option is that gender duality could have been to him a simple fact, perhaps just another one of the many puzzles of being human on which he did not wish to speculate. We will never know.

What is certain is that nowhere does Vollenhoven (like, for instance, Calvin or Kuyper) write about women in a humiliating or condescending manner. Besides, he makes no distinction as to their being human. They have both been created by God in his image; have received the same cultural mandate from Him; both fell into sin – which also affected their relationship. It would likewise be an error to regard the different *penalties* imposed on them (Gen. 3:16-19) as eternal *norms*, since both can participate in salvation through Christ. Therefore "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female: for you are all one in Christ" (Gal. 3:28).

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Chapter 2: Originally published in Afrikaans in *Tydskrif vir Geesteswetenskappe*, volume 53, number 3, pages 267-286, September 2013. (Indexed on the Social Sciences Citation Index.)

Chapter 3: Originally published in Afrikaans in *Koers*, volume 77, number 1, pages 56-69, 2012. (Open access at www.koersjournal.org.za)

Chapter 4: Originally published in Afrikaans in *Koers*, volume 79, number 1, 2014. <http://koersjournal.org.za/index.php/koers/article/view/1248>

Chapter 5: Originally published in Afrikaans in *Koers*, volume 79, number 1, 2014. <http://koersjournal.org.za/index.php/koers/article/view/1247>

In another recent publication (of 2014) the same author provides a detailed exploration of the viewpoints of four fathers of a Christian philosophy: John Calvin (sixteenth century), Dirk H.Th Vollenhoven, Hendrik G. Stoker and Herman Dooyeweerd (twentieth century). The title of the book is:

At the cradle of a Christian philosophy (180 pages).

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ABOUT THE BOOK

This book is concerned with the question of how to understand and write the history of Western intellectual thinking.

- It firstly provides an overview of different methods trying to portray this complex and long history of more than 2500 years.
- Secondly, it indicates how the consistent problem-historical method could rectify the deficiencies identified in these methods of philosophical historiography.
- A subsequent chapter discusses the stance and typologies used to categorise five main types of Christian worldviews, providing a new alternative.
- The next two chapters, aiming at identifying the philosophical basis of various viewpoints, explore the issues of sexual and gender differences and relations between men and women in the course of the intellectual history of the West. Firstly, a major example of such an effort on the concept of woman is reviewed and some lacunae identified. Secondly, it is argued that the consistent problem-historical method is better equipped to identify the religious, ontological and anthropological presuppositions behind different views about sexuality and gender through the ages.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bennie (B.J.) van der Walt (born 1939) studied Theology and Philosophy at the Potchefstroom University in South Africa and the Free University in the Netherlands, obtaining the Th.B. and D.Phil. degrees. From 1974 to 1999 he was Director of the Institute for Reformational Studies and Professor in Philosophy. Since 2000 he has been research fellow in the School of Philosophy at the North-West University. He has written many popular and scholarly articles and books and lectured in many countries. He was awarded two honorary doctorates as well as the Stals Prize for Philosophy.

