

On evolution, sciences, anaesthetics ...

Klapwijk, Jacob. 2008. **Purpose in the living world? Creation and emergent evolution.** Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 311 p. Price: \$72,00. ISBN: 9780521729437.

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While reading Klapwijk's book I recalled an episode reported to me by the late Rev. Deon Kempff, a well-known pastor and theologian in Potchefstroom. He was laying in a theatre-bed, before an operation. After a while the doctor appeared and started injecting him with anaesthetic. In that moment the old pastor recognised behind the mouth-mask of the doctor, the same person (a Pentecostal believer) with whom he was exchanging letters on the topic of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Only three or four seconds were left to him before falling into Morpheus' arms. Nevertheless the old pastor managed to send a message: "... don't forget to reply to my last letter on the spiritual gifts"!

I found the anecdote quite amusing, a tale about the passion for debates which accompanied life in Potchefstroom. I will explain later how I relate this episode to Klapwijk's book. Let us first briefly describe the content and aims of this text.

Jacob Klapwijk is a well-known philosopher in the reformational tradition of Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven. His book touches on two main topics, viz. a possible Christian understanding of evolution and a sketch of the role of the disciplines (as well as pre-scientific frameworks and commitments) involved in the study of natural phenomena.

Concerning the first and main topic, the author rejects both creationism and naturalist evolutionism to embrace a “general theory of emergent evolution” (GTEE). It is not a brand-new theory devised by Klapwijk: the most famous supporter of it was Michael Polanyi (already in the 1940s). Klapwijk, however, aims at reformulating the theory of emergence by utilising the distinction between entities and modal functions and by re-orienting it towards the key concept of idionomy (p. 8).

Within the circles of reformational philosophy, there is and there will be much lively discussion on this topic. Those who have attended the 2009 Stoker’s Lectures (Potchefstroom Campus), will know that Danie Strauss poses many critical questions (also) to the GTEE approach. For instance: if one modal aspect is supposed to “generate” a (higher/second) modality, how can one still maintain that the second modality is irreducible to the first one? Now, the fact that modalities are irreducible to each other has been a fundamental standpoint of this school of philosophy.

Yet, not all reformational thinkers are inclined to reject some or other version of the theory of evolution. For example Roy Clouser will soon write a review of Klapwijk’s book (see *Philosophia reformata*, 2010), in which he will very likely be more open towards Klapwijk’s views. After all, Dooyeweerd considered evolution (once freed from its reductionist leaning) an “attractive theory”, though he had problems reconciling gradual change with his own understanding of type-laws. Although Klapwijk rejects the existence of type-laws (p. 248 ff.), Clouser has already suggested a way out of this dilemma and it will be interesting to see how the debate will proceed.

As there is so much meat on the fire of the first topic (i.e. evolution/ism), and most reviews focus on it, I would rather like to briefly focus on the second topic (which is more neglected), namely the nature and role of the disciplines and pre-scientific factors involved in the study of natural phenomena.

It is in relation to this topic that I return to the initial anecdote. While reading the book in fact, like old Dr. Kempff, I started feeling: “Is this

not the same person who promised to clarify his views?” Is he not the same author, for example, who launched already in the late 1980s (in the pages of *Philosophia reformata*) the proposal of a “mediating role of worldviews”? In those years Klapwijk also touched on several related issues. Questions were asked and replies were expected, though not always received.

At that stage, I for one could not figure out how worldviews could mediate between (religious) ground motives and philosophy while also being themselves regarded as religious ground motives. It is a pity that those issues are not recalled in the present context. And some of the new ideas are not clearer either.

In this new book, religious ground motives are not mentioned anymore, but “religion” seems to be substituted by (or to be a synonym of) “faith” (e.g. p. 200). Is the distinction between (central) religion and (modal) faith, then, simply irrelevant? Furthermore, in some cases worldviews are said to “derive from faith” (p. 196) while in other cases worldviews are the result of “religious expectations” (p. 205). Still in other cases (p. 200, see fig. 10.1) the role of worldviews disappears and scientific thinking seems to interact directly with faith/religion. Is it because worldviews are *part* of “faith”? But were they not *derived from* faith?

Whatever the case, I would say it would be time for Klapwijk to supply a systematic account of his views on these matters. We don’t need to speak of “contradictions”, but I am sure I am not the only reader who is still looking forward to a solid explanation, by Klapwijk, of the nature and role of each scientific and pre-scientific factor involved in science or scholarship. In addition, it would be very appreciated if the explanation could be linked to the themes, discussions and proposals which Klapwijk put forward in the past. Changing one’s mind is not a crime, provided it is kindly signalled, so that the reader does not get confused.

During the years Klapwijk has identified and discussed many epistemic factors. To mention only a few among the pre-scientific ones, he has dealt with religious ground motives, religious commitments, religion, personal conception of life, worldview, faith, practical life experience and the practical ethos of one’s community. It would be time to know what terms are simply synonyms, how many epistemic factors Klapwijk would count as relevant for science and scholarship, how they differ from each other and how they actually function. In other words, before getting “anaesthetised” by new reformational

controversies about evolution, I would like to remind the author not to abandon the other important topic.

Apart from this critical note, the book constitutes an important document and should not be missed by all those who are interested in a Christian approach to evolutionary theories. In fact, the text reflects a reformational approach but interacts with a wide range of authors and positions. These are both strong points. In addition, the text is well written, personal and enticing, which is definitely a “plus”.