

International Conference Philosophy in the Reformed Tradition

8-11 December 2021 (online)

Overview of Interest Groups

We welcome you in one or our interest groups on two occasions in our conference. Interest Groups are semi-informal discussion groups around a theme, hosted by one or more experts in the field. There are no formal presentations, however, the host(s) will give a 5 minutes introduction and possibly some questions for discussion. The aim is to discuss current issues in the field, make connections, identify common interests, potential co-authors, collaborations and grant opportunities. Participants are encouraged to unmute and interact. All Interest groups run as parallel sessions in Zoom. Most of you have indicated a preference for an interest group upon registration, but you are free to move to any interest group as you see fit. See website for more information: <https://www.reformationalphilosophy.org/rpc2021-program/>

Interest Groups are held on:

9 December 2021 13:15 – 14:15 UTC

11 December 2021 12:00 – 12:50 UTC

- Ethics (*Corné Rademaker & Bart Cusveller*)
- Politics and International Relations (*Trineke Palm*)
- Political Economics (*Govert Buijs, Andrew Basden & Joost Hengstmengel*)
- Sustainability (*Andrew Basden & Jan van der Stoep*)
- Law (*Alan Cameron & Romel Regalado Bagares*)
- Medicine and Anthropology (*Henk Jochemsen & Gerrit Glas*)
- Technology (*Wa-Chul Son & Fernando Pasquini Santos*)
- Systematic Philosophy (*Roy Clouser and D.F.M. Strauss*)
- Education (*Jan Hoogland & Edith van der Boom*)
- Normative Practices (*TBA*)
- Arts and Aesthetics (*Robert Covolo*)
- Natural Sciences (*TBA*)
- Global Christianity (*Michael Wagenman*)
- Women in the Reformational Tradition (*Elaine Storkey & Christine Boshuijzen-van Burken*)
- Sociology (*Alan Storkey & D.F.M. Strauss*)
- Theology – Reformational Philosophy Gap (*Jeremy Ive & Timoteo Gener*)

*Please note that some Interest Groups will only be hosted on one of the days

1. Ethics

Hosts: Corné Rademaker and Bart Cusveller

General themes for discussion are:

- Issues that prompt philosophical and theological ethics in the neocalvinist/reformational tradition from the participants own cultural and social contexts and practices.
- Sources and resources in philosophical and theological ethics from a neocalvinist/reformational perspective that the participants have found helpful and/or worthwhile.
- Systematic issues prompted by and needing further reflection in philosophical and theological ethics.
- Future collaboration.

9 December 2021: Ethics in the Neocalvinist tradition – health care ethics and beyond

As a starter for the conversation during the workshop on December 9, session host Bart Cusveller will very briefly give an impression from his recent work on philosophical ethics in the neocalvinist tradition, prompted by teaching professional ethics to health care workers. Workshop participants join in, bringing forward the ethical questions from their contexts, their systematic-theoretical questions, etc. During the last half hour of the workshop opportunities for collaboration will be addressed.

11 December 2021: Ethics in the Neocalvinist tradition – animal ethics and beyond

The structure for the workshop on December 11, led by Corné Rademaker, is similar, but he will start the discussion from his work in the context of human-animal relationships and ethical issues they raise. Depending on time, the duration of the session and the number of participants, discussion in this session follows his introduction. Again, opportunities for collaboration will be addressed.

2. Politics and International Relations

Host: Trineke Palm

We discuss the current issues in Politics and International Relations and how these can be addressed from the perspective of reformational philosophy. It will be an informal discussion, with many opportunities for participants to engage in the discussion and make connections.

3. Political Economics

Hosts: Joost Hengstmengel, Andrew Basden, Govert Buijs

In just the last decade, the field of economics seems to go through a severe paradigm shift. From a focus on 'homo economicus' and financial efficiency it seems to develop itself into a new science of human flourishing, environmental responsibility and values, with a new awareness of the complexity

of human choices (moving away from rational choice theory toward 'behavioral economics'). In this 'workshop/interest group' we will discuss these recent developments and try to give an assessment from a christian-philosophical perspective.

4. Sustainability

Hosts: Andrew Basden & Jan van der Stoep

We discuss the current issues in Sustainability and how these can be addressed from the perspective of reformational philosophy. It will be an informal discussion, with many opportunities for participants to engage in the discussion and make connections.

5. Law

Hosts: Romel Regalado Bagares & Alan Cameron

What is Dooyeweerd's conception of Law, and what does it mean for jurisprudential and interdisciplinary scholarship within the current broad cultural/societal and scholarly contexts?

6. Medicine and Anthropology

Hosts: Gerrit Glas and Henk Jochemsen

The group offers a platform for discussion about issues in medicine and (philosophical) anthropology from a reformational philosophical perspective. Topics to address could be:

- Medicine as a normative practice; applications of the normative practices approach to medicine
- The concept of professionalism; how to respond to current challenges to medical professionalism
- Developments in reproductive genetics
- Ethical issues in current medical practice
- Further development of Dooyeweerdian anthropology;
- Fluid identities in the current Western world; the I-self relationship; the paradox of erosion of boundaries and heightened awareness of boundaries
- And others....

7. Technology

Hosts: Fernando Pasquini (9 December 2021) and Wha-Chul Son (11 December 2021)

9 December 2021:

We will start with a discussion of "Creational Technology": a vision for technological development that preserves and enhances the creational realities (and our relationships to them), instead of extinguishing, substituting (Schuurman) or departing from them. This follows from a theological perspective of the human calling as kings and priests, and also takes as a reference the works of philosophers such as Herman Dooyeweerd, Albert Borgmann and Hartmut Rosa. This covers a lot of themes, giving directions for technological development under a Christian perspective. For example:

1. Technology that affirms time, instead of despising rhythms and occasions for our dealing with things;
2. Technology that affirms space, instead of an existence based on the "everywhere and everytime", and also protecting the built environment and its relevance;
3. Technology that affirms the natural world, instead of ignoring or destroying it;
4. Technology that affirms the body, instead of despising it as irrelevant or changeable material in our relationship with the world (a kind of gnosticism);
5. Technology that affirms community, instead of fragmenting families and institutions, and atomizing individuals;
6. Technology that affirms negativity; i.e., the reality of suffering, pain and the groaning of creation towards its redemption (instead of silencing it in a desperate attempt, such as denounced by Stanley Hauerwas' reflections on modern medicine).

11 December 2021:

Title: Will We be Networked in the Form of Avatar? On the "Metaverse" Hype

Zuckerberg, the CEO of FACEBOOK, declared recently that his company will change its name into "META" focusing on "Metaverse," a new network platform in which people meet one another in the form of an avatar. The concept and technology of Metaverse raises questions that are not new but significant. We could discuss topics such as:

- Is metaverse an inevitable future or another promotion of a tech project?
- Can/shall metaverse function as a "social" platform?
- What are (philosophical, theological, anthropological, social, etc.) implications of Metaverse?
- What insights can we draw from reformational philosophy concerning Metaverse?
- Is metaverse desirable?

8. Systematic Philosophy

Host: Roy Clouser (9 and 11 December 2021)

Host: D.F.M. Strauss – (11 December 2021)

11 December 2021

The familiar way to capture the Biblical message is to refer to the basic motive of creation, fall and redemption. However an equally significant characterization is found in the distinction between structure and direction. Keep in mind that the structure (law for) creation is directional while direction is structured.

When salvation is seen as the escape from one area of creation to another one then that initial one will be conceived as something inherently *evil* with possible escape-destinations such as moving to

rationality, to forming, to the collective whole (of the nation, the state or the church), to freedom, and so on. Yet a truly biblical perspective does not localize evil in a specific area of creation, but in the apostate direction of the human heart – and salvation is equally a directional matter, never localized in one or another area of creation only.

What is unique about the New Testament perspective is that it is the only one in world history which proclaims the unity and goodness of creation – compare 1 Timothy 4:4: “For everything God created is good.”

If we look at philosophy, and the different existing special sciences, from the depth perspective of worldview, the most remarkable fact is that we are constantly confronted by what may be called a surrogate salvation appeal. Each of these ways to salvation rests on an over-evaluation of a well-created part of reality, which at once leads to a depreciation of something else within creation – already a fundamental characteristic of the ancient heresy of gnosticism. At the same time, this attitude idolizes (deifies) something within creation – a point of departure of all idolatrous service, which brings honour meant for the Creator, to a creature. One may say that the basic motive of Scriptures is given in the distinctness of structure and direction. Wolters succinctly characterizes this structure-direction distinction: “It is in this feature of traditional philosophy, which I have called the ‘metaphysical soteriology’ (and which has been blunted but not completely eradicated, in most Christian philosophies) that its religious nature comes most clearly to the fore. In my view, it ought to be a mark of philosophy which seeks to be as radical as the Bible that it renounces this whole enterprise, and simply accepts, as a point of departure, that every creature of God is good, and that sin and salvation are matters of opposing religious direction, not of good and evil sectors of the created order. All aspects of created life and reality are in principle equally good, and all are in principle equally subject to perversion and renewal.”

Some discussion themes and questions challenges for reformational philosophy

- 1) What is distinctive about scholarly activities?
- 2) Why is “science” not objective and neutral? [Looking at the upshot of 20th century philosophy of science – the inevitability of a theoretical frame of reference and an ultimate commitment.]
With examples from the natural sciences and the humanities: if the special sciences are objective and neutral they would have lacked a *history*.
- 3) What about $2 + 2 = 4$? Is it not true for Christians and non-Christians alike?
[Christians and non-Christians are embraced by the same creation order: they are not doing different things, yet they do the same things differently – owing to the antithesis]
- 4) Since the ideal of Christian scholarship is mostly challenged from the angle of the natural sciences. As an example an apparently neat mathematical proof will be mentioned yielding opposing results owing to alternative philosophical points of departure (Cantor's proof of the non-denumerability of the real numbers).
- 5) A few examples from the disciplines of physics and biology will underscore the unavailability of an underlying philosophical frame of reference (paradigm).

- 6) How does Dooyeweerd's philosophy enable us to appreciate the uniqueness and coherence between the natural sides of reality: number, space, movement, energy-operation, life and feeling?
- 7) This may help us to identify perennial philosophical problems (such as unity and diversity, multiplicity and wholeness, constancy and change, universality and what is individual) while explaining why misunderstanding these issues result in ismic orientations (such as arithmeticism, holism, rationalism, irrationalism, realism, nominalism, physicalism, vitalism, psychologism, and so on).
- 8) How do we have to understand the relationship between biblical authority and (ontic) normativity – contrasted with the idea of human autonomy?
- 9) The first domain of normativity to be accounted for is found within the sphere of logicity where we find the contrary logical – illogical. Without an insight into logical principles (such as the principles of identity, non-contradiction, the excluded middle and sufficient ground) it would be impossible to distinguish between logically sound concepts and arguments and their illogical counterparts. Recollect an example from Kant, Frege, Russell and Cassirer: the illogical concept of a *square circle*.
- 10) The unique contribution from *Reformational Philosophy* in this regard is given in the discovery of the principle of the *excluded antinomy*, which is lying at the basis of the principle of non-contradiction. Whereas contradictions are intra-modal (for example confusing two *spatial* figures – such as a square and a circle), antinomies are inter-modal, owing to an attempt to reduce irreducible aspects to each other (such as is found in Zeno's classical arguments against multiplicity and movement (bisecting a line), Achilles and the tortoise, the flying arrow).
- 11) The all-important distinction between modal laws and type laws could be briefly explained with reference to natural and societal entities (what is known in Dooyeweerd's philosophy as individuality-structures).
- 12) The process of cultural-historical disclosure could be highlighted with a view to undifferentiated societies and the subsequent differentiation of society.
- 13) Yet throughout the history of reflection on state and society two theoretical orientations dominated the scene, namely atomism (individualism) and holism (universalism). These approaches hampered a proper understanding of the relationship between state and society.
- 14) At this stage it would be good to introduce the difference between the Roman Catholic principle of subsidiarity by contrasting it with the principle of sphere-sovereignty.
- 15) This will enable us to understand the rise of the modern idea of the state in some detail – contrasted to the legacy of kingdoms and empires.

- 16) This process should also briefly account for the impasse of modern theories of the social contract (Hobbes, Pufendorff, Locke, Rousseau and Kant) as well as the three phases of the development of the modern idea of the just state (German: *Rechtsstaat*).
- 17) Against this background a more nuanced account could be given of the place of the state within a differentiated society, including the theoretical distinctions involved in distinguishing between coordinational, communal and collective societal relationships.
- 18) Then the relationship between law and state (the jural aspect of reality and its role within the structural principle of the state) could be assessed.
- 19) Only now will it be possible to provide a more precise account of the different legal spheres found in a differentiated society – and to explain Dooyeweerd's unique contribution in this regard, concerning the difference between civil private law and non-civil private law.

9. Education

Hosts: Jan Hoogland and Edith van der Boom

Cultivating learning communities of grace in our schools and classrooms is foundational to creating effective and meaningful learning spaces. Within this interest group we will focus on topics such as attention to diversity, cultural complexity and increasingly shifting markers of origin and ethnicity, racial justice, and human sexuality and how it impacts and forms school and classroom cultures. Specifically we will seek answers to the following questions:

- How do racism and other forms of oppression underlie achievement gaps and alienation within our schools?
- How can classroom learning be linked to larger movements seeking to effect change in community?/How can school culture be a vehicle for social change?
- What is the relationship between the daily behaviour of educational leaders and the cultures of schools?

We will search for a reformational philosophy approach to the current challenges above.

10. Normative Practices

Host: Currently no host found

Several scholars in the reformational philosophy tradition have outlined an approach of normative practices, which is a conception of social practices partially based on core philosophical insights of the Dutch philosopher Herman Dooyeweerd. We ask participants to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of this approach and its potential to engage to emerging conceptions of social practices.

11. Arts and Aesthetics

Host: Robert Covolo

There has been a long standing tradition of an appreciation of Art and Aesthetics from a reformational philosophy perspective. We discuss what are current developments and opportunities.

12. Natural Sciences (11 December only)

Host: Tatas Brotosudarmo

We discuss the current issues in Natural Sciences and how these can be addressed from the perspective of reformational philosophy. It will be an informal discussion, with many opportunities for participants to engage in the discussion and make connections.

13. Global Christianity

Host: Michael Wagenman

How can reformational philosophy be helpful in addressing current shifts in Global Christianity. What does the current shift in Global Christianity mean for opportunities for furthering reformational philosophy?

14. Women in the Reformational Tradition

Hosts: Elaine Sorkey and Christine Boshuijzen-van Burken

The last quarter century in academia has been marked by the huge increase in women scholars. Areas which once were male preserves now acknowledge that women have contributed highly significant research and taken up leadership roles. It is somewhat strange, therefore, to note that women are not represented in Reformational Philosophy in the same proportions as in other fields of enquiry. This interest group will explore why this might be the case, but also note the significant work that women have done in deepening our understanding of how Reformational Philosophy provides the ground work for many other areas of scholarship.

We hope that everyone who joins this Interest Group has a chance to participate, so that we enjoy real engagement with one another.

15. Sociology

Hosts: D.F.M. Strauss (9 December 2021) and Alan Storkey

9 December 2021

The sociology group may want to read the Foreword of RST (Reintegrating Social Theory) (up to line 7 of the second page), then page through the Table of Contents and finally we may assess the analysis of one of the elementary (analogical) basic concepts of sociology, such as biotic analogies (RST 176-198).

Questions:

- (i) How does an insight in the distinctive feature of theoretical thought (modal abstraction – CH-2) enhance an understanding of the basic concepts of sociology?
- (ii) What is distinctive in the transcendental-empirical method employed by Dooyeweerd?
- (iii) What is the distortive effect of isms such as atomism (individualism), holism (universalism), rationalism, irrationalism (see RST:20), realism, nominalism?
- (vi) What is the philosophical background of the idea of the social construction of reality?
- (v) How did Dooyeweerd classify social forms of interaction?
- (vi) What are the differences between traditional and differentiated societies according to Dooyeweerd?

11 December 2021:

We celebrate the God-given relationships and institutional structures within which we live. We look at the central religious motifs driving relationships today like success, consumption, individualism, acting, control, celebrity, reward and their impact on marriage, family, communities and nations. We look at the social media impact on the content and character of relationships in home and work, and the cultural changes in the meaning of love.

16. Theology-Reformational Philosophy Gap

Hosts: Timoteo Gener and Jeremy Ive

9 December:

The first session will provide the opportunity for those attending to share challenges and prospects for a Reformational approach to theology in the 21st Century (after a brief introduction, maximum 5 minutes each followed by moderated discussion).

Drawing on the resources and insights of Reformational philosophy, we shall consider how theological reflection, including the retrieval of key elements of the Reformed theological tradition, and the repair and development of that tradition in the light of the Scriptural witness, can help us respond to the challenges of different national agendas and cultural contexts, and will explore what those responses might look like.

11 December:

The second session will draw the threads together and explore ways to deepen and systematically develop a Reformational approach to the prospects and challenges identified in the first session.