Philosophia Reformata 75 (2010) 82–93

BOOK REVIEWS

Jacob Klapwijk, *Purpose in the living world?* Cambridge 2008: Cambridge University Press. 322 pages. ISBN 978-0521729437

Book reviews for TIME magazine class them in one of three categories: read, skim, or toss. This book is definitely a "read." This is especially true for anyone interested in the questions of the relation of evolutionary theory to Christian Faith, the philosophy of biology, or the philosophy of Dooyeweerd. It exhibits impressive erudition, critiques a multitude of theories and viewpoints in a fair and competent manner, and proposes a clear-cut thesis which it defends with extensive argumentation. That thesis is called the General theory of Emergent Evolution (GTEE), which means that there are irreducible levels of living beings that have emerged over time. This happened gradually within any level while new levels appeared by emergent jumps. My remaining comments on the book are, like ancient Gaul, divided into three parts: those points I find persuasive, those I find attractive but wish had been better phrased or defended, and those I find troublesome or unpersuasive. Before getting to them, however, let me add that the book is written in a clear and engaging style, and is pitched at a level which makes it accessible to non-philosophers, students, and educated laymen. The translation is exemplary.

The book deserves praise for the deft way the author avoids both fundamentalism and scholasticism. He insists that Scripture is to be read as religion, and that "The bible is not an extension of science for insiders" (p. 289). He is equally careful and consistent in rejecting the idea that science can prove the existence of God, and in this connection there are cogent criticisms of Dembski and Behe. Given all that, it is no surprise to find him further arguing that the idea of a gradual or saltational diversification of life forms — including humans — is not ruled out by the Scriptural account of creation, and that he does so without falling back onto a soul/body dualism.

It also deserves appreciation for the way the author distinguishes the issues of evolution as a biological theory and naturalism as a competing religious belief. All too often religious Naturalists try to pass these off as an inseparable package when they are no such thing. Against this Klapwijk invokes the anti-naturalist argument of CS Lewis and Alvin Plantinga to the effect that pure physicalism undercuts its own claim to truth. Moreover, he is equally fearless in attacking the dogmatic Darwinists who insist that random natural selection alone is sufficient to explain all diversification of life forms. In place of that, the author points to other biotic laws and to jumps in the appearance of new life forms, especially to those with new (additional) modal qualifications. For example, there can be no gradualist account, he says, of the jump from plants to animals or from animals to humans because they are qualified by additional modal functions each of which are ordered by a distinct kind of laws. These he terms 'idionomies." Thus he objects that the present preoccupation of evolutionary theory with finding transitional life forms assumes gradualism: "Not the

increasing complexity but the new articulations of life challenges thought" (p. 79).

Lastly in this first set, is the GTEE thesis itself. As a neglected option it certainly deserves to be put on the table for discussion. We need to ask whether it is more plausible that fundamentally different *kinds* of life forms of a different idionomy suddenly emerged from or supervened upon previously existing forms, rather than thinking of them as having arisen step by step. The author clearly stakes this claim, and just as clearly proposes a version of it which is controlled by his belief in God in that it avoids not only physicalism but all reductionism.

The second set of comments begins with the wish that the difference between aspectual or "modal" levels among living things had emphasized more clearly that the central issue at stake is one of quales. There is a cluster of concepts and claims involved with this point in that "emergence" and "irreducibility" are defined as correlates (pp. 144-5), while any new level that emerges and is irreducible is described repeatedly as "more complex" or as involving "new laws". This strikes me as inadequate; the central issue in determining whether we have a genuinely new level is the *kind* of complexity or laws we are confronted with. This point is briefly acknowledged on p. 113, but does not control the subsequent discussion (see p.151, e.g.). This is a pity because it is the difference in kind — the qualitative differences between what is meant by "physical", "biotic", "sensory", "logical", etc., — which yield the conclusion of irreducible levels. Unless the increased complexity or additional laws involved in understanding data are of a distinct kind, no new and irreducible level need be involved.

I also wish the issue of difference in kind had been acknowledged to be grounded in indefinable quale intuitions and thus not to be demonstrable by argument. There are moments when this point surfaces ("Amongst all nations on earth we find….justice as a primary intuition." p. 148) but, again, it does not control the discussion. What happens more often is that the reader is referred to increased complexity and/or new laws. For example on p. 144 we are told: "…liquidity [of water] is not an emergent property; it is a physical characteristic that can be explained from the physical structure and properties of H_2O molecules." And the following page adds: "…emergence refers to irreducible novelty." But surely liquidity cannot be predicted or deduced from the structure of H_2O. Neither can the properties of superheated steam. So what, exactly, does "explain" mean here? Once again, it seems that whether a characteristic is emergent and irreducible has to depend on differences of *kind*. Where increased complexity or new laws are of different kinds it makes sense to say "Emerging phenomena are by definition not explicable from an underlying domain" (p. 135), because then the explanation will also be seen to be of a different kind. Otherwise not. Yet having said on p. 113 that "…the real differences in levels of complexity are not quantitative but qualitative…" p. 152 takes this back by saying that "…complexity is not the decisive criterion of emergence but idionomy is." The inconsistency here (compare also pp. 104 &

105) is disturbing because the point is so crucial to ontology generally, over and above its importance to the GTEE thesis.

The final member of this second set concerns a pure omission from the book. There is no suggestion as to why Naturalist thinkers would be inclined to deny the quale differences among idionomies and complexities, differences that yield the irreducible levels they also deny. For Kuyper, Vollenhoven, and Dooyeweerd, that answer would have been loud and clear: it is because they have deified some one or two aspects of the cosmos that they wish to reduce the remaining aspects to the one(s) they have deified. I must confess to being surprised to find that point missing, especially when so much else that was said provided a natural lead-in to that point.

My last set of comments begins with the least important item. On p. 158 I was surprised to find it asserted that "…the fundamental differences in levels are not *given* in experience." But if difference of level is, as I've been urging, the same as (or a direct inference from) differences in aspectual kinds, then they are indeed given in experience. In fact, just a few sentences later a very good argument against Naturalism goes like this: "Even in the naturalistic thesis that the living world can be completely reduced to the physical world, the difference between both worlds is the hidden point of departure, its denial a theoretical amendment after the fact!" After what fact? I don't see how this can be answered except by saying: "after the fact that the difference has been experienced pre-theoretically." But in that case, why deny that the level-differences are given? They may remain implicit in pre-theoretical experience as opposed to being made explicit by theoretical analysis, but whatever can be made explicit had to have been there already.

On this same page and in connection with the same point, differences of levels (quale differences) are said to be known by 'intuition" — a point I not only agree with but find to be under-emphasized. But when connected with the disclaimer that what is being known by intuition is not given in experience, intuition is thereby made to sound like a Kantian mental capacity by which we read into experience what would otherwise not be there. Given the overall tenor of the book, I take this to be simply an unintended glitch. For no one can argue that *there are* levels of reality and at the same time admit that we know levels via intuitions, if those intuitions impose upon reality what is not already there.

Finally, I am left with a fundamental question about the central claim of the GTEE. That claim is that there are levels among living things (and throughout reality generally) which are emergent and irreducible. This means that higher levels are not caused by lower levels; the lower are pre-conditions for the higher, but do not produce them. This view is set over against Dooyeweerd's reservations concerning evolution as a whole. In this connection Klapwijk objects to the way Dooyweerd saw type laws as an obstacle to evolution despite calling it "an attractive theory." Klapwijk points out that taken that way, type laws amount to replacements for Aristotelian changeless essences. By contrast, he wishes to allow for both gradualist changes within indionomies and saltations by which new idionomic levels appeared.

The problem is that this GTEE alternative to Dooyeweerd appears to be saddled with the same problem type laws have. If things cannot evolve from one Dooyeweerd-type to another, neither can they evolve from one Klapwijkian indionmy to another. For as Klapwijk explains it, the GTEE holds that the appearance of a new level is not caused by any lower level as a totality, nor is it produced by gradual changes in a lower level, nor is there downward causation. So what, then, could possibly produce a new idionomic level of life forms?

You might think that at this point the answer would be "God," but it is not. Klapwijk rightly sees that move as invoking a "God of the gaps" interventionist explanation, and rejects it. But that leaves us with a theory in which "emergence" is pure mystery. It is not a name for a process, but for a puzzle. Indeed, it is more than a puzzle because, given the parameters of the theory, it recommends belief in something that *cannot* have a cause and yet is not God.

Roy Clouser

Bradley Monton, *Seeking God in Science: An Atheist Defends Intelligent Design*. Peterborough, ON & Buffalo, NY 2009: Broadview Press. 177 pages. ISBN 9781551118635.

This is a remarkable book, in a number of respects. First of all, its author is a card-carrying atheist but its goal is, as the subtitle says, to *defend* intelligent design (ID). Second, it actually does a *better* job at this than most pro-ID books whose authors have religious background views more hospitable to ID. Third, the book consistently avoids getting bogged down in the political and cultural issues associated with ID and keeps a relentless focus on the more important question whether ID is true. Fourth, throughout the book, the author is open-minded and fair about both the support for his own atheistic position and the force of the arguments for ID. The often confused and heated debates about evolution, creationism, and ID need the kind of coolheaded clear thinking this book exemplifies. Bradley Monton provides powerful proof of the usefulness of philosophy.

The book consists of four chapters. In chapter 1 Monton articulates the doctrine of ID. Chapter 2 discusses whether ID may count as science. In chapter 3 five arguments for ID are presented and evaluated. The book closes with a chapter about whether ID should be taught in schools. Although I will raise some critical questions below for the purposes of this review, there should be no doubt that I am very sympathetic to the project of this book and largely in agreement with many of the specific arguments it contains.

Chapter 1 offers some illuminating tweaking with various possible definitions of ID. Monton settles on the following: "The doctrine of intelligent design holds that certain global features of the universe are best explained by an intelligent cause, *or* that certain biologically innate features of living things are best explained by the intentional actions of an intelligent cause which is not biologically related to the living things, not by an undirected process such as

natural selection" (27). This definition best captures what ID proponents are after, or at least what they should be after if they want their position to be as strong as possible. Contrary to what many people assume, then, ID is not only about finding evidence of design in the biological evolution of living things on this planet, but also about cosmology and the origin of life. While I agree with Monton that ID ought to be understood in this broader sense, it should also be pointed out that the term 'ID' is not always used in this sense. Often, people use it to refer to the narrower class of arguments that try to find evidence for an intelligent cause in the evolution of living things.

Interestingly, Monton actually accepts the central claim in the aforementioned definition: He believes it is true that some features of the universe or living things are best explained by an intelligent cause. However, he does not accept the inference from ID being the *best explanation* to it being *true*. He thinks some features of the universe simply do not have any explanation at all; they are brute facts. This leads me to a question about his position. When discussing pro-ID arguments in chapter 3, Monton elaborates on various possible naturalistic explanations of seemingly intelligently designed phenomena. It wasn't always clear to me if he was merely holding these up for consideration to show that pro-ID arguments aren't watertight, or if he was making the stronger claim that the naturalistic explanations he discusses are in fact equally good or better explanations. The latter would be at odds with his admission in chapter 1 that ID provides the best explanation of the phenomena under discussion.

In chapter 2, Monton dissects the judge's ruling in the 2005 Dover trial that ID counts as religion, not science. Although the bottom line is that the entire issue whether ID is science is moot, because the really important question is whether it is true, the chapter still contains insightful discussions of the problems of methodological naturalism — i.e., the doctrine which holds that science may never appeal to non-natural causes — and it exposes various weaknesses in attempted defenses of the doctrine. Readers familiar with Alvin Plantinga's and Del Ratzsch's thinking on Christian science will recognize some of the arguments.

The core of the book is chapter 3. Monton considers the following ID arguments: (i) the argument from cosmic fine-tuning, (ii) the cosmological argument, (iii) the argument from the origin of life, (iv) an evolution-based argument (Michael Behe's irreducible complexity argument), and (v) an intriguing argument to the effect that we are living in an intelligently designed computer simulation. He finds all of these arguments (except the evolution-based one) somewhat plausible, but not enough to accept their conclusion. He doesn't consider the option that the arguments together might make a cumulative case for ID, but I suspect he wouldn't find this a promising idea.

Monton levels an interesting new objection to the fine-tuning argument (i). He argues that it is inappropriate for most of us to take a firm stand on the force of this argument, since we are not in an epistemic position to evaluate the evidence for fine-tuning properly. Only a few cosmologists are and they disagree in their judgment. I wonder, though, why Monton does not object to biological ID arguments on similar grounds. Presumably neither he nor many

other philosophers are particularly well positioned to evaluate the chemical and biological evidence pertaining to the origin of life and the power of unguided evolutionary processes. If that is correct, then we should tread carefully in endorsing or rejecting such arguments. Perhaps Monton nonetheless rejects evolution-based ID arguments because he believes there is more consensus in biology about the relevant issues than there is in cosmology about fine-tuning. Whether this assessment is correct, remains to be seen. As I understand it, many biologists now admit that natural selection alone does not suffice to explain biodiversity and they hypothesize various additional mechanisms (although none of these include ID).

Monton's evaluation of both the origin of life argument (iii) and the irreducible complexity argument (iv) leans on the possibility of our universe being spatially infinite. Contrary to popular belief, the Big Bang hypothesis does not include the claim that our universe is spatially finite and expanding; it might as well have been spatially infinite right from the start. Monton reports that current cosmology takes this latter option very seriously. An infinite universe blocks the inference to ID: Even if there is just the slightest chance of life and intelligent embodied beings like ourselves arising by naturalistic means, an infinite universe will contain an infinite number of planets with intelligent life (assuming other parts of the universe are roughly similar to our part).

Given the growing popularity of theistic evolutionism, also in the Netherlands, I found Monton's critical appraisal of theistic evolutionists' dismissal of ID refreshing. He takes Ken Miller and Denis Alexander to task for criticizing ID on the wrong grounds: ID is not anti-science, nor are ID arguments obviously fallacious arguments from ignorance or God-of-the-gaps arguments. I myself am often surprised to hear people announce that they reject ID and believe in theistic evolution instead. On Monton's definition of ID (quoted above), it is easy to see that theistic evolutionism counts as a form of ID, provided theistic evolutionists believe their doctrine on the grounds that it provides the best explanation for certain features of living things — which they certainly should, because it is mysterious on what other grounds, if not these, they would want to believe it.

Even though the final chapter will mostly be of interest to American readers, it also offers insights of general importance. Monton points out that a compelling answer to the question whether teaching ID is good or bad for students requires extensive empirical research on students' long-term intellectual, political, and sociocultural development. Absent such studies, proclamations on either the benefits or drawbacks of teaching ID must remain speculative. Monton also holds a plea for inquiry-based science education, as opposed to fact-based education. Teachers should foster an understanding of science as a dynamic critical enterprise, in which evidence is weighed and arguments are evaluated to arrive at theories and explanations that best approximate the truth. In such an approach there is nothing wrong with also discussing problems in evolutionary theory and evaluating the arguments for and against ID, as long as that is done in a non-proselytizing manner.

I wish that every scientist, philosopher, theologian, or public figure who wants to say something about ID would first pick up a copy of this book, study it carefully, and then reconsider whether she or he really wants to say it. I'm sure that would save us all a host of muddled arguments and unwarranted opinions.

Jeroen de Ridder

Alvin Plantinga and Michael Tooley, *Knowledge of God*. Malden, MA / Oxford 2008: Blackwell. x + 270 pages. ISBN 9780631193647.

This book offers the kind of sustained discussion one would wish to see more often: informed, intelligent, creative, to the point, and rigorous. Two highly distinguished philosophers, Alvin Plantinga and Michael Tooley, debate arguments for and against the existence of God and the rationality of belief in God. Both authors give an opening statement in which they present their initial arguments. This is followed by two rounds of reactions in which each of them critically engages the other's arguments. In this review I will summarize the main lines of argument while inserting some brief questions and evaluative comments.

In his opening statement, Plantinga starts with a familiar characterization of (Christian) theistic belief. A theist believes that a personal omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good God is the creator and sustainer of everything that exists. Relying on his proper functionalist account of knowledge, Plantinga goes on to argue that theistic belief is likely to be warranted if theism is true. This is important, for it means that objections to theism must attack its truth, not the possibility of rational belief in it.

The bulk of the chapter then presents an indirect argument for the truth of theism by arguing against one of its main rivals, *naturalism*: roughly the position that everything that exists is natural, from which it follows that neither God nor other entities with 'godlike' qualities exist. Plantinga doesn't mention that the cogency of this argumentative strategy depends on a hidden premise that the rival positions under discussion exhaust the possibilities. Some people may want to deny this and urge that Plantinga needs additional arguments to establish the truth of *theism* as opposed to polytheism, pantheism, or more fanciful non-naturalistic views.

The case against naturalism has three parts. (1) Naturalism cannot accommodate the notion of proper function. If naturalism is true, organisms and organs do not have proper functions. And that implies that derivative notions, such as health and sanity, have no application — which is absurd. The reason for this is that the notion of proper function only makes sense in the context of conscious design. Naturalistic analyses of proper function fail. I have two questions about this argument. First, is there really an *everyday* notion of proper function; isn't proper function to some extent a technical term that philosophers or scientists can define for their own purposes? Second, assuming there is an everyday notion of proper function, is its meaning sufficiently well-

determined to do the work Plantinga wants it to do, to wit ruling out naturalistic analyses in highly contrived counterexamples?

(2) Naturalism is self-defeating. Someone who believes in its truth has a defeater for everything she believes. This part is Plantinga's famous evolutionary argument against naturalism, the core of which is the claim that natural selection doesn't select cognitive faculties for their reliability but only for their contribution to fitness. Since the adaptive usefulness of cognitive faculties has no implication whatsoever for their reliability, someone who believes that our cognitive faculties have been produced by naturalistic processes should be skeptical about their reliability and hence about everything she believes. As Tooley rightly points out, the Achilles heel of this argument is the claim that adaptive usefulness and reliability aren't positively correlated at all.

(3) Naturalism cannot accommodate belief. If naturalism is true, nobody ever believes anything. The reason is this: Just as one can simply see that a squirrel cannot be a number, one can see, upon reflection, that it is impossible for material things to think or have cognitive content. I share Tooley's main worry with this argument: It hinges solely on the reliability of our intuitions regarding what material things can or cannot do. I am pretty sure that we tend to have a firm grasp on what 'medium-sized dry goods' can do, but I am not so confident about our grasp on the capabilities of highly complex arrangements of living brain tissue.

Let's now turn to Tooley's opening statement. Its core is a two-step argument against the existence of God that proceeds from premises about particular evils such as the famous Lisbon earthquake. The conclusion of the first step is that the probability that God didn't exist at the time of the particular evil under consideration is less than one half. The second step lowers the probability of God's non-existence by taking into consideration multiple evils at different times. The details of the argument get somewhat technical as they involve formalized inductive logic, but we can appreciate its flavor without going into technicalities.

A crucial premise is the claim that we can move from *known* wrong- and rightmaking properties of an action to the right- or wrongness of an action *all things considered*. Tooley claims that our knowing that a particular action — for instance, the choosing to allow the Lisbon earthquake — has a very serious wrongmaking property and no known counterbalancing rightmaking properties licenses an inference to the conclusion that the logical probability that the action is wrong all things considered is greater than one half. This move attempts to undercut a popular reply to the evidential problem of evil, which holds that our epistemic position with regard to the moral qualities of God's actions is to feeble to speak with any significant degree of confidence. It remains to be seen, however, whether the support Tooley offers for his claim will convince many people. One reason to be skeptical here is that Tooley's reasoning relies heavily on contentious *a priori* judgments about how many right- and wrongmaking properties actions are likely to possess. As Plantinga rightly points out in his reply, we would do better from a rational point of view to withhold judgment on such matters.

This brings me to one of the few points where I felt the interaction between the two authors to turn out slightly disappointing. As I said, Tooley's argument crucially involves judgments about the *a priori* logical probability of propositions about right- and wrongmaking properties. His support for these judgments is negative: He observes that we do *not* have any reasons to believe, say, that there are more right- than wrongmaking properties. Against this, Plantinga points out — correctly, in my view — that the intrinsic logical probability of propositions should not be equated with the epistemic justification we possess for these propositions. In his final reply, Tooley apparently misses the point of this objection altogether, or else has fundamentally different views on the issues, which he doesn't articulate. The result is that the authors seem to be talking at cross-purposes about an issue of central importance to Tooley's project.

The book contains much more intriguing arguments, but space is lacking to summarize them all. There is a discussion of whether atheism should be the default position in debates about God's existence, several naturalistic construals of belief and content are scrutinized and the possibility of thinking robots is investigated, and there are criticisms and defenses of Plantinga's theory of knowledge.

One of the major attractions of a book like this is that, even though in the end the authors do not seem to be any closer to one another than they were at the beginning of the discussion, it gives you an impression of the kind of basic commitments it takes to defend either a coherent theistic worldview or a naturalistic one. This is an important task for philosophy. As the American analytic philosopher David Lewis used to say, philosophical arguments 'measure the price'. When that is accomplished, we still face the question which prices are worth paying. The reader has to make up his or her own mind about that.

To conclude, this is an excellent book, which should be of interest both to people who are looking for a high-level introduction to some of the central debates in the philosophy of religion, as well as to those who are already familiar with the literature and are interested in the niceties of Plantinga's arguments against naturalism and Tooley's sophisticated atheological argument from evil. Highly recommended.

Jeroen de Ridder

Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Justice: Rights and Wrongs*. Princeton and Oxford 2008: Princeton University Press. XXI + 400 pages. ISBN 978-0691129679

On October 19, 2007, Nicolas Wolterstorff was awarded a honorary doctorate at the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam. Before the official ceremony took place a number of VU colleagues discussed Wolterstorff's work in a small symposium. Wolterstorff himself answered their remarks. Henk Woldring, who was the promoter of Wolterstorff, had given me the then unpublished manuscript of Justice, rights and wrongs. So I had the opportunity to comment on that book. The different contributions and the reaction of Wolterstorff were published in

the following year (Henk E.S. Woldring, ed., *Essays in Honour of Nicholas P. Wolterstorff,* Amsterdam: VU University Press, 2008). This review therefore has the character of a continued discussion.

But before I pass over to some substantial disagreements I want to say first that Wolterstorff has written a remarkable book. As I said in my first comment: he makes true what he writes in his preface. He speaks for the wronged in the world. He makes perfectly clear, already in the opening pages, in which way the supposed good of oppressed people can be used to violate their rights and how 'benevolence' can be used as an instrument of oppression. He defends the rights of the oppressed against objections from different sides: Christians who believe that in the New Testament love has replaced justice, communitarians who believe rights to be dangerously individualistic, other scholars and politicians who believe rights to be an invention of the West, not applicable in other cultures where the group may be more important than its members. Wolterstorff moreover does so with passion as well as with a wide range of good arguments and in a clear style. I believe nobody who is seriously interested in justice and rights may omit reading this book.

Wolterstorff confronts two conceptions of justice: justice as right order and justice as inherent rights. The last conception is quite often claimed as a result of the enlightenment or, perhaps, of Ockham's nominalism. Wolterstorff holds, by contrast, that inherent human rights were present already in the Old Testament and were conceptualized in the 12th century by canonist lawyers. The right order conception also knows rights, at least nowadays. But justice as inherent rights claims that human individuals have at least some rights just by being human. These rights are not conferred.

Wolterstorff's focus is mainly on moral rights. Much attention is given in recent literature to one particular type of moral rights: the political second order right that some first order rights are implemented in positive law. But the legality of human rights is not Wolterstorff's topic.

I will concentrate this review on one point: the grounding of human rights. There is, of course, an obvious difficulty in any grounding: to justify human rights one needs premises which on the one hand are substantial enough to justify the rights and which on the other hand are more or less generally acceptable. It is, for this reason, impossible to find a rock bottom of normative knowledge which can do the job.

Let us look to Wolterstorff's grounding. Every grounding I am aware of uses the concept of the worth or the dignity of individual human persons as value which justifies human rights. But, Wolterstorff argues, this worth or dignity cannot just float free: "always there has to be something that gives the entity such worth as it has, some property, achievement, or relationship on which its worth supervenes" (p. 341).

All secular groundings of human rights are unsuccessful. In most cases these groundings select some property of humans (e.g. Kantian rationality) as ground. But, apart from the question how these characteristics could give the required worth, there is the problem that there are many individuals who lack the properties which should do the job. Individual persons e.g. might not be

rational, because they are too young or because they suffer from Alzheimer's disease (chapter 15). So Wolterstorff offers a theistic grounding.

He starts his discussion of this theistic grounding with the biblical thesis that God created humankind in His image. But he concludes, after ample discussion, that "(t)he image of God is not adequate, all by itself, for grounding natural human rights"(p. 352). The problem is mainly the same as with secular grounding. "If we interpret the image of God along capacity-resemblance lines, then … not all human beings possess the image" (p.352). There is a more plausible interpretation of 'the image of God', Wolterstorff argues: along 'nature-resemblance lines'. But again: some human beings are malformed. It is not clear why persons who lack the characteristics which make human nature "the image of God" have some worth.

But does Wolterstorff's own theistic grounding fare better? He says that God's love for individual human beings give them their worth. To defend this thesis he distinguishes between love as attraction, love as attachment and love as benevolence (p. 188 ff, p. 358, 359). Love as attraction presupposes some worth in its object. Love as benevolence may enhance worth because the life of its object may become a better life, but "(b)eing an object of benevolence is not, as such, an enhancement of worth ("p.359). It is the love as attachment which bestows worth on every human being.

I criticized this position in the symposium in 2007. Love as attachment, I summarized Wolterstorff, means that the lover is attached to the loved person, just as a human being may be attached to some object because her deceased father has used it. By violating such an object one violates the person who is attached to the object. In comparable way, by wronging a human person one wrongs God, who is attached to each and every human being. But, I continued, the consequence is that when one wrongs a human being, then in the end one does not wrong that human being, but one only wrongs God. So this fails as a defence of the worth of human individuals. If am attached to my dog and someone hurts my dog, he wrongs me. He can only wrong the dog if the dog itself has some worth (see Woldring, p.68).

Wolterstorff conceded my point, but said that he believed to have repaired the flaw in the published book (Woldring, p. 98). Comparing the book with the earlier manuscript we can see that he now distinguishes between different types of attachment. The attachment to a relic because it belonged to my late father is different from the attachment a person acquires by being appointed in a worthy position. The example is an ambassador appointed by a queen. The ambassador now earns gestures of respect that would be inappropriate before her appointment (p.358-360).

But I am not sure that this distinction is of much help. Recently an Israeli minister, who was angry about a tv serial in Turkey, insulted the Turkish ambassador. It was generally understood that it was not the ambassador in person who was insulted; the insult was an insult of the Turkish nation which was represented by him. The wronging of someone as an ambassador is the wronging of the person or collectivity he is an ambassador of.

As I said before, we don't have a rock bottom of normative knowledge. This implies that every grounding or justification of the worth of human individuals is dependent upon context: as soon as we find or produce some shared understanding we might argue from there. Every justification is provisional. It may rest upon factual beliefs which later appear to be false. Or it may start from normative principles which we no longer find acceptable.

I suggested during the 2007 symposium two possible points of grounding individual human dignity: attempts to solve disagreement and guidance of our interpretations of the human rights. And I argued that Wolterstorff's grounding was of little help in these respect.

As to the first point it should be noted that, even if Wolterstorff's grounding is a valid one, it can only appeal to people who believe in an existing God, who is attached to all of us. Wolterstorff knows that very well. He explicitly recognizes that he only argued "that a grounding of natural human rights is available to the person who holds the theistic conviction indicated" (p. 360). He did not argue for these theistic convictions himself, although he believes them to be true.

This underlines what I said about context. I myself don't believe this to be a problem. In his preface Wolterstorff himself also rejects foundational thinking (p. xi). But I am afraid that there is some tension between his non-foundationalist philosophy on the one hand and his need for grounding natural human rights on the other hand.

I suggested that if we agree on (some interpretation of) human dignity of each and every individual then that might be enough. Of course, nothing is wrong with philosophers trying to find deeper ground. But as long as we fundamentally disagree about these deeper grounds, we should do with our overlapping consensus on human dignity. Wolterstorff does not accept this. In his response to me as well as in his book he expresses his concern with Alzheimer patients: he needs some ground to protect them. On his last pages he is really concerned about secularization. He believes, as I do, that civilization is a thin veil and that there are many examples of persons murdering, torturing, raping others, sometimes just for fun. Our Christian heritage knows the flaws of mankind. Secularization might destroy our subculture of human rights. Wolterstorff, however, does not believe secularization becomes true.

There might be a difference here between the American and the European perspective. In Europe secularization is not something to be afraid of, it is already there. In this context it is of no help to claim our Christian groundings in order to save human rights of Alzheimer patients. We have to find common ground with other believers in human rights. And we have to build together political structures to safeguard them against whims and caprices of daily politics and opinion polls.

Arend Soeteman