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The Great Filter and Space Exploration

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published in

Findings. A Journal of Reformational Thought
2023

[Link to publication in VU Research Portal](#)

citation for published version (APA)

Harmsen, M., & van den Brink, G. (2023). The Great Filter and Space Exploration: A Dooyeweerdian Response. *Findings. A Journal of Reformational Thought*, 5, 24-38.

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Findings

A Journal of Reformational Thought

Issue 5, June 2023

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Findings

A Journal sponsored by All of Life Redeemed International Seminars Project

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ISSN: 2744-4236

All of Life Redeemed International Seminars Project is an initiative by reformational scholars around the world to share the insights of the reformational tradition of scholarship.

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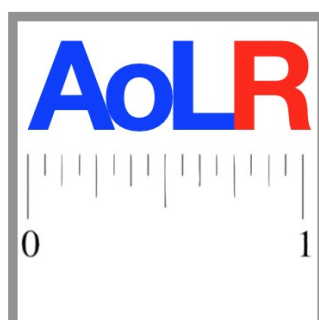
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Published by Thumbwidth Press, Dunedin, New Zealand

on behalf of All of Life Redeemed International Seminars Project



Introduction – The Editors

Welcome to Issue 5 of *Findings*.

The articles offered in this issue start with an editorial by Chris Gousmett, suggesting that the strategy of seeking exemptions from legislation to cater for the distinctive approaches of Christian organisations is mistaken, and that alternative strategies should be pursued.

This is followed by a review by Bruce Wearne of the current position and prospects for Reformational scholarship, in a context where long-held convictions about personhood, sexuality, public health, critical studies in many disciplines, make it all the more difficult to raise the kind of perspectives about which reformationally inclined scholars and students will be keen to make a contribution.

Alan Cameron then presents some of the insights from the Feldenkrais Method of somatic (body) functioning improvement which shed some light on a reformational view of the person, in particular some of the views of Herman Dooyeweerd. This is reciprocated with a reflection on how a reformational analysis gives greater meaning to the Feldenkrais perspective.

Then Léonardo Balena from Brazil explores issues of faith and sustainability, exploring how a Christian perspective on environmental preservation can avoid the problems arising from exploitation of the creation's resources without consideration of the impact this exploitation has. His exploration discusses what it means for humans to have dominion over the creation, and how redemption through Christ brings blessings for the whole of creation, not just humans.

Maaïke Eline Harmsen and Gijsbert van den Brink from The Netherlands discuss whether it is possible, taking into account the insights of Dooyeweerd's philosophy, for human beings to explore space and colonise it. Can we? Should we? Will we meet extraterrestrial life, and if so, how should we understand this in the light of Christian convictions? With the prominence of the efforts of groups like SpaceX to reach Mars and beyond, it is an issue which Christians need to grapple with.

Bruce Wearne discusses how Reformational philosophy illuminates the ways in which sociology has developed across the 20th century and its prospects for the future, and the contributions that Reformational philosophy can make not just in clarifying the issues but in pointing out new and fruitful avenues for the future of sociological research.

Finally, in a new “Department” of the journal, Chris van Haeften, also from The Netherlands, explores an issue in Dooyeweerd's philosophy, namely how his view of “reality” raises questions about how we view time, the modal scale, identity, selfhood and religion. Chris raises some provocative questions and we encourage readers to respond to help us further understand these critical but difficult issues, and to submit further articles of this sort for this section of the journal.

We trust you find these articles of interest. We welcome contributions for publication in a subsequent issue. Contact the editors on thumbwidth.press@gmail.com

Editorial: Seeking exemptions from legislation

Chris Gousmett

Making legislation in a pluralist society is fraught with difficulties. Given the diversity and incompatibility between many of the visions of life which lie behind the different cultural or social groups, it is almost inevitable that legislation affecting social life will come into conflict with some one or other, or multiple, such visions.

One way in which such conflict has been addressed in various jurisdictions is for “exemptions” to be carved out for particular groups where legislation creates an egregious clash with their visions and ways of life. Christians have not been shy to seek such exemptions for their institutions, practices, or private lives. An example from recent years in multiple countries has been the proliferation of “conversion therapy bans” in which certain practices, adjudged to be directed at changing a person’s professed sexual orientation, have been made illegal. Some practices thus outlawed are abhorred by many including Christians. As such, the intent to protect people from such abusive practices is acknowledged as necessary.

However, the legislation is often worded expansively so that it also includes practices, common among Christians and other religious groups, such as prayer and pastoral counselling, which in themselves are not considered to be abusive. This may include seeking assistance with persistent grief after a bereavement, loss of purpose from unemployment, uncertainty about a decision to marry, and many other problems for which support, advice and prayer is sought. Such requests for help are in fact specifically proscribed in connection with attempts to change someone’s sexual orientation, and controversially, can include requests from the person concerned for assistance to deal with unwanted sexual desires which conflict with their religious beliefs. So such support is prohibited from being made available even when it is sought, and consented to by all parties concerned.

While there are many objections which can be, and have been, raised against such legislation, and others like it, what are we to make of the strategy which some have adopted, of seeking an “exemption” from legislation for Christian prayer and counselling support? What are the implications of such a strategy and is it an appropriate path to follow? It seems that this approach is increasingly widely used around the world.

Other examples include exemptions sought from employment legislation, to allow Christian schools, and other organisations operating on a specific faith basis, to employ only teachers and school staff who share the school’s stated faith basis and will model and promote that throughout the life of the school. Medical personnel, and clinics operating on a faith basis, might seek exemption from requirements to refer people for services such as abortion. Government employees have sought to be exempted from handling applications for same-sex marriages, and others have sought exemptions from providing other services, or providing access to facilities for children’s

events where drag queens will provide entertainment, and similar situations where they have an ethical objection to the event (or aspects of it) which is being promoted.

One strong objection to this strategy of seeking exemptions is that it immediately positions Christians (and others wishing to use it) at odds with the principles being promoted by the legislators. They are seen to be wanting to stand outside the norms of society in order to maintain practices which are seen as objectionable and out of step with the direction society is developing.

We need to leave aside for the moment whether the position they hold is specific to them or whether many others not belonging to that faith perspective would support them and agree with them. It is an important point, and in many instances Christians can be the first to stand up and object to new laws which affect them, but also will affect others who are not necessarily organised to make a stand. Many may agree that such laws are unfair, or ridiculous, or lack common sense, and so support for positions Christians may take might be more widespread than appears to be the case.

But to return to the impressions made on wider society by this strategy, what is presented is a tacit agreement that perhaps the legislation is needed to prevent abuse of some members of society, but Christians should be “exempt” from this legislation as they say it unfairly prevents them from conducting their affairs as they wish. Take for example non-Christian teachers who are not accepted for teaching positions in a Christian school. This can be seen as discrimination and hence bigotry and narrow-mindedness by Christians. The impression is that the legislation is fine for everybody else, but “we Christians have special requirements and wish to be exempt.” That is, we wish to continue with what are perceived to be unjust, unfair and discriminatory practices because our religion demands it. As a result, Christianity as such is seen as a narrow-minded, bigoted faith whose adherents seek to be allowed to behave unfairly and unjustly towards others. It may also give the impression that some practices of Christians are abusive or unjust as such, and that governments are only protecting the weak and vulnerable from abhorrent treatment regardless of its religious basis.

Note that I am not saying that Christians who seek to employ only Christians in Christian schools, and those in the other instances mentioned above, are behaving unjustly. I am in favour of Christian schools (and other faith-based schools) being allowed to act in accordance with their faith commitments.

I am saying that the **public perception**, and specifically the perception of legislators, is that Christians seeking such exemptions do so because they wish to be allowed to continue to behave unjustly and that they are therefore narrow-minded and bigoted.

The other troubling aspect of this approach is that it tacitly acknowledges that the legislation is otherwise reasonable and should apply to others, but is unreasonable for Christians to be required to comply. The legislation as such is not objected to, just its application to Christians. As a result, Christians are seen as seeking special privileges not available to others.

What then could be possible solutions to this problem?

Firstly, I would hold that any legislation to which Christians have objections should be considered in the light of the negative impact it would have on society as a whole. That is, of course, assuming that the legislation is not drafted so as to specifically penalise Christians and those of other faiths. That is a different matter altogether. But assuming that the legislation may have detrimental consequences for Christians and other believers, it is legitimate to object to it. And even more importantly, Christians and others should object to legislation that has detrimental (unfair, unjust, discriminatory) consequences for **anyone**, and not only when the effect is on the faith to which I happen to be committed. Christians should speak out against any unfair, unjust legislation regardless of whether it affects Christians. And of course some such legislation is specifically targeting Christians not because their beliefs or practices are unjust, unfair or discriminatory, but because some political lobbies make this accusation so as to damage the reputation or viability of religious groups and their activities. There are those who attack Christianity because it is critical (through its teachings for instance on marriage and sexuality) of the views and lifestyles of the attackers. Any attempt to promote the view that marriage should be for life between one man and one woman is inherently critical of serial marriage (multiple divorces) and same-sex unions. That cannot be avoided without gutting Christianity of vital teachings which may happen to fall foul of contemporary sensibilities.

Secondly, we must develop and promote a perspective on public justice which seeks to ensure that all those in our society are treated fairly, equally, justly and without discrimination or favour by laws which apply to all. That is, discriminatory legislation must be shown for what it is because it flouts basic principles of fairness and justice, not because it has detrimental effects on some or advantageous effects for others. This means, as I mentioned above, that any unjust law should be objected to by Christians, and not only those which affect Christians unjustly. We must become known as advocates for public justice for all, and not as advocates of “exemptions from doing justice” for ourselves.

Thirdly, then, an appeal for an “exemption” from legislation should be the exception rather than the rule, and apply only in cases where no better alternative is available. If it is good legislation, then it should apply to all. If it is bad legislation (even only in part) then it should be criticised and amendments proposed and argued for, including through public protest marches and petitions seeking to present an opposing viewpoint.

Legislation which needs to carve out “exemptions” for some on the grounds that it is unfair to them is bad legislation. Instead, what we need to do is amend legislation so that exemptions are not required, in that its perspective on public justice is such that it does not create the problems for which exemptions are presently sought as a solution. This would have to include an acknowledgement of the right of institutions (such as schools and churches) to be treated fairly in terms of their own character and establishing convictions and not simply limit rights of public justice to individuals.

To enable this approach to be effective, Christians must become more alert and informed about political processes and developments. Awareness of the problems which legislation causes for

others is vital, along with support for those others to seek a just solution, if we are to hope for support when problems may arise for us. Limiting our advocacy for public justice to issues which affect only Christians is not advocacy of public justice at all, but for a form of privatised justice which perpetuates the perception that Christians (and churches) are interested only in their own privileges and advancement, with the right to discriminate against others who differ from them.

Reformational scholarship: current position and prospects

Bruce Wearne

What is the current position of and what are the prospects for reformational scholarship in Australia and New Zealand? This statement of mine is made on behalf of Alan Cameron of Wellington, New Zealand, Chris Gousmett of Dunedin, New Zealand and myself Bruce Wearne, and I live in Point Lonsdale, Victoria, Australia.

Perhaps the way to begin to come to a Biblically-directed view of the long-term prospects of reformational scholarship in the South West Pacific, would be to do some historical research and to frame our analysis by an historical account such as is given to us by Keith Sewell – who is still at work in these parts – in his 2016 work **The Crisis of Evangelical Christianity** (Wipf and Stock 2016). The crisis in Christianity, so endemic in all other parts of the West (if not the non-West as well – Africa, Asia and South America), is just as persistent here in this South West Pacific region of the globe. Reformational scholarship in the “heartlands” of the West – UK, USA-Canada, The Netherlands and Europe – is clearly caught up in all kinds of tensions and we here in the South West Pacific are also caught up in those self-same tensions. Few of our problems are unique to our local situation, although we do have distinctive historical formations to deal with on many fronts.

We may see ourselves to be in the midst of much lamentation about public life being persistently seduced and vandalised and even called into question – often the critique is inadequate, ignorant and sentimentalist. It is true that public life is subjected to ideologies that give too much emphasis to what are merely cosmetic changes to terminology or the “optics” of public appearance by celebrities. The major political parties in our polities may have demonstrated an inability to withstand this superficiality but we who are at work in reformational scholarship will have to defend the Christian integrity of our enterprise while scrupulously avoiding the impression that we have a blueprint to resolve the many-sided problems and paradoxes that confront us on all levels. We will need to find ways to encourage careful and appreciative listening to all those who are seeking to address the complex problems we face, and deepen a positive appreciation for all efforts and actions that seek to define a new agenda for caring and responsible stewardship as well as renovating public institutions in the interests of just statecrafting. And that should not prevent us from offering sharp critique when that is needed.

In this context, any reformational scholarship cannot avoid addressing this complex, many-sided cultural problematic that confronts all living under its impacts. This is a development which has big implications for the public profession of our faith and since these issues are global, this problematic needs to be addressed by a global effort, not least to provide support and resources for those Christian scholars and their communities in vulnerable situations; for instance, in Kenya, in Cambodia – places where they do not have the means or opportunity to do the research we can do and thereby help them to address their own local situation that they know because it is their daily context. We

will certainly need to get to know them and their immediate local contexts as we come to realise that their issues are also our issues and we may need to speak up in our context for them.

In that sense any initiatives that can be undertaken in this region (or any other region) have to keep in mind that no Christian person, no group of Christian persons, let alone a lone scholar or group of scholars, have it within themselves to bring about a renewal of their own whole-hearted Christian discipleship, let alone convey this renewal by their scholarship to their neighbours. Such renewal and such conveyance must be the Holy Spirit's bequest, and as such must be and remain the necessary presupposition of any truly Christian scholarly endeavour, and certainly of scholarship that wants to present itself as "reformational" and gather under the "All of Life Redeemed" banner.

And no such endeavour can be of benefit if it does not grapple with and is nurtured by the teaching of Christ Jesus that we find in the Holy Scriptures, for in Him all things hang together. With this recognition we come to the view that our interpretation of what the Scriptures are saying, and our efforts to say what Christ's redemption means, must be on the understanding that our stories, our accounts, our expositions will always be in need of ongoing reform. We can and must draw on the scriptural insights to direct our reformational scholarly endeavour and we cannot undertake scripturally directed learning (a term promoted by H Evan Runner in the '50s, '60s and '70s for North America) if the Scriptures are absent from our thinking.

This is a time when the precious few, who have an inkling that their work has been positively and creatively impacted by the labours of Herman Dooyeweerd and other "reformational scholars," must maintain a faithful and diligent patience – and patience is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit as we learn the hard lesson that in our efforts it is the LORD GOD who is watching over and making everything we do possible. Indeed, Jesus said of his disciples, I am the vine: without me you cannot do anything! And so we and they, continue to do the work we and they have been called to do, even as the organised manifestation of scholarly endeavour in, say, a distinctively reformational academy and even regularly convened conferences is not feasible in the prevailing situation which we might discern is turbulent and revolutionary.

The ongoing results of the efforts we have sought to undertake in the past, to lay a foundation for ongoing work, are now complicated immeasurably by the COVID pandemic and its aftermath, which will be a factor in our daily lives, let alone our scholarly engagement and our academic lives, potentially for years to come, possibly for as long as we continue to be given breath.

How we will need to work and operate in this context needs careful consideration, a consideration which itself must be shaped by our reformational insights, which we now must make available to others seeking direction, the way the truth and the life, seeking none other than to follow Christ, in this situation where it seems that all our previously honed wise assumptions about how we are to live seem open to question.

Consider now how our own bodies, our own physiology, and the public interpretation of our biological functioning as men and women, male and female, amenable to viral infection, is integrally part of the ongoing turbulent political contests that are being played out. These are often compoun-

ded by political, commercial and ideological interests that are not truly facing up to our global crisis in ways that can bring healing and resolution. Should we not learn to read this mayhem in ways that truly spur us on to develop the reformational scholarly contribution, such as it is, that we inherit from previous Christian scholarly generations?

The extensive and broad organisation that is sorely needed for a genuine reformation of science and scholarship may not be possible for us at this time, even if the formation of such structures, such academic structures, must remain latent as a normative task in the longer term and an ongoing calling for us as Christians and as Christian scholars anywhere and everywhere.

Many reformational scholars of necessity work in isolation or with limited support and mutual engagement with the work of others. But they are, as are we all, in need of mutual encouragement and engagement if we are to keep our work fresh and edifying. We need to do more to form relationships between ourselves to sustain and grow that which already exists if the reformational vision is to continue to have a scientific presence.

As fully part of the globe's current generation of Biblically-directed scholars we, in these parts, are praying that our work will be blessed as we commit ourselves to diligently “*carry on a long and difficult labour firmly believing that something permanent can be achieved.*” When scholarly labour is undertaken in faith, subject to the timetable of the Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, that is when our scholarship is accompanied by the “inner happiness and peace” that has already been promised to us by our Lord.

Dooyeweerd and Feldenkrais on the Human Body

Alan Cameron¹

I am an independent Christian legal scholar with a particular interest in the philosophy of law. I was a founding member of the Wellington Centre for Christian Studies based at Victoria University, and was a member of the (now defunct) Foundation for Christian Studies and Association for Christian Scholarship (New Zealand). Currently, I am helping with organization of an online series of [webinars](#) associated with the *All of Life Redeemed* Christian higher education initiative that originated in the United Kingdom. Closely associated with that recent development I have led the formation of an online group studying a Christian philosophy of law (Dooyeweerd). As a Certified Feldenkrais® Practitioner in the field of somatic (body) education I use movement with groups and individual clients to improve overall bodily functioning.

I was asked by Nicola Hoggard Creegan to write this piece for the New Zealand group Christians in Science because we are both convinced that healing involves the intersection of science and faith. Jesus healed, often by touch, and he healed even those born blind. And healing has always been and continues to be a practice which is wider than our traditional Western medicine, for all its power and the great good it has done in the last few centuries.

The integration of science with faith and other disciplines often happens by serendipity. In this case as I stumbled over the Feldenkrais Method® in the course of the search for an answer to my crippling migraine headaches. From the moment I encountered the Feldenkrais Method® as a student in weekly movement classes I was struck by the compatibility of this learning method with the perspective underlying the philosophy of law which had shaped my approach to research and teaching in the discipline of law. There were two notable shared features. They both had a holistic view of the human person and both were based on an interdisciplinary approach to science that supported their holistic understanding of the human person.

Moshe Feldenkrais (1904-1984) Doctor of Science (Physics), inventor, cartographer and judo exponent, was brought up in a Hasidic Jewish religious community in the Ukraine.² Like many others with a Jewish upbringing who ended up emigrating from Europe, his religious upbringing was accompanied by a life-long interest in scientific learning, but without maintaining an active religious faith commitment to Hasidic Judaism. This made me take notice because in my Christian faith I have been very influenced by Herman Dooyeweerd (1894-1977), a Dutch, neo-Calvinist philosopher,³ who was also very strongly attracted to scientific explanations of the world. For him

1 Originally published as a blog for NZ Christians in Science. Reproduced with minor editing by permission.

2 Mark Reese. *Moshe Feldenkrais: A Life in Movement* vol. 1, esp. Ch 1: Eastern European Roots, and Kaetz, *Making Connections: Hasidic Roots and Resonance in the Teachings of Moshe Feldenkrais*, 2007, River Publishing Centre.

3 See Marcel Verburg's intellectual biography, *Herman Dooyeweerd: The Life and Work of a Christian Philosopher*, 2015, Paideia Press.

science encompassed all the disciplines of higher education, including not only the “natural” sciences but all of the “social” sciences including his own specialist legal discipline of law.

Dooyeweerd’s theory of the human body

Although Dooyeweerd never realised one of his scholarly projects to develop a fully-fledged scientific account of the human person, the main lines of such an account were expressed in 32 “theses” that were to be the basis of a fully worked-out “philosophical anthropology.”⁴ A central tenet of his approach was that a biblically-based view of the human person should break radically with dualistic “scholastic” theological approaches. In his view this had never been achieved, notwithstanding the Reformation’s break with Roman Catholicism.

Dooyeweerd’s non-dualistic view of the person was that humans comprise a complex unity of diverse interconnected functions (functional aspects or *modes of functioning*) arranged in four different types of “individuality structures” and concentrated in the “heart” as the religious centre of the human being who is created in the image of God. The four “enkaptically interlaced”⁵ structures in ascending order of increasing complexity are:

1. A structure with a distinct physico-chemical qualification subject to the laws of physics;
2. A biotically qualified structure of living cells that is distinct from the physical;
3. A “psychic or instinctive” “feeling” functionally-qualified-structure which is bound into the preceding biotic and physically qualified structures, and
4. The highest functional structure that is (“enkaptically”) bound up with all of the “earlier” three is the act-structure, referring to the distinctive structural type that relates to human actions or acts.

These can be summarized as acknowledging that humans obey the rules of physics, and are also sensate biological creatures, but that we have another level, that of agency, which is interconnected with all the lower levels. According to Dooyeweerd, human acts emanate from the “soul or spirit,” or the “heart” out of which flows everything a person does. (Proverbs 4:23 NIV) He described the heart as the religious concentration-point of all human functions. The structures are not “parts” of a whole but intertwined bodily structural types that in their “enkaptic intertwinements” comprise the body as a total whole. At the foundation of the interconnected structures of the body are the functional *aspects*. These are not merely human modes of functioning, but universal cosmic aspects because every thing, event, process, and living being functions in these creationally given, interconnected modal aspects. In his general philosophical systematics he identified fifteen irreducible aspects of reality whereby earlier aspects provide the foundation for later aspects. The first is the aspect of discrete quantity (numerical) followed by the spatial (continuous extension),

4 *The Theory of Man: Thirty Two Propositions on Anthropology* available at: <https://reformationaldl.org/2019/07/15/the-theory-of-man-thirty-two-propositions-on-anthropology-herman-dooyeweerd/>

5 Enkaptic interlacement refers to the existence of separate structures which are entwined in such a way that they cannot be isolated without destroying the entity. A good example is the shell of a turtle.

kinematic (movement), physical (energy-effect), biotic (organic life), psychical/sensory, logical/analytical, historical (cultural-formative), linguistic (symbolic/sign), social, economic, aesthetic, jural/juridical, ethical and faith aspects.

When I became a “student”, and later trained to be a practitioner in the Feldenkrais Method® of somatic learning, I was struck by the similarities between Dooyeweerd’s holistic, functional-structural view of the human person and Feldenkrais’s integrated *functional* view of the human being. The similarities were particularly notable in their respective understandings of human functioning.

Feldenkrais and the human body

The aim of the Feldenkrais Method® is to provide a method of learning that enables a person to improve their overall ability to function in life in a way that approaches attainment of their fullest potential – to come to their full “maturity” in a somatic (bodily) way. (Moshe Feldenkrais, *Body and Mature Behaviour*). The practitioner teaches this in two ways: Awareness Through Movement® group classes comprising orally delivered lessons, and one-to-one, hands on Functional Integration® sessions.

Movement coupled with *sensory* “awareness” is the basis of this somatic learning method. Awareness here means paying attention to one’s *sensory* experience in movement to discover your habitual bodily patterns. They might include habits that inhibit realisation of a person’s potential in all of their activities and which are a significant contributor to a wide range of personal functional problems. They may include issues directly related to bio-mechanical functional patterns, but also to a wide range of habitual patterns of functioning – for example, habitual *visual* patterns that are implicated in limitation of the range of movement of the head, shoulders, arms, pelvis, legs, etc., and actions such as breathing.

Movement is used as the prime means of teaching in this method. But it achieves its aim by bringing conscious *analytical* attention to the interconnections of patterns of movement with other modes of functioning within the body that are always involved in a wide range of common human activities. This heightened bodily self-awareness helps to identify brain-based habitual patterns embedded in the nervous system that contribute to difficulties encountered in carrying out actions and activities.

This neuro-plasticity approach to somatic learning is premised on the total rejection of any dualistic notion of a human person as comprised of a body and a mind. Similar to Dooyeweerd’s conception of the human being, Feldenkrais’s conception of the human being is functional-structural whereby all modes in which human function in concrete acts of life are interconnected (much as all the structures Dooyeweerd outlines are interconnected also). In my training, I was taught how to direct my thinking (analytical function) to my sensory experience of bodily sensations and emotions based in the nervous system. That heightened awareness included not only my and others’ movement patterns but increased *spatial* awareness of how the laws of *physics* (e.g. gravity) operate through the skeleton and muscles in way that is detectable in the *sensory* experience of the body founded in the *biology* of the body. Practitioners of his method realise that, although somatic learning is rooted

in all the “lower” functional modes that Dooyeweerd identified as the numerical, spatial, kinematic, physical, biotic, and sensory/psychical aspect, total human functioning involves those substratum functional aspects being intimately connected to the higher functions of thinking (and consciousness), the cultural formative (self-formation), lingual (language) and social aspects. The method also pays attention to the *economy* and *aesthetics* of (“elegant”) movement in human actions.

The Feldenkrais Method® and the science on which it is based does not purport to be founded in a specifically Christian conception of the human body such as found in Dooyeweerd. However, the holistic functional-modal and science-based understanding of the human body which they both advocate provides a sound basis for implementing an approach to somatic learning that expresses the two greatest religious injunctions of Jesus: to love God with your whole self, and to love your neighbour as you love yourself. (Mark 12:30-31) I regard both my academic work and my somatic educational practice as ways of obeying those commandments.⁶

6 For a recent analysis of the Feldenkrais Method see the popular book, Norman Doidge, *The Brain’s Way of Healing*, 2016, Penguin, chapter 5.

Faith and Sustainability

A Christian Contribution to the Issue of Environmental Preservation

Léonardo Balena and Ney Maranhão

1. Introduction

The existence of art requires no justification by social, political, economic or even evangelistic criteria. Art needs no justification, since it is not a means to something, but an end in itself, having meaning as God's creation. Although it can perform many functions – such as communicating, teaching, entertaining, and contemplation – art presupposes none of them, but rather owes its existence and meaning to the fact that it is a work of the Creator, as Rookmaaker states.¹

Likewise, nature has value in itself, and does not need to be justified by its multiple purposes. To say that something has value in itself does not mean that it is absolute or autonomous, since nothing beneath the sun is free from the dependence imposed by reality, in relation to both Creator and to other creatures. On the contrary, to argue that nature has intrinsic value amounts to arguing that nature's importance is not imposed on it by its usefulness to humanity but is found in the fact that God made it.

According to Schaeffer,² people who believe that the world came into existence by mere chance are unable to attribute concrete intrinsic value to anything, because such individuals lack an ultimate source of meaning. The existentialist philosopher Albert Camus himself testifies to this condition by pointing out that if existence is absurd, how much more so philosophy and the other sciences.³ However, for the Christian, it should be different. Since he or she knows the Creator of all things, it is necessary to recognize the relevance of divine creation, including fauna and flora. However, it can be observed that the Church, in the last decades, has not properly considered the issue of environmental preservation and care of nature. There are two possible, but not exclusive, reasons for this: the dichotomy of thought and the polarization of the argument.

First, based on a mistaken Platonic perspective, many Christians tend to forget the original goodness of creation and equate it with sin. If the kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36) and if true religion is to keep oneself uncontaminated from this world (James 1:27), it follows that the things of the world, including politics, work, science, and nature itself, are sinful or, at the very least, inferior, and must be set aside in favour of the sacred things, the things of the Spirit, such as the Bible and the Church.⁴ Although it adopts a supposedly orthodox terminology, such a

1 H R Rookmaaker. *O dom criativo*. Brasília: Monergismo, 2018, p. 99.

2 Francis Schaeffer. *Poluição e a morte do homem*. São Paulo: Cultura Cristã, 2003, p. 42. [Pollution and the death of man]

3 Albert Camus. *Le mythe de Sisyphe*. Paris: Gallimard, 1945, p. 14. [The Myth of Sisyphus]

4 See the criticism of this levelled by Albert M. Wolters, *A criação restaurada: a base bíblica para uma cosmovisão reformada*. São Paulo: Cultura Cristã, 2019, p. 68. [Creation Regained]

dichotomous view, as will be seen later, is harmful because, among other reasons, creation is belittled as having a secondary relevance.

The second reason why Christians face difficulty in addressing the issue of environmental sustainability can be found in the phenomenon of thematic polarization, which tends to arise in sharply divided political settings. Such a phenomenon produces lonely islands of opinion that form an unbridgeable chasm of thoughts and beliefs between politically antagonistic groups. Its first commandment states that it is impossible for a certain issue, if first claimed by the alleged opponent, to be defended in a manner shared by those belonging an opposing group. It seems that for some Christians, words like “ecology,” “deforestation,” and “conservation” are synonymous with political struggles waged by rival groups.

The immediate consequence resulting from the above thoughts is contempt for nature, and the further consequence is the secularization of the area. How many groups of orthodox Christians are there who are interested in the defence of the environment and do anything to preserve it? The term “ghostly spirituality” refers to the Church that has no interest in the created world, that is, it does not have a body to exist in the midst of the community.⁵ What is the gain of performing charity and inviting others to worship if Christians do not recognize God as the Lord over life in its entirety, including the Lord over creation?

In this way, considering the above-mentioned problematic, the present text aims, by means of an introductory approach, to analyze, according to the biblical principles of creation, fall, and redemption, what should be the behaviour of human beings when dealing with the preservation of nature – seen as God's creation, stained by sin and redeemed by Christ.

2. Creation of Nature

Lynn White Jr., a former University of California professor, wrote in his well-known article “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis” that our ecology is conditioned by our beliefs.⁶ In other words, how a community decides to behave with regard to the preservation of the environment depends on its beliefs about its nature and destiny, that is, on its religion.⁷ As far as Christians are concerned, they believe in the creation account contained in the first chapter of the book of Genesis, which, in the opening verse, states that “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1).

It is relevant to remember that the word “creation” throughout the Scriptures assumes a double meaning. It can refer to God’s creative activity, which is represented through creative acts – for example, “Let there be light” (Gen. 1:3), “Let there be a firmament” (Gen. 1:6), “Let there be

5 H R Rookmaaker. *A arte não precisa de justificativa*. Viçosa: Ultimato, 2010, p. 24. [Art needs no justification]

6 Lynn White Jr. The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis. *Science* 155, 1967, (pp. 1203-1207) p. 1205, n. 3767.

7 Schaeffer agrees with this statement, because, according to him, “people do what they think.” He disagrees, however, with the conclusions of White’s text, for whom it would be necessary to let go of the arrogance of orthodox Christianity, based on the idea of dominion over creation, and, consequently, to equalize all living creatures. *Poluição e a morte do homem*, p. 14.

lights” (Gen. 1:14), etc.; but the term also expresses that God not only creates but also sustains the created order (Psalm 33:9). To underestimate the second concept of creation is to traffic in some form of deism, imagining that God created the universe but then left it. In fact, the same creator God is the God who maintains existence, creation, and from this perspective, there is an ongoing correlation between sovereign activity and created order.⁸

Having considered the concept, what is the purpose of creation? The author of Hebrews points out: “In bringing many sons and daughters to glory, it was fitting that God, *for whom and through whom everything exists, should* make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through what he suffered” (Heb. 2:10, emphasis added). For his part, Paul affirms: “yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things come, and *through whom we live*” (1 Cor. 8:6, emphasis added). Finally, to the Romans, Paul continues by saying, “For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen!” (Rom. 11:36). The preceding texts unequivocally mention that God created not only people, but the whole world for the purpose of manifesting his glory.⁹

Schaeffer, in contemplating the Creator's character, infinite and personal, now questions how creation was accomplished.¹⁰ From the perspective of infinity, there is a colossal abyss. Only God is the infinite creator, while other things are finite and dependent creatures.¹¹ Therefore, the human being, the animal, and the plant, in the light of the biblical teaching, are all equally separated from God in the creaturely category. If everything that exists was created out of nothing, then all things, including humans, are equal in origin.¹²

However, from the perspective of personhood, the human community is distinct from the fauna and flora, in that, despite their inherent finitude, people were created in the image of God himself. This expresses separation and union at the same time. In relation to the rest of creation, there is separation in the line: “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness” (Gen. 1:26); but in relation to a single creative work, there is unity in the idea: “God saw everything he had made, and behold, it was very good” (Gen. 1:31).

The understanding of the divine image in humanity gives rise to the idea of dominion over creation (Gen. 1:28), so that the first command given by God to human beings is to fill and rule

8 Albert M. Wolters, *A criação restaurada*, p. 24.

9 John Piper. *Providência*. São José dos Campos: Fiel, 2022, p. 71. [Providence]

10 Francis Schaeffer. *Poluição e a morte do homem*, p. 36.

11 Dooyeweerd expresses such a reality philosophically by mentioning that “Meaning is the being of everything created and the nature of our individuality.” For the author, the term “meaning,” unlike the usual usage, represents the contingency of the cosmos in relation to the Creator. Herman Dooyeweerd. *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought: The Necessary Presuppositions of Philosophy*. Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1969. v. 1, p. 4.

12 Schaeffer comments that in the view of creation and God's infinity, people do indeed become one with nature, not from a holistic perspective based on mysticism and pantheism, but from the reality that God made a great unity called Creation. *Poluição e a morte do homem*, p. 39.

over what has been made.¹³ What does such a command represent? According to Horton,¹⁴ subduing and ruling creation does not mean autonomous exploitation or violent domination; rather, it is a directive to cultivate and guard the sanctuary in its holiness, drive the serpent out of the garden, and extend God's kingdom.

The first verse of Psalm 24 sings: "The earth is the Lord's and everything in it." This poetic expression indicates two truths: a) the creaturehood of human beings alongside creation, and b) their commission to exercise stewardship in God's world, not as destructive consumers, but as servants. One realizes that it was not the biblical doctrine of creation that caused the oppression of nature, but the sin that came from the Fall.¹⁵

For his part, Bonhoeffer reminds us that such a commissioned authority of dominion is directly related to our connection with the creatures that are governed.¹⁶ In this sense, the soil and the animals over which the human being exercises his lordship are the world in which he lives, without which there is no existence. There is a reciprocal connection in the first chapter of Genesis: nature supports, nurtures, and sustains humanity and, on the other hand, people have been called to rule over nature through service and care.

By way of observation, it should be said that the cultural mandate (Gen. 1:28) – that is, the divine command for people to continue the work of exploring and realizing the manifold possibilities for development implicit in creation – does not contradict the need for preservation and care, insofar as both were given to humanity by God himself before the Fall.

Finally, it is necessary to identify the climax of creation. Walton, in a curious manner, points out that the apogee of the creational work can be found on day seven.¹⁷ It is known that the divine rest on the seventh day does not mean that God was fatigued from his creative deeds accomplished on the preceding six days, and thus needed a day off. Rather, the idea of rest throughout Scripture points to the notion of enjoying security and stability in an ordered system.¹⁸

When the Genesis account describes that God rested, it represents that the Creator takes up his abode in this ordered system that he had previously developed. In other words, God orders the

13 Derek Kidner. *Gênesis: introdução e comentário*. São Paulo: Vida Nova, 1979, p. 49. [Genesis: Introduction and Commentary]

14 Michael Horton. *Doutrinas da fé cristã: uma teologia sistemática para os peregrinos no caminho*. São Paulo: Cultura Cristã, 2016, p. 422. [The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way]

15 Michael Horton, *Doutrinas da fé cristã*, p. 422.

16 Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Creation and Fall: A Theological Interpretation of Genesis 1-3*. London: SCM, 1959, p. 37.

17 John H Walton. *O mundo perdido de Adão e Eva: o debate sobre a origem da humanidade e a leitura de Gênesis*. Viçosa: Ultimato, 2016, p. 44. [The Lost World of Adam and Eve: Genesis 2-3 and the Human Origins Debate]

18 By saying, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28), Jesus does not offer a simple leisure time or nap but invites people to enter God's ordered kingdom. Similarly, the rest promised by God to the Israelites does not represent relaxation, but rather symbolizes a state of order in society, where the people could live free from invasion and conflict.

cosmos for the purpose of establishing his residence and ruling over it, living with his people. The consequence of this understanding is that creation does not belong to human beings for them to do as they please with it but is God's place through which people serve him as co-regents.¹⁹

In light of the above, it is possible with the creation account to perceive the astonishingly wonderful way in which all things were created. Through his word God sovereignly calls creation into existence, which is in perfect harmony with all its participants, according to the divine purpose. However, it is known that history has not proceeded well; sin has entered the world, creating tyranny, destruction, and misrepresentation of created reality. Individuals go into crisis against their Creator, against their fellow human beings, and against nature.

3. Fall of Nature

Genesis 3 describes the fall of the human race through sin. The integrated coherence of creation with its inhabitants is marred by the disobedience of the first couple. For Augustine, humanity, apart from God longed for its own exaltation in order to find satisfaction and rushed into pride.²⁰ Adam's sin, as the representative of humanity, generates drastic consequences for all his descendants. After all, all generations are under condemnation, mired in misery, performing wickedness after wickedness.²¹

Dooyeweerd reminds us that, according to the divine judgment “Cursed is the ground because of you” (Gen. 3:17), the fall affected not only the entire human temporal existence, but also creation as a whole.²² Not having a religious root of its own because it was rooted in Adam’s subjection to his Creator, the earth involuntarily joined humanity’s apostasy against his Creator. Paul writes to the Romans about this terrible reality when he says that the whole of creation participates in the drama caused by sin, groaning in agony with birth pangs until now, as it awaits deliverance from evil and the redemption of all things by its Lord (Rom. 8:29).

An important point to be made is that sin cannot be confused with creation itself, for all things were created “very good” (Gen. 1:31). The doctrine of total depravity – that is, the biblical understanding that there is no single part of humankind exempt from sin – does not see humanity as sin, but points to the need for the complete redemption of humankind and its technologies. However, it is true that without transformation through Christ, sin is a source from which more and more sin flows.²³

19 John Walton. *O mundo perdido de Adão e Eva*, p. 48.

20 Augustine. *On Faith, Hope, and Love (The Enchiridion): The Early Church Father’s Christian Teachings on Prayer and Piety*. Adansonia Publishing, 2018, p. 14.

21 Paul elucidates this point when he says, “As it is written: There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away; they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one” (Romans 3:10-12). And further on, he continues, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23).

22 Herman Dooyeweerd. *No crepúsculo do pensamento ocidental: estudo sobre a pretensa autonomia do pensamento filosófico*. São Paulo: Hagnos, 2010, p. 187. [In the Twilight of Western Thought: Studies in the Pretended Autonomy of Philosophical Thought]

This statement is exemplified by the fact that, when it comes to creation, the fall does not affect humanity and nature alone, it also affects the way humanity relates to nature. The biblical understanding of dominion is exercised incorrectly as Schaeffer points out,²⁴ and is misrepresented. By creation, humanity was granted dominion, but as a fallen creature, he has exercised this commandment at will, exploiting created things as if they were nothing in themselves, as if he had an autonomous right over them.

The distorted notion of dominion over nature is shaped from civilization to civilization, from the worldview assumed by society. In this sense, depending on how individuals understand the God-nature relationship, they will assume their attitudes towards fauna and flora. It is possible to initially identify, for didactic purposes only, three different deficient perspectives on this relationship arising from the Fall, which, throughout history, have led the concept of human dominion and its ramifications: a) *God as nature*, b) *God above nature*, and c) *God apart from nature*.

The first view – *God as nature* – is the perspective advocated by pantheism. In the light of ecological problems, scholars around the world seek to develop a solution to this problem through the idea that everything is God or is part of God.²⁵ Here the attempt is made to erase the qualitative-infinite distinction that exists between God and creatures. Reality is contemplated as an extension of the divine essence from which all things emanate.²⁶ Pantheists point out that if everything that exists proceeds from the same substance, the result is that it would be necessary to work for the preservation of nature.

However, although it is a view that explicitly argues for environmental care and preservation, pantheism fails to provide a sufficient foundation for it. Schaeffer states that, in the end, the pantheistic notion offers an answer for unity, but does not attribute any meaning to diversity.²⁷ Therefore, this perspective even recognizes meaning in unity, but sees no meaning in particulars, such as humanity and nature. In other words, when the belief in a transcendent, immanent, unchanging, holy God is lost, it becomes impossible to argue about a concrete moral reality, that is, an objective statement about what is right or wrong. Thus, any defence of nature made on the basis of pantheistic arguments has no moral validity.

Secondly, there is the conception of *God above nature*, represented by Platonism and its various ramifications. In the Platonic understanding, matter, pre-existent and eternal, is moulded by the demiurge, just as a craftsman realizes his work. However, there is a distinction between the “upper world,” where immutable forms are found, and the “lower world,” which consists of appearances and shadows. The upper floor is the world of ideas, a metaphysical notion; the lower floor is the

23 Gregg R Allison. *Teologia histórica: uma introdução ao desenvolvimento da doutrina cristã*. São Paulo: Vida Nova, 2017, p. 427. [Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine]

24 Francis Schaeffer. *Poluição e a morte do homem*, p. 49.

25 Wayne Grudem. *Teologia sistemática*. São Paulo: Vida Nova, 1999, p. 204. [Systematic Theology]

26 Michael Horton. *Doutrinas da fé cristã*, p. 42.

27 Francis Schaeffer. *Poluição e a morte do homem*, p. 26.

material world, an imperfect reproduction of the eternal world of forms. The practical consequence of this philosophy is the appreciation of immaterial things and contempt for physical things.

The Platonic point of view has influenced many movements, theories, and religions over the centuries. The category he formulated encompassed the dichotomous views of reality, which were opposed by the Church. Gnosticism, for example, believed that – because matter is evil and spirit is good – there is a series of emanations flowing from the supreme deity, those who were closest to such deity would be of a more spiritualized nature.²⁸ Later, the tradition of Catholicism came to make a distinction in the world between nature, that which is material and visible, and grace, that which belongs to the heavenly realm.²⁹ Nowadays, in turn, the evangelical world, especially in its neo-Pentecostal strand, is responsible for continuing the Greek perspective by dividing reality between the “sacred” and the “profane,” attributing primacy to the “spiritual world.”

The big problem with interpreting *God above nature* is the attempt to break the integrity of creation by assigning it a secondary character, by relegating it to a lower sphere. Although true believers seek to be faithful through a life guided by this conception, the result is completely different. In the Christian view, there is no room for regarding the material world as inferior. After all, the incarnation and resurrection of Christ, untainted by sin, prove that physical and spiritual reality are not opposites. Thus, care for creation, including environmental sustainability, is not to be renounced as something superfluous in a world of shadows, but is to be seen as a biblical ordinance to be fulfilled.³⁰

With regard to the Fall and its influence, the last understanding to be analyzed is that of *God apart from nature*, which is claimed by humanism. Over time, nature, as conceived in the previous material worldview, is increasingly observed as autonomous and independent from grace. The fruit of this relationship harvested at the time of the Renaissance is represented by the fact that nature swallowed grace, giving way to humanistic thinking. Such thinking materializes as the system through which people try to find knowledge, meaning, and value, having as its basis humanity itself and its rationality.³¹

People, in this context, enact their total emancipation from the old religious medievalism towards the supposedly enlightened future of reason and science. Dooyeweerd mentions that, based on a proud consciousness, individuals regard nature as an expansive arena of infinite exploration, which will be thoroughly analysed by total human mastery of natural phenomena.³² Modern humankind sees himself as free to re-establish his control in the world through the scientific method, which is

28 Gregg R Allison. *Teologia histórica*, p. 304.

29 Dooyeweerd criticizes this view by stating that Catholic doctrine failed to realize that the ancient Greek way of thinking was completely immersed in a non-Christian understanding of reality, with a kind of Greek accommodation to Scripture occurring in an attempt at synthesis. Herman Dooyeweerd. *Raízes da cultura ocidental*. São Paulo: Cultura Cristã, 2015, p. 102. [Roots of Western Culture]

30 Francis Schaeffer. *Poluição e a morte do homem*, p. 41.

31 Francis Schaeffer. *O Deus que intervém*. São Paulo: Cultura Cristã, 2016, p. 23. [The God who is there]

32 Herman Dooyeweerd. *Raízes da cultura ocidental*, p. 172.

considered the only way to conquer nature. Therefore, the humanist, wedded to the scientific ideal of cause and effect, is unable to transcend his materialistic perception, and as a result despises the idea of the divine.

It is interesting to note that the misunderstanding of this view does not lie in the discovery of science. The orderly analysis of the empirical phenomena of reality is not a sin, rather it is part of human life, to the extent that such ability was given by God Himself. Humanism vacillates in exercising this scientific method, guided by the unbridled human desire to interpret creation as a mechanistic system that is closed – as far as the absence of transcendence is concerned – and unlimited – as far as the available resources are concerned.

This inordinate desire for control over the natural world opens the door to a mistaken understanding since it does not recognize nature as an end in itself for the glory of the Creator. Rather, nature's existence is objectified in light of humanity's greedy purposes. The equivalence between the creational concept of human dominion and the fallen vision of unlimited exploitation of the environment begins in humanism, that is, the perspective of *God apart from nature*.

Thus, the above views, however well-intentioned, are insufficient because they fail to establish a solid and coherent foundation for the preservation and sustainability of creation. There must be a valid alternative.

4. Redemption of Nature

Paul writes: “For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.” (Rom. 8:19-21). The text states that when the resurrection of the dead takes place, humanity and nature will be redeemed together, that is, the blood of the Lamb will also save nature from the captivity of the fall into sin, resulting in a new heaven and a new earth.³³ However, the biblical idea of redemption, although it has a future-oriented dimension as demonstrated in the preceding passage, produces, in the same way, practical consequences here and now.

According to the famous quote by Kuyper, there is not a single square inch in all the domains of existence over which Christ cannot claim his absolute lordship.³⁴ It is thus understood that the extent of redemption in Christ is as great as that established by the Fall, there being no space sufficiently deformed that it cannot be redeemed by the action of heavenly providence. In other words, the Messianic redemption is not restricted only to the salvation of individuals but involves creation as a whole – so that Christians are called to promote the restoration of all areas of life, including its relationship with nature.

33 Wolters points out that the new heaven and new earth promised by the Lord will be a continuation, from the purification by fire, of the creation known to us today. Albert M. Wolters, *A criação restaurada*, p. 53.

34 Cited in James D. Bratt. *Sphere Sovereignty*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988, p. 488.

The alternative proposed by Christianity to restore the view of humanity in relation to the environment does not come from any of the three notions presented above, because all of them are the fruit of a mistaken perception of God, producing an erroneous understanding of creation. The Christian interpretation of the God-nature relationship could be none other than the one that defends the view of *God as the Lord of nature*. This expression departs from the previous problems mentioned by competing perspectives by revealing the sovereignty of the Creator and the need for human stewardship, since humans are not the Lord of nature, but rather act as vice-regents in its care mission.

The creative dominion exercised by humanity through a correct Christian perception generates a solid foundation for several positive results, among which we can highlight:

- a) the preservation of the human race – by the creative bond, people are linked to nature in a vital way, that is, if it did not exist or were to be destroyed, there would be no conditions for human life; therefore, preserving the environment is acting on behalf of our own existence.
- b) the sustainability of fauna and flora – moreover, environmental preservation by human beings is a gesture of protection for nature.
- c) the spread of the gospel – conduct in favour of environmental sustenance can become an evangelistic act, in that it expresses to the world that Christianity is not only concerned with future redemption, but seeks right now to see the redeeming work of Christ bring renewal in grace, to the greatest extent possible, to the creational structures marred by the fall.

However, it is necessary to stress that one must not confuse the consequences of something with its foundation, otherwise one may forget, with the passage of time, the real reason why such a thing is done. The redeemed Christian vision of *God as Lord of nature*, although it produces beneficial effects, does not hold that care for environmental preservation is justified primarily from the positive results it brings. Rather, the underpinning of this perspective on caring for nature and all that is in it is located in the simple fact that God created and cares for his creation, giving humanity the mandate to guard and honour it.³⁵ In other words, a sincere Christian ethic presupposes benevolence with regard to creation.

Schaeffer sensibly notes that the Christian understanding of nature also does not, like pantheistic thought, produce an intangible, sacred, or static interaction of humanity with created reality.³⁶ At no point do the Scriptures command an inoperative relationship – marked by passivity – or a mystical relationship – characterized by the attribution of human feelings or reactions to fauna and flora. Two situations must be distinguished: first, if there is a need, one must proceed as God said to Peter: “Get up Peter, kill, and eat” (Acts 10:13); however, any attitude resulting from the destructive impulse of human greed must be vehemently opposed, being considered a sin before the Creator of all things.

35 Several biblical texts testify to God's care for creation (Job 12:7-10; Ps. 104:13; John 4:11; Matt. 10:29).

36 Francis Schaeffer. *Poluição e a morte do homem*, p. 52.

Therefore, what is intended with this perspective, essentially, as highlighted by Maranhão, is to establish an understanding that allows humans to act with sobriety in the face of the delicate environmental issues that have long demanded critical reflection from us.³⁷ A vision that, despite recognizing the special human condition compared to other living beings on the planet, as a result, attributes to it not necessarily rights, but rather severe duties conducive to maximum protection and respect not only towards others (including future generations) but also towards everything else that complexly involves and conditions it.³⁸

In this way, the valuable freedom of the human being is preserved to pursue their own projects and ideals, while acknowledging their undeniable responsibility to act as a wise manager of that which ultimately they know does not belong to them. Based on this perspective, the relationship between humans and nature, as well as the handling of the delicate ecological issue, are therefore seen in the context of an intrinsic ethical demand for responsible management. After all, every allocation of power implies the attraction of responsibilities. In other words, those who have the power to lead have the duty to care.

Thus, adopting the Christian view does not necessarily mean endorsing any abuse or disrespect towards nature, viewing it as a mere source of resources available for the unbridled desires of human beings. Instead, with this perspective expressed here, a powerful ethical foundation is provided for the continuous restraint of human power, legitimizing what is now regarded as sustainable action in the wake of a biblical perspective. Its exercise, taking place in a deeply interconnected environment, generates benefits not only for nature but also for present and future human beings, expressing a truly conscious and awakened worldview.³⁹

In this sense, the notion of *God as Lord of Nature* provides a harmonious intertwining between the care for creation, represented by human dominion, and the cultural mandate, represented by the development of the potentialities found in creation. Such a symmetrical association is only possible thanks to the fact that the labour over creation will not be exercised in a tyrannical manner but will cherish creational sustainability. In light of the above, one realizes that the Christian alternative is the only adequate way to promote the restoration of the relationship between human beings and nature on a solid and coherent basis of meaning.

5. Conclusion

The purpose of this essay was to present, in an introductory way, how the relationship between humanity and nature should be guided by the Biblical perspective. It was verified, from a cultural analysis, that many Christians ignore the need to care for creation, considering it inferior or seeing it as an exclusive field of action for movements antagonistic to the Scriptural precepts. However, as pointed out, inactivity is not a valid option, since it generates secularization and, at the same time, dishonours the divine commandment of protection.

37 Ney Maranhão. *Poluição labor-ambiental*. Rio de Janeiro: Lumen Juris, 2017, p. 85.

38 Ney Maranhão refers to this perspective as “solidary anthropocentrism,” in contrast to humanistic worldviews.

39 Ney Maranhão. *Poluição labor-ambiental*, p. 85.

Thus, in order to propose a solution to the problem explored here, we sought to interpret human interaction with regard to the environment by prescribing the Biblical triad: creation, fall, and redemption. In a sovereign and majestic way, God creates all things from nothing for the praise of His glory, granting humanity the creative domain and the cultural mandate. However, with the Fall, there is rebellion. God's ordinances are distorted, and humanity contemplates the God-nature relationship in various mistaken ways, which can be summarized in the respective categories: *God as nature*, *God above nature*, and *God apart from nature*. All of them are problematic because they fail to preserve creation correctly.

If Christ is the Lord of all human existence, it was said that his redemption should promote restoration in all areas of life, including the relationship of human beings with the created world. The vision of *God as Lord of nature* was presented, which aims to represent a redeemed alternative for the humanity-nature relationship. This understanding, besides raising several positive points, states that the foundation of the care for creation comes from the fact that God created all things and cares for them. Thus, it is pointed out that the Christian notion allows people to seek to re-establish in society the harmony between the creational orders of dominion and the cultural mandate, which will happen with the realization of the idea of sustainable development of creation.

The Great Filter and Space Exploration: A Dooyeweerdian Response

Maaïke Eline Harmsen and Gijsbert van den Brink

Introduction

This paper provides a Christian philosophical and theological response, in the tradition of reformational philosophy, to the moral imperative of human advancement through space exploration as emerging from the Great Filter theory. First, it explains the so-called Fermi Paradox that underlies the Great Filter theory. Next, it explores this theory itself and its motivational power in driving advancement in space exploration. In particular, we will explore three motives behind the multi-planet efforts that are (in part) guided by the Great Filter theory, examining the motivations given by SpaceX founder and chief engineer Elon Musk, preparing the way for a more extensive and comprehensive case study of its project. Finally, we will provide a possible response to these motivations in the tradition of reformational philosophy and offer some reasons why this philosophy can help us in appreciating space exploration.

1. The Fermi Paradox: where is everybody?

To understand the driving motivations for human advancement based on the Great Filter theory, one must first understand the Fermi Paradox. The Fermi paradox is based on the combination of several relatively new, i.e., less than a hundred year old, scientific findings in our known universe, in combination with the relative age of our planet and the evolution of life as we know it.¹ First, we have only recently found out that there is more than one galaxy in the universe.² In fact, our universe has turned out to be truly immense and full of galaxies, each holding billions of stars and planets. Second, our planet and the material of which our life forms are made, are not unique to the universe. All elements in life forms here on earth can be found elsewhere in the universe and vice versa. Carbon, hydrogen, iron et cetera are all abundant in other places, and we have not yet found any elements outside earth, which are not part of our periodic table of elements. Third, our planet is not rare or unique in its standing just close enough to a star to have water that can stay in liquid form, and warm enough to contain life forms as we know them; in fact, it shares these properties with several so-called ‘exoplanets’ (i.e., planets circling stars other than the sun). Given these three discoveries, and the tendency of life to spread itself, we could expect that the evolution and proliferation of life could have started on numerous exoplanets just as well as on earth. This view is further strengthened by the fact that it is reasonable to suppose that some exoplanets evolved earlier

1 B Zuckerman and M Hart, eds. *Extraterrestrials: Where Are They?* 1995, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

2 In 1923, Edwin Hubble proved that there is at least one other galaxy, the Andromeda galaxy. We now know that there is an estimated number of 125 billion (1.25×10^{11}) galaxies in the observable universe. Our own Milky Way galaxy holds approximately 100 billion stars. Source: ESA:
https://www.esa.int/Science_Exploration/Space_Science/Herschel/How_many_stars_are_there_in_the_Universe.
Astronomers estimate there are millions upon millions of other galaxies also!

than our planet. Some galaxies, stars and planets are in a younger state of formation than ours, but there are older stars and exoplanets in our universe as well.

When we consider all these findings, the following question arises: why is our planet, being neither unique in relevant aspects nor the oldest one in the universe, as far as we know the only one with life and consciousness on it? The universe is full of stars and planets, but until now all others seem to be devoid of life. Why don't we find a single life form on any exoplanet?³ Perhaps one might answer that we have not tried enough, which may be true. Yet, if older planets exist, and if life has started on them with the passing of time but long before it started on earth, why did none of such life forms, at a stage of its cultural development that is comparable to our current stage, spread itself and reach other planets, including planet Earth or our solar system? The paradox can therefore be poignantly summarised in the very short question formulated in 1950 by astrophysicist Enrico Fermi while having lunch with fellow scientists: where is everybody? Or, as others have rendered the same phenomenon: why is there such a "Great Silence" in the universe? The Great Filter theory is an attempt to answer this question, explaining why thus far we haven't encountered any extraterrestrial life forms that have spread to our planet.

2. The Great Filter

The Great Filter is a term used first by mathematical biologist Robin Hanson. Hanson tried to calculate how difficult it is for life to emerge and then develop from one form to another, becoming more complex over time. He states that there could be a multi-layered *filter*, consisting of several barriers that prevent important break-throughs from taking place. These barriers to further developments may explain why we are lucky to be alive at all, and very special in the universe.⁴ In Hanson's view there are at least nine factors that may prevent a planet near a sun from developing single cell and multi-cell life and eventually becoming expansionist (i.e., colonising other parts of the universe). These factors are sequentially ordered, starting from the sort of planet that is needed for the evolution of life and ending with the emergence of intelligent life forms that colonise other places. On earth, we are now at the eighth step: a highly advanced technological society that has nonetheless not yet seriously attempted to become multiplanetary – which would be the ninth step. At least taking one of these steps must be highly improbable, since otherwise we would have observed the expansion of extra-terrestrial life forms.

This is not the place to discuss each of these nine factors that may come with a barrier. But to give a sample, one possible barrier seems to be the formation of life out of non-living materials. Scientists have tried to produce partially living material from non-living material, but have not succeeded until now. This showcases that the formation of life is very hard, and maybe unique in the universe. We have only detected a fraction of exoplanets in the known universe, but none of them (as far as we can observe) contains any life form. Another barrier could be that there are planets that have or did have various forms of life, but that these were unable to become advanced enough, or unwilling

3 More than 5300 exoplanets have been discovered until now (March 2023). Source: <https://exoplanets.nasa.gov/>.

4 R Hanson. The Great Filter – Are We Almost Past It? 1998. (unpublished).
<http://mason.gmu.edu/~rhanson/greatfilter.html>.

to leave their own planet and reveal themselves to other civilisations, let alone contact us.⁵ Maybe such civilisations, if they existed, managed to build a technology that was powerful enough to start interplanetary travel, but that same technology killed off the whole civilisation in its power (as would happen to the human species in case of a big nuclear disaster). Perhaps the barrier here is that the developed technology eventually (and inevitably?) destroyed these civilisations, thus preventing their further advancement. A third important barrier could be that those civilizations that escaped this fate were destroyed by external factors, such as a pandemic, or an asteroid impact; asteroids keep hitting planets every now and then. One asteroid killed the dinosaurs,⁶ another slightly larger one could kill all life on our planet. Without a solid escape system, such as being a space faring civilisation and/or being multiplanetary, this could have happened to all civilisations. And it can happen to ours as well if we do not take action. It could be that the universe is littered with dead civilizations which have not succeeded to reach other civilisations and life forms in time.

Interestingly, the main conclusion that has been drawn from the Great Filter theory is that our human survival chances may be quite low. For if, as most scientists think, the evolution of life up to the point where we are now is not extremely improbable, then the real barrier must lie in front of us. That is, it must be the case that most advanced civilizations in the universe cease to exist before they start to expand beyond their planetary home base. Yet, the Great Filter theory is of course not without its critics. In particular, it has been discussed for its statistical stance⁷ and its assumptions about our extraterrestrial life observation capabilities.⁸

Notwithstanding such discussions, the idea of a great filter (or filters) has become a remarkable motivational power for scientific and technological progress. In particular it has given special strength to the idea that as humankind we may be morally obliged to become a multi-planet species in order to have a higher chance to survive as a conscious species in an uncertain universe. In particular, the human colonisation of our relatively nearby planet Mars fits within this aim of enhancing our survival potential.⁹ Thus, the Great Filter theory fuels the argument that we must not be complacent and remain on our home planet, but strive to make sure we prolong our existence by becoming multi-planetary. The probability of the risk of human extinction has been studied by many scholars¹⁰ and the likelihood of various doomsday scenarios has been seriously discussed.¹¹

5 It could be that the ever expanding universe itself is a barrier for contact. Even if information was sent around close to the speed of light, it would take millions of years to reach possible others in the universe.

6 There is much evidence that this took place in Chicxulub, Mexico, approximately 66 million years ago. Its effects allegedly killed 75% of all life forms on earth. <https://corescholar.libraries.wright.edu/ees/127/>.

7 D J Aldous. The Great Filter, Branching Histories, and Unlikely Events. *Mathematical Scientist*, 37 (1), 2012, pp. 55-64. Retrieved from <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/74g525bp>.

8 D J Des Marais et al. Remote Sensing of Planetary Properties and Biosignatures on Extrasolar Terrestrial Planets. *Astrobiology* 2 (2), 2002, pp. 53-181.

9 See <https://www.marssociety.org>.

10 Cf. e.g. B Tonn and D Stiefel. Human Extinction Risk and Uncertainty: Assessing Conditions for Action. *Futures* 63, 2014, pp. 134-144.

The Great Filter theory, therefore, lends support to the urgent development of new technologies because of the fear of such doomsday scenarios, including that of the gradual regress of civilisations. Indeed, certain civilisations did rise for centuries to cultural and intellectual heights, in order to then fall quickly and unexpectedly. As a result, there often was a sudden diminution of knowledge and intellectual advancement as they vanished. Examples of collapse through lack of expansion and/or innovation can be found in numerous historic events, ranging from the fall of cities to the collapse of entire empires such as the Roman Empire.¹² As to more gradual forms of regress, in the last century the American public Space Agency NASA had become capable of building rockets that could send humans to the moon – but until 2022, for more than ten years NASA had not been able to build any rocket that even had orbital capabilities and to send humans into low earth orbit anymore.¹³ This final example leads us to the case study that we will discuss now, focusing on a recent private company rather than the state-funded NASA: the attempt to colonize other planets by SpaceX.

3. Case Study: SpaceX

This Great Filter theory does indeed motivate some, most notably in the company *Space Exploration Technologies* (SpaceX), to set up plans to colonise other planets, starting with Mars.¹⁴ The reason for choosing SpaceX as a case study is that it is the leading company in Earth-to-Orbit transportation of satellites, as well as the lead company in bringing humans back to the moon for NASA. Also, it is an influential private space exploration company that has a relevant non-commercial mission statement. SpaceX’s mission statement is “making humanity multiplanetary”:

Building on the achievements of Falcon 9 and Falcon Heavy, SpaceX is working on a next generation of fully reusable launch vehicles that will be the most powerful ever built, capable of carrying humans to Mars and other destinations in the solar system.¹⁵

SpaceX was founded by Elon Musk in 2002 with his personal investment, when he divided all his gained assets between SpaceX and Tesla Motors (co-founded in 2003; Musk even borrowed money in the years after this to pay for his costs).¹⁶ SpaceX is partially founded to ensure we have a higher

11 N Bostrom. Existential Risks: Analyzing Human Extinction Scenarios and Related Hazards. *Journal of Evolution and Technology* 9 (1) 2002. Retrieved from <https://nickbostrom.com/existential/risks>.

12 M L Wong and S Bartlett. Asymptotic Burnout and Homeostatic Awakening: A Possible Solution to the Fermi Paradox? *Journal of Royal Society Interface* 19: 2022, 20220029. <https://royalsocietypublishing.org/doi/10.1098/rsif.2022.0029>.

13 See <https://www.space.com/space-shuttle-final-mission-atlantis-10-years>. NASA has only recently started to explore the possibility of the colonisation of Mars. In 2022 NASA scientists published ‘Approaches To Humans-Mars Both Safe and Affordable’ (see NASA-TM-20220007320.pdf).

14 See for instance <https://www.marssociety.org> and D M Bushnell, R Moses and S Choi, S. Approaches To Humans-Mars Both Safe and Affordable. Hampton: Langley Research Center. (2022) Retrieved from: <https://ntrs.nasa.gov/api/citations/20220007320/downloads/NASA-TM-20220007320.pdf>

15 <https://www.spacex.com/mission/>.

16 We realize that Musk’s reputation became contested across the globe after he purchased Twitter in 2022 and subsequently brought about significant changes in its modus operandi. We have decided, though, not to let these

chance of survival in case of a catastrophic event such as an asteroid impact or a biological or nuclear disaster that would wipe out all life on our planet.¹⁷ According to Musk, ours is possibly the only civilization “currently alive in the observable universe,” and that is why it is so important that humans build civilizations in space.¹⁸ Musk wrote about his company’s mission statement more extensively in an article for *New Space Journal*, entitled “Making Humanity Multiplanetary”. Here he states the following: “History is going to bifurcate along two directions. One path is we stay on earth forever, and then there will be some eventual extinction event. (...) The alternative is to become a space-bearing civilisation and a multi-planetary species, which I hope you would agree is the right way to go.”¹⁹ On Twitter Musk adumbrated his aim with SpaceX in almost poetical terms: “We must preserve the light of consciousness by becoming a spacefaring civilization [and] extending life to other planets.”²⁰ In 2022, comparing this to his other big company, Musk summarised the goals of both using the following oneliner: “Tesla is to protect life on earth, SpaceX is to expand life beyond.”²¹

In particular, SpaceX plans to build a permanent base on Mars, which obviously goes beyond the goal of space exploration. The exploration of space in terms of discovery has generally been noted by space agencies and scientists as an endeavour worth pursuing.²² But how about permanent human colonisation? The temporary base on the moon since 1969 was believed to be partially a scientific exploration effort, partially a part of the Cold War tactics of the United States of America. The permanent moon bases as proposed and/or planned by China, Europe and the United States would purportedly be for scientific exploration, not for human settlement as a goal in itself.²³ The colonisation of Mars proposed by SpaceX, however, amounts to the establishment of a permanent base with as many as a million people there, and has no strictly scientific purpose. Rather, it is meant first of all to ensure survival and preservation in case of emergency, and signifies a first step in humankind becoming multi-planetary.²⁴

The ideal of the Mars base is not based on escapism as such, but as he explains it, it is a calculated way to lower perceived risks of annihilation of life in general and human life in particular, by spreading and thus protecting (human) life. Whatever we may think of this, it is evidently an

later events (with a different company) affect our analysis of the motives behind SpaceX.

17 J H Jiang, P E Rosen and K A Fahy. Avoiding the “Great Filter”: A Projected Timeframe for Human Expansion Off-World. *Galaxies* 9 (3) 2021, p. 53. <https://doi.org/10.3390/galaxies9030053>.

18 <https://twitter.com/elonmusk/status/1011083630301536256>.

19 E Musk. Making Humans a Multi-Planetary Species. *New Space* 5 (2), 2017, pp. 46-61. Retrieved from <https://www.liebertpub.com/doi/10.1089/space.2017.29009.emu>, p. 46.

20 <https://twitter.com/elonmusk/status/1011083630301536256>.

21 <https://twitter.com/elonmusk/status/1547927887734456322?s=20&t=sck2c2mzQ1kdV2i6R3o81w> .

22 <https://www.nasa.gov/topics/moon-to-mars/> and <https://www.space.com/china-plans-mars-base-with-astronauts>.

23 <https://www.nasa.gov/feature/goddard/2021/nasa-s-artemis-base-camp-on-the-moon-will-need-light-water-elevation/>

24 <https://elon-musk-interviews.com/2020/12/11/axel-springer-award-2020/> .

innovative new step in securing human survival chances. The traditional prevention of catastrophes on earth, as in general health care efforts, or designing and building structures to protect inhabited regions against flooding, is of a different category, since usually only parts of the earth experience severe natural catastrophes. Today, however, the risk of an all-encompassing catastrophe has become much larger. In this connection Musk explicitly refers to the Great Filter as a challenge and a motive for humankind's becoming multiplanetary: "We must pass the Great Filter".²⁵

A second reason behind SpaceX's endeavour to make humanity multiplanetary is that this could give a purpose in life to people – a reason to get out of bed in the morning. SpaceX's mission page starts with this drive: "You want to wake up in the morning and think the future is going to be great – and that's what being a spacefaring civilization is all about. It's about believing in the future and thinking that the future will be better than the past. And I can't think of anything more exciting than going out there and being among the stars."²⁶ Musk often refers to Douglas Adams' *A Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* as a source of his personal philosophy.²⁷ In this book, Adams (1952-2001) claims that the question of the meaning of life should be explored but cannot be answered. The only way to explore the true meaning of life is to explore life and the universe itself.

Interestingly, even though in his view spacefaring is about "thinking that the future will be better than the past", Musk never suggests any kind of utopia idea of living on Mars. It would be harsh living, even though there would be a democratic society, preferably with its own government. There would not be a particularly better government or society than the one on earth. There is no expectation to build a paradise on Mars. The colony life would be dangerous and maybe even boring for a significant number of years, as the radiation, temperature and lack of atmosphere would be challenging to human life. So-called 'terraforming' of Mars would take decades, if it were possible at all, and humans would have to stay sheltered in domes for the time it takes. Living there would not be for the rich or happy few. A ticket to Mars would cost no more than your life savings, or a loan, so that selling your house would be sufficient. Going to Mars would be voluntary. Life on Mars would not be meant to escape a dying planet, but, as we said, a method of spreading the risk of extinction by living on two planets instead of one. Hopefully we will learn to conquer more planets and galaxies on the way. As time continues, both Mars and planet Earth will be uninhabitable anyhow in a few hundred million years as our sun is dying, making life on both planets impossible. So turning to this new habitat is just a start to "preserve the light of consciousness" and thereby, for now, reduce the risk of extermination. In this way one can work on exciting goals such as terraforming Mars with nuclear technology. All this will have to prevent us from declining in the eighth barrier of the Great Filter, according to Musk's vision.

In brief, the two main arguments for planetary colonisation are to control the risk of extinction of humankind as a result of either imminent catastrophes or global cultural regress, and to give humans a purpose in life, a goal to pursue. In what follows, we will first very briefly sketch a

25 <https://twitter.com/elonmusk/status/1294917318405836802?lang=en>.

26 <https://www.spacex.com/mission/>

27 <https://www.cnbc.com/2019/07/23/why-hitchhikers-guide-author-is-elon-musks-favorite-philosopher.html>;
cf. Douglas Adams. *A Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. 1979, London: Pan.

possible Christian response to these developments, focusing especially on the possibility of extraterrestrial life. Next, we will assess the pros and cons of colonising other parts of the universe more particularly from a Dooyeweerdian point of view.

4. Christianity and Extraterrestrial Life

As a Christian one could believe that life is unique to planet earth as God made it so. But in the thousands of years of reflection on our place in the universe, humankind, being religious or not, has often made mistakes in this regard and misjudged the age and nature of the universe as well as our origins and physical place in it. We thought that the sun and stars revolved around our planet. We thought that all heavenly spheres were perfectly round shapes, as this was Aristotle's philosophy. This philosophical misperception fuelled the rage of scientists and clerics who targeted Galileo when he noticed craters on the moon with his telescope. We thought that the human race was at best 10,000 years old, but ongoing research has established that in fact our species is much older. For most of the time until now in our scientific understanding, we thought that there was only one galaxy, but as it turns out there are many. We thought our planet was the centre of the universe, whereas we are anywhere but. Of course it is not only Christians who learn new things about the universe all the time. Until in 1927 the priest-scientist George Lemaitre discovered through mathematical reasoning that the universe had a starting point, most scientists of his day believed that the universe did not have a beginning but had been there from eternity in a 'steady state', and mocked his findings with the term 'Big Bang theory'.²⁸

This history of huge changes in our understanding of the structure of the universe should foster humility in our statements on the uniqueness of life forms based on what we know now. We could find extinct or even living forms of life within a few years on Mars or other planets, as we barely started scratching the surface of a few other planets in space exploration. If we claimed that we are certain that God only created life on earth, such discoveries would create huge tensions in the Christian beliefs of many. In fact, we have no knowledge at all of God's possible creation of life forms outside our realm at this moment. In the Bible we are not told whether or not there are other life forms outside earth (apart from angels). Herman Bavinck wrote in his dogmatics that "this much (...) is certain: belief in the existence of animate rational beings on planets other than the earth belongs totally to the realm of conjecture". In his time, it was "contradicted rather than confirmed by (...) science",²⁹ but that did not prevent him from seriously considering its possibility. Indeed, we are not forbidden to think of possible other worlds. We do know that we are known, loved and cared for as earthlings by the Creator, but we do not know for sure whether we are unique in the universe.³⁰ It might even mean an exercise in humility to us if extraterrestrial life forms were detected. Thus, Christians have no a priori reason to reject the possibility of extra-planetary life and

28 Cf. <https://phys.org/news/2017-05-vatican-celebrates-big-dispel-faith-science.html>

29 H Bavinck. *Reformed Dogmatics. Volume 2: God and Creation*. [1928] 2004. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic., p. 449.

30 C Dekker, H Falcke and M E Harmsen. Plaats de mens niet in het middelpunt van het heelal. *Nederlands Dagblad* 77 (20686), 2021, p. 15. <https://www.nd.nl/opinie/opinie/1022251/plaats-de-mens-niet-in-het-middelpunt-van-het-heelal>.

the search for it out of hand. Indeed, we might even argue that it might be in line with the abundance of God that there are various other forms of intelligent life elsewhere in the cosmos. As Olli-Pekka Vainio argues, “we have stronger theological reasons to argue for the existence of multiple intelligent species than the existence of just one”.³¹

But how about the attempt to become multi-planetary ourselves? As we will show, this question can be fruitfully addressed by taking a specifically Dooyeweerdian stance.

5. A Dooyeweerdian Response

I will discuss the motives and assumptions behind the quest to become multiplanetary by canvassing four themes: the desire for risk management and control, the acknowledgement of human fallibility, the expansion of human knowledge, and the search for meaningfulness. Whereas the final motive is found wanting, it will turn out that the other three are highly commendable from the perspective of Christian – and more specifically Dooyeweerdian – thinking. This can especially be substantiated from Dooyeweerd’s study of the four pre-theoretical religious “ground-motives” (or “ground-ideas”) that in his view have fuelled Western philosophical thought ever since its inception in ancient Greece. Three of these ground-motives are dialectical, in the sense that they consist of two poles that compete with each other for dominance. These are the form-matter ground-motive that characterized ancient Greek thinking, the nature-grace motive that emerged in the Middle Ages and structured Roman Catholic thinking, and the modern humanistic nature-freedom ground-motive. Each of these motives “does not allow of a real synthesis of its antagonistic components”, since the one has “the inner tendency to absorb the opposite one”.³² This is not the case, though, with the fourth ground-motive: the Christian creation-fall-redemption theme.

This is not the place to expand on this part of Dooyeweerd’s reformational philosophy in more detail. What is important for our purposes, though, is that according to Dooyeweerd all these ground-motives are still at work in one way or another in contemporary Western society. The most prominent themes that in his view are prevalent these days are the two dialectical components of the humanistic ground-motive: the tendency of seeking to control nature and our fate through science and technology, versus the wish to be completely free and autonomous persons.³³

31 O-P Vainio. *Cosmology in Theological Perspective*. 2018. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, p. 105. Vainio provides a succinct but useful survey of Christian and other opinions on the possibility of “aliens” throughout history (pp. 89-105). Of course, not every Christian thinker agrees with Vainio. Philosopher of religion Brian Hebblethwaite, for example, and young earth creationist Ken Ham, both tend to the view that belief in extraterrestrial life reflects a secular worldview (94-95). Both Augustine (*City of God*, 16.9) and C.S. Lewis left the question open-ended, which is perhaps the best we can do. C.S. Lewis. *Dogma and the Universe*. In: *C.S. Lewis Essay Collection: Faith, Christianity and the Church*. Edited by Lesley Walmsley, 2000, London: Harper & Collins, p. 92.

32 Herman Dooyeweerd. *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought. Volume I: The Necessary Presuppositions of Philosophy*. Translated by W S Young and D H Freeman. [1953] 1969. Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, p. 80.

33 Herman Dooyeweerd. De vier religieuze grondthema’s in de ontwikkelingsgang van het wijsgerig denken van het avondland. In: M E Verburg, Ed., *Herman Dooyeweerd: Grenzen van het theoretisch denken*. [1941] 1986. Amsterdam: Ambo, p. 124. In fact, a large part of the first volume of Dooyeweerd’s *New Critique* is devoted to an analysis and critique of this humanistic ground-motive. Herman Dooyeweerd. *A New Critique of Theoretical*

As Dooyeweerd observed, these themes are contrary indeed in that both of them tend “to absorb the opposite one”. Largely below the surface, however, the Christian creation-fall-redemption motive also continues to play its role. How could we assess the space exploration developments described above in light of Dooyeweerd’s analysis of Western thought? While we realize that much more could be said, we will provisionally answer this question by briefly pointing out six relevant insights.

1. Control and Creation

First of all, the attempt to decrease the risk of annihilation of human life here on earth (as a result of catastrophes or cultural regress) by becoming multiplanetary can naturally be interpreted in terms of the first pole of the humanistic ground-motive as distinguished by Dooyeweerd: the wish to control nature (or our environment). The attempts by scholars to understand and control the risks of the vanishing of humanity seems an extension of the modern desire to put nature to our use. Their scholarly exercise is based on mathematical calculations and statistics, as it is related to the earth’s age and the possibility of future asteroids hitting our planet.

Now preventing damage and fighting potential loss of life by means of scientific findings and technological developments, whether vaccinations or dykes or whatever, are generally speaking morally sound actions in themselves. They belong to the domain of “creation” – the first theme of the Christian ground-motive – and it has generally been deemed appropriate to explore what has been given to us in God’s creation and use it to our best purposes. The Christian tradition of moral thinking, however, does not consider the possibility that a single natural (or human-wrought!) catastrophe might ever wipe out the whole of life on earth – let alone that it is our duty to prevent this. In Genesis 9 God vows not to flood the earth again. However, this does not mean that the earth could not be destroyed by other natural disasters or by human technology. Therefore, it is in line with the traditional attempt to protect human life against destructive forces by controlling nature to consider a ‘moving out’ in a couple of millions of years, as the sun will evaporate our protecting atmosphere. Since human technology will threaten our survival as humans much earlier, however, it seems justified to start conceiving how we might realize such ‘moving out’ right now.

But would not Christian thinking (as appropriated by Dooyeweerd) prevent us from ever leaving planet earth, as this is an expression of the humanistic motive of control? Not necessarily. We might make a distinction here between the wish to control as a goal of its own (a humanistic motive) and the wish to alleviate a present or upcoming danger. If our actions are prompted by the wish to preserve human life and alleviate the evil of human destruction, the Christian motive of seeking redemption by developing creation would be at play – like it was when Christians started to build hospitals, hospices et cetera. But the wish to control all possible future scenarios definitely falls outside this ‘cultural mandate’ to open up and develop creation (a neo-Calvinist theme based on Genesis 1:28 that was important to Dooyeweerd³⁴). This mandate does not turn us into the absolute rulers of our own fate. We will expand on this theme in our third reflection.

Thought. Volume I: The Necessary Presuppositions of Philosophy. Translated by D H Freeman and H de Jongste. [1953] 1969. Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, pp. 188-495.

2. Freedom and Fallibility

The other component of the humanistic motive discerned by Dooyeweerd, the expansion of personal freedom and autonomy, can be seen in the desire to colonise other planets, such as Mars, and to establish an independent government on it. This is another interesting notion for reformational philosophy to further explore and review. Often Christians have rejected such dreams to escape earth or society and start a new one somewhere else as utopian, with humans wanting to ‘play God’ by bringing paradise into being all by themselves. As we have seen in SpaceX’s plans for colonising Mars, however, such endeavours need not necessarily be intended to inaugurate a new and perfect paradise of intelligent and morally excellent people. Rather, SpaceX’s non-utopian ideal of a Mars base shows consideration of our human nature as morally flawed (or sinful, we might say). However far we may ever progress in science and technology, we have a sinful nature that will have an impact on our future technological designs and scientific endeavours. There is no paradise waiting for us on Mars or on a spaceship, because we will take our constantly failing morality with us.

Non-utopian extraplanetary colonisation plans acknowledge that we will not advance in moral capabilities through scientific or technological advancements, or by resettling the best and brightest of us to a new extraplanetary colony. Colonisation to another planet does not help us escape from ourselves. We would still be the most vulnerable and dangerous beings to be brought on a starship to Mars, and we might even create havoc in other parts of the universe than just on planet earth. In our design of future technology for earth or Mars or any planet, we should acknowledge this permanent moral fallibility of humans. The Dooyeweerdian ground-motive of creation – fall – redemption, and in this case especially its emphasis on the Fall into sin, comes to our aid here.³⁵ It helps us not to dream about space exploration and colonisation as a possible panacea for all the world’s problems, but to envisage and assess such plans along realistic, non-utopian lines. We could even reflect with the aspiring Martians on this theme with an eye on good governance on Mars.

3. Space Exploration, Technology and the Cultural Mandate

Thirdly, let us consider the expansion of human knowledge as a motive or reason for space exploration and colonisation. Christian theology and philosophy have a long tradition of thoroughgoing reflection on scientific exploration and the advancement of science and technology. In reformational philosophy, scientific exploration of any kind is considered as part of the ‘cultural mandate’ – as Abraham Kuyper, the godfather of reformational philosophy, had called it.³⁶ There is no area that cannot be explored or that does not fall under Christ’s dominion. “No single piece of our (...) world is to be hermetically sealed off from the rest, and there is not a square inch in the

34 Cf. Herman Dooyeweerd. *Roots of Western Culture. Pagan, Secular and Christian Options*. Translated by John Kraay. 1979, Toronto: Wedge Publishing Foundation, pp. 64-65, 67, 71.

35 For how the human Fall into sin could be plausibly envisaged in an evolutionary context, see e.g. G Van den Brink. *Reformed Theology and Evolutionary Theory*. 2020, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, pp. 180-198.

36 J Klapwijk. Abraham Kuyper on Science, Theology and University. *Philosophia Reformata* 78 (1), 2013, pp. 18-46. V Bacote. Beyond ‘Faithful Presence’: Abraham Kuyper’s Legacy for Common Grace and Cultural Development. *Journal of Markets and Morality* 16 (1), 2013, pp. 195-205.

whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign of all, does not cry: ‘Mine!’”³⁷ For Kuyper, this meant that Christians should not leave the scientific task of exploring the world to others.

This basic Kuyperian insight offers great potential to fruitfully think through and evaluate the developments we have been sketching above.³⁸ Like Kuyper, Dooyeweerd had a high view of the cultural mandate as expressed in Genesis 1:28.³⁹ Arguably, his reformational philosophy does not exclude other parts of the universe beyond planet earth from the space we are called upon to explore. We acknowledge our Creator as the maker of *all* that is, under and above the moon. The discovery and classification of stars, galaxies and black holes does not have to be left outside our scientific endeavour, just because we are living here, under the moon, as earthlings.⁴⁰ Science and the development of the technology that follows from it was initially seen as a work of human dominion. Only later on scholars such as Schuurman, Verkerk and others have highlighted motivations behind scientific and technological developments which they found ambivalent.⁴¹ In particular, they were (and are) concerned about their link with the humanistic ground-motive, especially its ideal to realize a totalizing control of nature through science and technology. Whereas this concern is definitely justified (today “scientism” is the most assertive embodiment of this ideal), even they have rightly acknowledged that technology as such is a useful human tool to honour our Creator, if designed and executed in a just way.

Technology should not be used to exploit either other people or the environment, or even our own human nature. This is not a far-fetched scenario, since our desire to be free from our Creator brought about the fall and severed our ties with God, corrupting our thoughts, desires and actions, including our handling and designing of technology. A worldview that sees our environment (which potentially extends to the entire cosmos) and our own natural self as nothing more than resources to be conquered and exploited, loses any sense of the intrinsic value of nature and human beings from the perspective of our Creator. Having said that, however, even though we should remain vigilant, there is no reason to frame the desire to explore and eventually colonise other planets *a priori* as

37 A Kuyper. “Sphere Sovereignty.” Inaugural address at the opening of the Vrije Universiteit. In: James D. Bratt, Ed. *Abraham Kuyper. A Centennial Reader*. [1880] 1998. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, p. 488.

38 Unfortunately, Kuyper did not equally include women in this cultural mandate, suggesting that women should be helpers to men, staying at home in the kitchen, living room and cellar. See A Kuyper. *De eerepositie der vrouw*. 1914, Kampen: Kok.

39 Cf. René van Woudenberg. *Gelovend denken. Inleiding tot een christelijke filosofie*. 1992, Amsterdam: Buijten & Schipperheijn, p. 91.

40 Cf. H Falcke and J Römer. *Light in the Darkness: Black Holes, the Universe, and Us*. 2021, New York: HarperCollins Publishers.

41 E Schuurman. *Transformation of the Technological Society*. 2022, Sioux Center: Dordt Press.; E Schuurman. Responsible Ethics for Global Technology. *Axiomathes* 20 (1) 2010, pp. 107-127; M Verkerk, J Hoogland, J Van der Stoep and M De Vries. *Philosophy of Technology. An Introduction for Technology and Business Students*. 2016, London: Routledge.

inspired by the wish to instrumentalize or exploit other parts of the universe without a proper sense of their intrinsic value.

A related concern that may emerge at this point has to do with the well-known critique of Lynn White and others that Western Christianity, largely due to the conclusions it drew from the Genesis-command to fill and subdue the earth (i.e., the ‘cultural mandate’) in terms of scientific and technological advancement, has eventually caused the ecological destruction of our planet.⁴² If we extend our technological aspirations to Mars, will we not simply repeat on Mars the problems we caused on Earth? Now first of all the thesis of White has been qualified on various counts; for example, historians have pointed out that a degrading treatment of nature has been part of all sorts of cultures, including those that have not been in touch with Christianity; mono-causal explanations of such a complex problem simply won’t do.⁴³ Second, if planets like Mars contain traces of biological life at all, for all we know they do not have such an intricate and vulnerable ecology as planet Earth. And third, if Mars will turn out to after all have a vulnerable ecology of its own, since ecological degradation is ultimately self-destructive, we need not put our hope on moral growth and increasing altruism in humans in order to expect more vigilance on their part in this regard.

4. *Meaning and Value*

Let us now turn to the last argument for multi-planetarism and Mars colonisation, which is the wish to get to know the meaning of life. As we have seen, according to SpaceX founder Elon Musk, the only way to come to know this meaning is to expand our knowledge of life itself. Let us compare this view with the notion of meaning given in Reformational philosophy: “*Meaning* is the *being* of all that has been *created* and the nature of even our selfhood. It has a *religious root* and a *divine origin*.”⁴⁴ By stating that life and creation itself has meaning, Dooyeweerd installs an intrinsic value on human life and all of creation which precedes human thought or valuation of that creation. This intrinsic layer of meaning in creation, however, clearly differs from meaning as found through performing activities as those involved in the SpaceX multiplanetary goals. In Musk’s view, the activities and goals of diminishing extinction risks through colonisation, spreading the light of consciousness and expanding human knowledge, eventually have to be performed in order to find meaning in life in general and in human life in particular. From a philosophical point of view, this is a quite naïve way of thinking. For clearly, it will be impossible to find meaning by just expanding the range of our factual knowledge, since the meaning of things is not one more ‘fact’ next to others, but a way of interpreting and experiencing the world of facts. If the world as we know it does not strike us as meaningful already (for example because we do not consider it the work of a Creator), then there is little chance that this will change once we discover more facts about the universe. For example, it would be a childish, Yuri Gagarin (“I went up to space, but I did not encounter God”) type of mistake to suggest that once we travel through the universe or colonize other planets, we will at some point automatically run into God.

42 Lynn White Jr. The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis. *Science* 155/3767, 1967, pp.1203-1207.

43 Cf. Mohammed Abu Sayem. Lynn White, Jr.’s Critical Analysis of Environmental Degradation in Relation to Faith Traditions. *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 56 (1), 2021, pp. 1-23.

44 Herman Dooyeweerd. *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, [1953] 1969, Vol. 1, p. 4 (emphasis in the original).

What is interesting to note here, however, is that the quest for finding meaning in life is a universal human phenomenon. We often ask this question of the meaning of life when we or others are treated unfairly, or experience something that (seemingly or really) has no meaning at all. In such cases it does not seem enough to describe who we are and what we are made of. We are the only sentient moral beings on earth, the only bipeds who are fully self-aware and, moreover, who care about the fairness of events. We have moral and spiritual dimensions, which machines, software programs and other life forms such as animals, seem to lack. The question of the meaning of life is given to humans to explore and all sorts of answers can be found in various philosophical and religious traditions. According to reformational philosophy, this is because created being, including ‘our selfhood’, have been invested with (the need for) meaning by the Creator. The hope that the meaning of life can finally be found through space-exploration testifies to this universal longing.

5. Reductionism versus a Multiplicity of Modalities

Reformational philosophy is wary of reductionism, or reducing humankind to a biological, chemical or otherwise material essence. Thus, the expansion of our knowledge through space exploration, without acknowledging other aspects of life and its meaning than these material ones, would mean nothing else than expanding our knowledge of matter. The premise that there is no other meaning than what we are, chemically, biologically, physically, will determine the outcome of this quest for meaning: it is only the quantity of our knowledge that will expand, not its quality.

This tendency to reduce our life to certain material (biological, chemical etc.) aspects betrays a materialistic worldview on the part of Mr Musk and SpaceX. This worldview is not a necessary assumption behind multi-planetarism, however. Unpacking the theme of creation (as part of the Christian ground-motive) in a way that does justice to its multifarious dimensions, Dooyeweerdian philosophy offers a much richer description of human life and the world at large. The modalities or “modal spheres” in which humans and the world operate, feel and think are not only biological but also spiritual, moral, societal, legal, aesthetic, et cetera.⁴⁵

Reducing ourselves to merely intelligent biological beings as the SpaceX motives suggest, would mean that we ignore or belittle those other aspects, whereas it is precisely in these aspects that the specific meaning of human life may be found. Humans are different from animals and Artificial Intelligence, not because we know more or because we are more intelligent or rational. Artificial Intelligence will surpass us in intelligence in computations, and can hold vast amounts of data.

The difference is that we as human beings participate in all these other dimensions as well. For example, we know some form of right and wrong, and relate to a transcendent Being who holds us accountable and calls us into his communion. Engaging in space exploration and colonization might not just give us an opportunity to expand our safety or knowledge, but also to reflect on the issue of the meaning of life in relation to this transcendent Creator of the universe and our lives.

⁴⁵ See e.g. Herman Dooyeweerd. *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought. Volume II: The General Theory of the Modal Spheres*. Translated by D H Freeman and H de Jongste. [1955] 1969. Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed.

6. Redemption and Hope

Finally, it is not just the notions of creation and the fall that play a constitutive role in a reformational-philosophical assessment of space exploration and colonisation, but also the third part of the Christian ground-motive as distinguished by Dooyeweerd: the notion of eschatological redemption. This is not to suggest that we might bring humanity closer to such redemption through our attempts to colonise other planets – to think so would be a dangerous form of hubris. Yet, the Christian hope for ultimate redemption may help us to remain steadfast in the faith that our universe is not destined for final destruction, but for transformation into what is called the reign of God. This vision may inspire us to realize prefigurations, however partial and deficient, of the eschatological life in which “justice and peace embrace” (Psalm 85). Being attuned to this renewal that is to come can steer our attempts to expand human life beyond planet earth in ways that actually promote justice and peace.

This brings us to the most obvious counterargument against the colonisation of Mars (or any other planet for that matter): such an endeavour would demand an enormous amount of earthly resources. As our world is in dire need of our attention as climate change ravages our biodiversity and will have lasting devastating consequences mostly to the poorest and most vulnerable of the human population on earth, allocating resources and human power to otherworldly locations seems unjust and immoral, from a generally human as well as from a specific reformational philosophical perspective. Therefore, these costs should be taken into account and the benefits to be expected should be very carefully weighed against them whenever the decision to colonise another planet is being made.

Thus, humankind in general, and space engineers in particular, who take the tripartite Christian ground-motive of creation, fall and redemption seriously, will design and develop (space) technology based on these premises. The notion of creation leads to a co-creating technology (space faring technology included) that first of all maintains life on earth, but may then also find reason to expand it. The continued state of human fallenness and fallibility leads to the humbling awareness that all our design and technology can be inspired not only by morally outstanding ideals but also infected by pride, greed etc. This will make us very suspicious towards utopian notions of “bringing heaven on earth” – or on Mars, for that matter. And finally, the notion of redemption will inspire engineers to design and develop technology that restores life, heals divides, and brings righteousness to the poor and afflicted. These threefold motives for cultural, scientific and technological development can drive us to engage in space exploration in a careful but joyful way, since we don’t have to worry whether our civilisation will fall or rise and expand beyond earth. For at the end of the day, our fate is bound to God's plan of redemption and ultimate restoration, not on all too human attempts to build our own paradise.

6. Conclusion

In this article we explored some of the underlying reasons for space exploration and colonisation, especially those of this decade’s leading Space exploration company and its chief engineer in the endeavour to colonise Mars. If these reasons – passing the Great Filter, expanding human

knowledge, reducing the risk of human annihilation – are important enough, monetary or resource issues should not be the issue. We conclude that, would the issue of preserving and expanding “the light of human consciousness” require it, the colonisation of Mars could be argued for. This is true even from a reformational point of view, as the cultural mandate provides an incentive to explore all of creation, not just the earth and moon. The moral notion that the preservation of humankind through becoming a multi-planet species is worth putting effort in, even displays an admirable ethic: as human beings we are worth the trouble of trying to ensure survival. This counters arguments of the Voluntary Human extinction Movement⁴⁶ and transhumanist thinking that human life is but a temporary evolutionary phase, so that defeatism on our future fate (or even voluntary annihilation) is preferable. We also found that the realistic and non-utopian expectation of a Mars Colony where human fallibility is acknowledged, is compatible with Christian thinking in general and the Christian ground-motive as distinguished by reformational philosophy in particular. Unlike suggestions to the contrary, however, exploring and colonizing other parts of the universe will not, in and of itself, help us to find the meaning of life.

Lastly, one more thought. It could very well be that when there is a Mars Colony within twenty or thirty years from now, colonists there might ask for help from Christians on earth to start or join a congregation of Bible readers, or of seekers for meaning in life, as they will access the earth’s literature, including the Bible. After all, they would still stem from the human race for which Christ died, and carry its genes. As all planets are part of creation, who could resist helping such colonists to find their Creator and Saviour in order to honour Him?

46 See <https://www.vhemt.org/>

The Philosophy of the Cosmonomic Idea and the Chapters of Sociology's 20th Century Story

Bruce C Wearne

The Problem

Any authentic Christian sociology will have to work with the pre-scientific assumption that human society is God's creation, the theatre in which men and women live out their days, those whom God in creating them defined as the bearers of the Divine image. Their lives are in answer to God's call, to love Him with everything they have, and to love their neighbours as themselves. The social circumstances and consequences of these responsibilities are sociology's empirical focus.

It was the many-sided character of this social involvement that James Olthuis had in view in 1970, when he connected the Philosophy of the Cosmic Idea (PCI) to sociological research in a paper he wrote for university students. His aim was to give a theoretical account of

... the status and nature of the structural entities which everyone experiences in his life; family, state, marriage, institutional church, business, labor union etc. How is one to account for these structures... philosophically? What is their ontic status? How is it possible that such structures retain their identity in spite of the change in individual members? How is it possible that marriage, to take an example, is still recognized to be marriage in spite of the changing forms of marriage in history?¹

By addressing the study of societal structures in this way, Olthuis was restating what Herman Dooyeweerd had formulated in 1937 when the Free University jurist explained sociology's relationship to the philosophy he had then just recently formulated in systematic terms in his Dutch language *magnum opus*.²

Dooyeweerd obviously judged that those working with his philosophy needed guidance as they confronted the dominant schools of sociology in their own academic workplaces. Volume III considers "The Structures of Individuality of Temporal Things" and it then moves on to a comprehensive discussion of the "Structures of the Individuality of Temporal Human Society."

A truly Christian sociological contribution will not only seek to gain confidence about its own philosophical assumptions but, as it considers the empirical results from its own fieldwork, along with the findings of others, it will need insight into the way the theories of these "schools" are active in the field. To be at work in sociology requires such understanding and this state of affairs can be confusing.

1 Jim Olthuis. "The Reality of Societal Structures." Unpublished mimeograph. Toronto: Institute for Christian Studies. (Association for the Advancement of Christian Scholarship Academic Papers), 1970.

2 Herman Dooyeweerd. **De Wijsbegeerte der Wetsidee**. 3 volumes. Amsterdam: H J Paris, 1935-36.

This confusion, I conclude, is mainly caused by a lack of insight concerning the basic problems which human society presents to theoretical thought, and so of the right meaning and the mutual relationship between these problems. I tend to think of these basic problems in the following terms as follows:

1. How are the different forms of social life (such as family, marriage, business enterprise, state, church, club, partnership, etc.) related to the modal aspects of temporal reality (number, space, motion, organic life, feeling, logical thought, history, language, social intercourse, economics, aesthetic harmony, law, ethics, faith)?
2. Are the structures of these forms of social life themselves variable in their historical development, or are there constant structures at the base of the variable forms of social life, which alone make these changing forms possible?
3. How are the diverse structures of social life related to one another, and in what ways are they intertwined?
4. What is the deeper unity and origin of these structures?³

This 1937 formulation is still just as relevant for the study of sociology in 2023 as it was when it was first published, as it was when Olthuis' paper appeared in 1970. Accounting for sociology's "diversity of schools" is still part of the preparation for an empirically-oriented sociology. The single-minded under-graduate who simply wants to get busy with "sociological research" may find this to be a diversion but it is not. It is crucial. So what can the Philosophy of the Cosmomic Idea contribute to the understanding of this "diversity of schools" as it is manifested within the discipline known as sociology?

The Textbooks

We concede that a distinctive literature of PCI sociology, documenting its fieldwork, has not made its appearance. But whenever PCI scholarship moves into sociology it has had to confront the confusing variety of sociological "schools." The complex task of engaging in immanent critique, probing the presupposed philosophical bases of these diverging schools, should not be avoided. It is a necessary task, and has not been made easier by the formidable publications of the "textbook sociology" industry. These works are marketed as "Sociology." They are oriented very much to the under-graduate student "niche". They construe the discipline in a synthetic way by weaving all the different theoretical "perspectives" together in what are often well-crafted narratives, all under the heading of "theory."

The "perspectives" are illustrated by fieldwork findings that illustrate diverging rationales for social research. The overall effect is to present a complex, encyclopedic academic pursuit.⁴

3 Herman Dooyeweerd. "De beteekenis van de wijsbegeerte der wetsidee voor de theorie der menselijke samenleving", *Philosophia Reformata* 2 (1937) 2: 99-116, at pp. 99-100.

4 See as examples: Anthony Giddens and Phillip W Sutton. **Sociology** (9th edition) Polity 2021; George Ritzer. **The McDonaldization of Society: Into the Digital Age** (9th edition) Sage 2018; Michael Haralambos and Michael Holborn. **Sociology: themes and perspectives** (8th edition) Collins 2013.

“Textbook sociology” discloses the persistence of the presumed synthetic character of the sociological discipline. These “Introductions” will often provide a detailed account of the variety of sociological “schools” and “perspectives”, and they will also be compared and contrasted. This is taken-for-granted as an introduction to sociology as it is taught around the world in schools and universities. Each school will be given its due and such accounts will also be accompanied by the findings from research undertaken from that perspective. And so sociology is introduced to students with such a synthetic presentation – sociology is what sociologists have studied. That is how students are usually confronted with the discipline. To develop a critical analysis of any such text book is itself a very difficult task, and not made any easier by the textbook’s presumption that this is merely an *introduction* to the field.

But the Philosophy of the Cosmomic Idea cannot concede that the synthetic configuration of what has hitherto been taught as “sociology” can answer the basic philosophical questions that a sociological student will have to resolve.

And there is more. The question of sociology’s emergence as a scientific discipline also needs to be dealt with. This brings us to the *historiography* of sociology, the story of how it has come to occupy its own place in “society of the sciences.”

Sociology’s 20th Century History

So how are we to understand sociology’s recent history? Sociology’s early beginnings were in 19th century Europe in the aftermath of the French revolution, provoking sustained reflection upon the emergence of what we have come to call the “industrial revolution”.⁵ We can say that over the course of the 20th century, sociology’s epicentre moved westward, away from Europe and across the North Atlantic. Early 20th century European sociology, deeply conscious of how Europe had emerged from Europe’s past, configured a social future which was indeed looking in a westward direction. Max Weber noted this when he introduced his collection of essays on the sociology of religion:

A product of modern European civilization, studying any problem of universal history, is bound to ask himself to what combination of circumstances the fact should be attributed that in Western civilization, and in Western civilization only, cultural phenomena have appeared which (as we like to think) lie in a line of development having universal significance and value.⁶

This then reminds us of the “intertwined” world-historical, civilisational or global significance of Western Europe and North America. Dooyeweerd recognised that this horizon had to be taken into account when his own scholarly work came into contact with what was then being developed as

5 Anna Beazanson “The early use of the term industrial revolution” *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 36, 1922, pp. 343-349.

6 “Author’s Introduction” in Max Weber. **The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism** translated by Talcott Parsons, London, Unwin University Books, 1930. pp.13-31 at p.13 (This is the opening paragraph of what was originally published as “Vorbemerkung” to Max Weber. **Gesammelte Aufsatz zur Religionssoziologie** 1920 pp. 1-16 at p.1.)

“sociology”. If, as he alleged, there was a “basic lack of insight” prevailing within “European sociology” in 1937, a similar problematic persists when, eighty-five years later, the Philosophy of the Cosmomic Idea confronts the latter-day form of the sociological discipline that has seemingly become such a well-established “North American” academic and scientific pursuit.

In recent decades, with the impact of a post-modern “incredulity to all meta-narratives”, there may well be a greater diversity of sociological “schools”. But in the immediate post World War II years it was observed that the epicentre of sociology, like the centre of “Western civilisation” itself in the years of the cold war, was persistently on the move “westwards”. And then, by the end of the 20th century, with the end of the cold war, and as a new millennium began, those working in “European sociology” would also be working within the context of a rediscovery of the discipline that had initially been conceived in their own locale, and this renewed understanding had been brought about through the formidable contribution from the once European discipline’s “North American” descendants.⁷

And so we might say that when sociology’s 21st century tale is told, “Post-Modern Sociology” will be the latest “chapter” in a story that was disclosed when European scholars rediscovered how “European sociology” had been kept alive and mediated through “North American sociology” which had inherited a view of sociology from their European sociological predecessors.⁸ This latest chapter might also have taken the name “End of History Sociology”⁹ from the late 1980s when it seemed as if liberalism was victorious as the Soviet Union collapsed and the cold war came to an end.

The significant late 20th century European appreciation for “North American sociology” focused upon the work of Talcott Parsons who had insisted that sociological theory originated from the work of sociology’s European “founding fathers”. His had been a very complex task, but it was welcomed in Europe, and the views of Weber and Durkheim had thereby remained relevant for the new century. At that time, the echoing and haunting calls from the storm birds of the late-19th century’s civilisational crisis were also heard - Marx, Freud and Nietzsche - and so were also received in the sociological pantheon, even if at times confined to the fringes.

Not without relevance for “North American sociology” was Peter Berger’s¹⁰ pragmatic receipt of phenomenology (from Alfred Schütz¹¹) and the development of his social constructionist perspective. Sociology, incorporating Berger’s emphasis upon a “biographical perspective,” sought

7 Geoffrey Hawthorn. **Enlightenment and Despair: a History of Sociology** CUP 1976 p.216. Jurgen Habermas stated emphatically in 1981 that ‘any theoretical work in sociology today that failed to take account of Talcott Parsons could not be taken seriously.’ “Talcott Parsons: Problems of Theory Construction” *Sociological Inquiry*, 51, 3-4, 1981, 173-196 at 174. See also Uta Gerhardt **The Social Thought of Talcott Parsons: Methodology and American Ethos** 2011, Ashgate; Bruce C Wearne “Review of Uta Gerhardt The Social Thought of Talcott Parsons: Methodology and American Ethos” *Thesis Eleven* 129, 1, 2015, 131-135.

8 Jeffrey C. Alexander and Giuseppe Sciortino “On Choosing One’s Intellectual Predecessors: The Reductionism of Camic’s Treatment of Parsons and the Institutionalists” *Sociological Theory* 14, 2 (July) 1996, pp. 154-171.

9 Francis Fukuyama. The End of History? *The National Interest* 16, 1989, 3–18.

10 Peter Ludwig Berger (1929-2017) was Austrian-born, arriving in USA in 1946 at the age of 17.

to ground sociological research in a humanistic *Weltanschauung*. Social reality, Berger says, is humanly constructed and, from that bottom line, sociology's "debunking" of taken-for-granted realities can proceed.¹² Social constructionism exerted a powerful influence upon academic sociology, and ironically cleared the way for the subsequent receipt of the even more rigorous "debunking" derived from post-structuralist French incredulity to all meta-narratives.¹³ And so, from a post-modern perspective, sociology would style itself as "critical theory." The "deconstruction" of Foucault as well as Gramsci's reconfiguration of Marx have been confirmed, finding Richard Rorty's pragmatic pragmatism a ready ally. The story had moved on. The contributions of "North American sociology" were being incorporated into a new chapter.

The New "Chapter" in the History of Sociology

As we now know, the "new chapter", looking beyond "American sociology", absorbed a resurgence of feminist sociology, and was also reckoning with the persistent emergence of so-called "multi-cultural societies" within the West, as well as the emergence of newly independent states after colonisation, the recognition of the needs of ethnic minorities as well as the rights of indigenous as well as other displaced and marginalised people. Feminist sociology, in its reliance upon social constructionism, had asserted gender equality and resisted female marginalisation (i.e. confined to domestic life and child-rearing) in industrialised contexts. But this then gave currency to other new perspectives that were predicated upon an *a priori* distinction between biology (sexuality) and culture (gender)¹⁴. So feminist sociology in its explicit alliance with those who claim to "decenter the world," was part of the presupposed socially-constructed ethos when sociology took its next decisive turn toward "queer theory," and its emphasis upon ambivalence, ambiguity and multiplicity, aiming to make "reality" appear even more unstable, complex, and disorderly than it does already.¹⁵ Sociology's "progressive" self-definition was taken-for-granted as it absorbed these "reality changing perspectives". And so all kinds of post-colonial perspectives (including the recent prominence of Critical Race Theory said to be part of worldwide "Black Lives Matter" protests) find a place under the banner of academic sociology in its "inclusive" stance.

The key to tracing sociology's "progressive" disclosure will be found in the long-established pre-theoretical assumption that norms are but human devices constructed by human beings in acts of self-creation. And as can be derived logically from a careful examination of sociology's curriculum, such "self-creation" is in ambiguous tension with the human condition in so far as the latter presupposes a normative task of procreation.

11 Alfred Schütz (1899-1959), Austrian-born, arrived in USA in 1939 having fled Vienna. Strongly influenced by Husserl's phenomenology, he studied law with Hans Kelsen and economics with Hayek and von Mises.

12 Peter L Berger and Thomas Luckmann. **The Social Construction of Reality**. 1966, Anchor. Peter L Berger. **Invitation to Sociology: a Humanistic Perspective**. 1963, Doubleday.

13 Jean-Francois Lyotard. **The Post-Modern Condition: a Report on Knowledge** (trans. Bennington & Massumi) 1984, Univ. of Minnesota Press; David Harvey. **The Condition of Post-Modernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change**. 1989, Blackwells.

14 Michele Barrett. **Women's Oppression Today**. 1980/2014 (New Edition). Verso.

15 Jane Flax. "Postmodernism and Gender Relations in Feminist Theory" *Signs* 12, 4 (Summer) 1987, pp. 621-643; see pp. 642-643.

The Christian Antithesis

At precisely this point any effort to develop a sociological scholarship from a *Biblically-directed* view of *human procreation* will have to reckon with the way humanistic and post-humanistic sociologies have maintained a decisive influence, and continue to do so with no let up, that can be seen *empirically* in legislation, efforts to regulate public life, and public policies that implicate marriage and “sexual identity”. This development, deconstructing and reconstructing what is to be lawfully understood in terms of human rights, is evident world-wide. And it must have an impact upon any scholarly effort to develop and *publish* a Christian sociological perspective.

In such a public context, the open enunciation of a belief that marriage is a husband-wife relationship has to be problematic in such a public-legal context, subject to accusations of hate-speech and denial of human rights, and therefore also potentially liable to criminal penalty. Therefore it must be understood by Christian scholars taking up this task, that the development of a Christian sociology has to be problematic in such a public-legal context where due respect for such vowed belief has been undermined by subsequent legislative mistakes that have ignored the full consequences of the “progressive” legislation. But that public-legal context only makes the advocacy of such an alternative normative viewpoint all the more necessary, not merely to protect the faith of Christians – let alone Christian sociologists operating in an increasingly secularised and antagonistic academic context – but because of all those who consider marriage to be a husband-wife relationship, the rights of all who have made solemn public wedding vows that ascribe to such a “sexual identity.”

In this sense, Christian sociology is called to render an important intellectual and academic service that contributes to public justice for all. Its dissent will have to be constructed with positive contributions to the public understanding of the “common good,” the “national interest” even if its understanding of these shows *Christian* distinctiveness.

The public-legal perspectives justifying such legislative narrowing of what I call the open enunciation of marriage beliefs (even when they have already been implicit in the public vow of marriage partners for generations) may claim to concede a willingness to allow such “religious belief” to function but if we are taking notice of the justifications given by parliamentarians for such legislation, we will note a presumption that the social space in which such “religious” beliefs are given a formal nod of respect is an increasingly narrowing “private sphere.”

To announce a Biblical view of procreation, with all that this means as part of a comprehensive creation-wide world-view (or philosophy), is the only critical Christian way to resist a public-legal demand that actually requires believers to renounce the creation-wide dimensions of their own faith, let alone their publicly affirmed marriage vows. But to do so will run foul of those who will want to hear such a public statement of marriage belief as “hate speech” toward those not born in that “conventional” way.

A Biblically-directed view of procreation as an integral component of a sociological perspective is basic to loving one’s neighbour, the stewardship of creational resources, public justice, and the

nurture of future generations. It is not just a set of doctrines that can be limited to an understanding of courtship and marriage. It has implications for *all* dimensions of human responsibility, for how we understand education and schooling, the division of labour between male and female, the courteous ways in which we treat each other, how we should understand “sexuality” as human potential for procreation, and how the “human project” is embedded in a natural environment. It has immediate consequences for how we understand the institutions of public governance, and even of how religion is manifest in social life.

Such a view must also have an impact upon the way in which we understand our bodily chemistry, the genetic inheritance we receive from our parents, the strengths, weaknesses and even our bodily deformities and diseases. It provides a context in which to frame our human efforts to alleviate suffering and overcome the many troubling problems that confront our planet. And because the dogmas that arise from the religion of human autonomy have massive and ongoing impact upon the way these problems are being addressed,¹⁶ a Christian sociology cannot be developed without deepening appreciation for the ongoing *religious antithesis* within which, in its own Biblical perspective, the Cultural Mandate (Genesis 1:28-31; Psalm 8) and its updating in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20), is necessarily disclosed.

The Contribution of the PCI

And so the Philosophy of the Cosmomic Idea suggests that a Christian sociological perspective stands in need of a cumulative and critical examination of the ongoing nurture of the liberal-humanistic world-and-life-view that has long been at work in sociology, and in its text-books, since the 1950s and 1960s (what I have called “the North American sociology” chapter). It will also need to deepen insight into how sociology has participated in the evaporation of the humanistic *Weltanschauung* under late-modernist or post-modernist conditions.

But how is this necessary and critical examination of the confusing variety of sociological schools to be taken up without ambiguity by the erstwhile Christian student, when the 1999 Foreword to *In the Twilight of Western Thought* tells us that Dooyeweerd’s transcendental critique can be viewed as an endorsement of the post-modernism that has arrived with its late 20th century efflorescence?¹⁷

Therefore it would seem only right that before clarifying how the Philosophy of the Cosmomic Idea can enhance a student’s understanding of “North American Sociology,” that this philosophy

16 Think here of the way “traditional” ethics has been deconstructed in order to facilitate research on human subjects, redefine human life, and thus make human seed, ova, and embryos, within certain limits, “commodities”. And note how these legal developments coincide with some attempts from the feminist contribution that have sought to reconfigure the way in which biology relates to human cultural formation. See Barrett Footnote 14 and note how the stringent demands that are raised in a political context for increased access to “rights to termination” (abortion) presume an undefined “right” to sexual activity *as if such consensual intercourse has nothing to do with human procreation!*

17 James K. A. Smith “Editorial Foreword” in Herman Dooyeweerd. **In the Twilight of Western Thought: Studies in the Pretended Autonomy of Theoretical Thought**. 1999. Edwin Mellen Press, pp. v- xiii at pp. xii-xiii (Series B, Volume 4 The Collected Works of Herman Dooyeweerd). See Paul Otto. In the Twilight of Dooyeweerd’s Corpus: The Publishing History of In The Twilight of Western Thought and the Future of Dooyeweerd Studies. *Philosophia Reformata* 70, 1, 2005, pp. 23-40.

*and its associated sociological insights assist reformational thinkers in coming to a truly Christian and critical assessment of the, at times, highly ambiguous receipt of Dooyeweerd's philosophy in that same domain! Otherwise such "Christian sociology" will be going ahead blind and that would not be wise.*¹⁸

By examining the sociology text-books of the earlier eras, it is possible to gain insight into how the *perspectives* we now hear about with such dogmatic certainty, have been radicalized over time.

"Progressive" post-colonial action, resolutions and legislation, as well as the populist collectivist movements that claim to be opposing "progressives", are making appeal to beliefs that were already present *in a nutshell*, when the synthetic "theory" of sociology courses was being outlined 30-40 years ago in the texts and courses of those times.

The PCI's contribution will encourage a fresh critical confrontation with the theories of academic sociology (and not with them alone of course) to discern how the various schools of liberal-humanistic sociology have been active in nurturing this latter-day global societal revolution in all of its nationalist, "progressivist" and "critical theory" directions.

There are persistent efforts among evangelicals to keep "Christian sociology" alive and PCI sociology will also need to stay alert to sociology that arises from a renewal in Roman Catholic circles. PCI sociology should not remain deaf to the significant efforts of Muslim scholars to initiate an accommodation with the liberal-humanist world-view and its corresponding ideologies that is typically found in any differentiated democratic order.

Dooyeweerd's 1937 statement actually implies that his philosophy, in seeking an approach to sociology that stands alongside all the other (liberal humanist and socialistic humanist and whatever-humanist) sociologies, does not assume that its task is to resolve the tensions that arise within and between those denominations of sociology that are expressive of a *religious belief* in human autonomy.

The tension in humanistic sociology arises between the twin idols of scientific rationality and the free personality and any true resolution of that tension can only come from a radical turning away from the idolatry that generates it. The Christian sociological contribution is not called upon to resolve those tensions but is called to give evidence of an authentic sociological engagement motivated from its humble and repentant pre-scientific allegiance to Christ Jesus.

18 And Olthuis's exposition of Dooyeweerd's sociology in 1970 affirms the unchanging structure of marriage in its changing historical forms. So how now does PCI philosophy account for what is, around the world, referred to as "same-sex marriage"? (see footnote.1 above) It needs to account for the *empirical* reality of the social consequences of a *legal error based in a classificatory mistake*, that implies that a same-sex friendship generated by sexual desire in sexual play can be the basis for marriage. A Christian sociology from a PCI standpoint will have to develop from an outlook that openly considers so called "same-sex marriage" as the mistaken and misnamed relationship that arises among populations within polities that have witnessed a legislative and jurisprudential effort to redesign not only marriage but also gender, according to an ideology that views marriage and gender in terms of human self-creation, reducing marriage to a form of sexually-motivated lifelong friendship given special privileges in law because of its coincidence with the mutual vow of the partners to life-long fidelity. The "project" presumes that it is for public law not only to define structures found in reality but to *create* them.

All genuine special sciences are to be ascribed their due. And a Christian scientific engagement with sociology is called to challenge not only the confusing “lack of insight concerning the basic problems which human society presents to theoretical thought,” but to develop empirical research on an integrally Christian path that would bring reformation to sociological scholarship. The reformation of the academy is also in view, and so Christian scholarship must seek to address and help overcome the tragic social malformation of scientific work also in universities. The Philosophy of the Cosmomic Idea has an important contribution to make to scholars working toward that reformation.

On the Same Page

B C Wearne

In publishing Chris van Haeften's essay, "Dooyeweerd and the Riddle of Reality," *Findings* editors have decided to make it the inaugural contribution of a new "Department" of our journal – **On the Same Page**. Chris's article is an attempt to expound Dooyeweerd's view of the created cosmos in three and a half thousand words.

We are therefore inviting readers who have developed similar exegetical analysis of major PCI writings, or recurrent themes in reformational scholarship, to help us develop this department of our journal and submit articles of similar length with a view to publication.

Not every edition of *Findings* will feature contributions to **On the same page**. And subsequent editions will be open to feature a selection of reader responses to the published article (of 300-500 words in length). These will identify important issues that have been raised, criticisms and corrections, as well as any other matters deemed relevant.

We hope that such expository essays with the resultant discussion among our readership becomes a key element of the contribution *Findings* makes to the further development of reformational scholarship.

On the same page may also feature essays commenting on references to PCI scholarship by scholars who do not necessarily adhere to this philosophy but who have seen fit to draw attention to it as they make their own scholarly contributions.

Scientific scholarship, particularly philosophical argument, needs exposition, and accessible essays of this length may well prove vital for a new generation of PCI scholars. The results of intellectual labour should always invite reflection, discussion and debate as we seek to deepen scientific insight into the world in which we live to the glory of God. We take this step as part of an ongoing contribution that can at times be difficult but we do so believing (as Herman Dooyeweerd remarked in the Foreword to his 1935 *magnum opus*) "*that this will indeed lead to something of lasting assistance for the realization of Christian scholarship.*"

Apart from thanking Chris for submitting his article, an attempt to expound Dooyeweerd's view of the created cosmos in three and a half thousand words, we thank him for hereby stimulating our editorial reflections that have led to this innovation.

So, this department will, from time to time, feature essays like this initial one from Chris. We invite our readers to give brief critical and cogent responses.

Thank you.

Dooyeweerd and the Riddle of Reality

Chris van Haeften

Introduction

Is there meaning to reality? Can human life be fundamentally meaningful?

Philosophy has dealt with these basic existential questions in various ways. This article follows Herman Dooyeweerd in his dealing with these questions. They are here approached in a fundamentally empirical way. This means among other things that the dialectical problem of being and becoming is rejected. We have no experience of anything that is not subject to becoming. We only know reality as process. Neither do we know of any reality apart from the subjective functions of human consciousness. Even the idea of reality apart from human beings is a human idea. This calls for an investigation of human experience.

Human experience, temporal and cosmic

As part of cosmic reality, human experience, whether primary or theoretical, is a process “in” time.¹ Our awareness of time stems from experiencing our identity.² As such, it is primarily awareness of duration.

But not just any duration. The duration of our existence fits our cosmos. Human beings are only possible as cosmic beings. Therefore, the time of our existence and experience is cosmically structured. We only know of duration according to the structure and the modes of cosmic time.

Cosmic time

Which modes can we detect in the cosmic time of our experience? Without being exhaustive, we can say that our experience shows numerality, space, motion, energy, life, psychical awareness, and logic.

That these would all be modes of time is surprising. How can numbers, space, and logic be modes of time? The most simple answer to this question is that they are modes of human experience, and that human experience is temporal, so the modes of human experience must be modes of time.

There are no things or events that do not have some duration. Space, even in its primary sense of simultaneous extension, presupposes time, since simultaneity is a form of experience, and therefore a form of time. This becomes even clearer when we realize that the space in motion and in physical

1 We say “in” time. But this is not an adequate expression since “in” has foremost a spatial meaning.

2 Herman Dooyeweerd. **A New Critique of Theoretical Thought**. The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, Volume III, 1969, p. 109.

reality always presupposes time. No motion and no energy can be real apart from some duration. And surely, there is no life apart from time. Likewise, psychological awareness is only real as occurring.

But logic? By subsuming logic under cosmic time we get to a fundamental point. Logic applies to human thinking. Since this is a process, logic presupposes human time. This puts an end to timeless being. Human thinking can only occur in the all-sided coherence of human reality. Without our bodily existence there could be no thought, and hence no logic.

But is it not possible to yet attain to some form of timeless being solely on the basis of logic? The most simple answer to this question is that something without time has no now, and therefore never is.

Modal reference

Cosmic modes refer to one another. There is no logic apart from psychological awareness, and there is no psychological awareness apart from biotic life. Likewise, there is no biotic life apart from physical energy. And physical energy presupposes motion, while motion presupposes space. But how about numerality?

It is not difficult to understand how the functions of space, motion, energy, biotic life, psychic awareness, and logical thinking are related to number. A logical thought is one thought, composed of a number of parts. Psychic awareness too occurs in a multiplicity of occasions. Biotic life is always the life of one living being, and consists of a number of phases. Physical energy as well implies a number of entities between which energy is exchanged. Motion, even if it is not interrupted, implies a number of positions. Space necessarily implies a number of points and three dimensions.

Furthermore, each of these modes, as basic “object” of theoretical thought, is one such “object.” Likewise, every object of primary experience is one “object.”³

Primary experience and theoretical knowledge

In our everyday experience we do not distinguish these modes of time. They only become explicit in theoretical abstraction. In primary experience they remain implicit. Nevertheless, they are there. They are the modes by which the cosmic reality of our experience is characterized. Together, in their coherence, they constitute the particular way in which human beings experience cosmic reality. In their coherence they are characteristic of the continuous unity of human cosmic experience.

³ I write “object” with quotation marks, for Dooyeweerd emphatically makes clear that the basic concerns of theoretical enterprises are very different from the objects of primary experience.

When we further investigate our concrete cosmic experience we find that it is characterized by other functions as well. For example, we also find the lingual mode and the economic mode. While the numerical mode is in a sense basic, it is at the same time expressive of modes that are less basic. Thus, the numerical mode of our experience refers to the lingual and to the economic mode. Numbers can be named, and a price (expressed in numbers) can be attached to every real thing.

There is no cosmic mode separate from all the others. Only in their occurring togetherness and mutual reference are they real. Each one mode refers to all the others. This universal referring and expressing constitutes what Dooyeweerd calls the meaning of our cosmos. Meaning means that no thing and hence no mode is absolute.

The root of cosmic reality

Apparently, the cosmic time of our experience is multi-faceted. Since all relative modes of cosmic experience presuppose the human ego, the latter can be called the root of cosmic reality. The modal structure of cosmic time has to be retraced to a creaturely central root-unity of the entire temporal reality.⁴

Since cosmic reality is meaning, its root must be meaning too. This refers to the Origin of the human being. This seems logical, but it does not answer the question how a concrete individual *self* is referred to its Origin. How does this referring occur, and how does meaning-fulfillment concretely originate from the Origin?

The human ego is real in all experience as self-awareness. Is there existential meaning for the human ego? Can my life be fundamentally meaningful? Can I find fulfillment of my meaning? Does my existence have any relation to what transcends the relativity of cosmic time with its various modes?

The relative and the absolute

The self is at the base of cosmic time. It is its root. But surely, it is not absolute. I, as a member of the human race, stem from other human beings, who are as relative as I am. Therefore, in order to find the Absolute I have to go even beyond the origination of the human race.

How is this to be done, and what is this “going beyond”? Apparently, it can only be done in a personal-existential way, which implies my reconciliation with my relativity. I must find rest in the middle of time’s unrest.

4 Herman Dooyeweerd. De leer der analogie in de Thomistische wijsbegeerte en in de wijsbegeerte der wetsidee. *Philosophia Reformata* 7, 2, 1942, pp. 49-50.

Individual self-hood

According to Dooyeweerd, “Our intuition of time is undeniably rooted in the identity of our selfhood.”⁵ “It is I who remain the [...] deeper unity [...] of my temporal existence.”⁶ I am identical over the course of my life-time. Self-awareness implies awareness of self-identity.

What is this identity of the individual selfhood? Is it an objective reality, of which we can form a concept? How is the individual selfhood experienced? How does it exist?

The answer to these questions is that selfhood, *ipseity*, is constantly being experienced. But it is not an object. Yet, it is only real in being experienced. It is *radical* reality, radical experience. It is a basic riddle.⁷ It is subjective totality of meaning.⁸ Its reality, therefore, points to the Absolute Origin of meaning.

All this sound pretty abstract. But the reality of self-hood is that it is *my* selfhood. *Ipseity* refers to my reality. Concretely it points to my having been born of woman, to my having to grow up, to my having to get a handle on my hormone-driven reality, it points to my sickness and my health, and to my having to die. These unavoidable vicissitudes of life are *mine*. My reality is the reality of these vicissitudes. Therefore, the question of the meaning of life is the question of how to get these things settled.

Transcendence

According to Dooyeweerd, philosophers transcend time in an act of transcendence.⁹ What does this mean? It cannot mean that the act in its actuality leaves time behind such that it would be partly temporal and partly non-temporal. Acts require time for their entire duration. Nor can it mean that we become conscious of any “object” beyond time. For neither the objects of naïve experience nor the theoretical objects are apart from time. Objects in the proper sense are only given in a duration of the cosmic subject-object relation, and the Gegenstände (“objects”) of theoretical knowledge presuppose a real act of abstracting thought. The only possibility is that in “transcending” philosophers become aware of our radical position “in” time. The act of transcending theory is

5 Herman Dooyeweerd. Het tijdsprobleem en zijn antinomieën op het immanentiestandpunt. *Philosophia Reformata* 1, 1, 1936, p. 69.

6 Herman Dooyeweerd. **A New Critique of Theoretical Thought**. The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1969, Volume I, p. 5.

7 Herman Dooyeweerd. **In the Twilight of Western Thought**. Craig Press: Nutley, New Jersey, 1972, p. 181.

8 Herman Dooyeweerd. **A New Critique of Theoretical Thought**, Volume I, p. 5.

9 Herman Dooyeweerd. Het tijdsprobleem en zijn antinomieën op het immanentiestandpunt II. *Philosophia Reformata* 4, 1, 1939, p. 5.

simply concerned with the ego as ego, it is meant to point to the philosopher's self as "heart." In the process of philosophical thinking the philosopher's ego should return to itself.¹⁰

Double Riddle, Absolute Origin

It should be emphasized that *ipseity* belongs to concrete primary experience, and that here our relatedness to God shows itself. *Ipseity* is irreducibly *given*, and is given *as pointing to God*. The vicissitudes of my being make me cry out to the God of my life.

Personal identity is experienced as involving a subjective lapse of cosmic time. This is why and how time is experienced. We are aware of time in being ourselves. Ego presupposes time.

Apparently, our intuition, upon theoretical inspection, refers us to two enigmas at once: time and the human being. Augustine raised the question "What is time?" He knew it intimately, but could not formulate a concept of it. It is the same with regard to *ipseity*. There is no theoretical answer to the question "What am I?" We cannot comprehend ourselves.

But we all know ourselves. This shows in the innumerable day-time occasions when we use the personal pronoun "I," and sometimes *ipseity* appears even during the night, in our dreams. Self-awareness is a most intimate knowledge. Yet, the question "What is this I?" constitutes the riddle of the sphinx.

The answer Dooyeweerd gives to this theoretical problem is very clear. The human being can only be understood as existing in relation to the Creator. This is not meant to yet again open up some possibility of logical-conceptual or quasi-conceptual knowledge of God. "Creator" is another term for "Absolute Origin," which can only be known passionately,¹¹ not by a conceptualizing theoretical mind. Jesus the Christ referred to this reality as "Father," Whom we are to love passionately, with all our heart. Since the Biblical expression "heart" refers to the human being as a personal focus of religious¹² passion, and since the ego *is* the heart, it follows that the ego has to be become inflamed by love.¹³

Dooyeweerd often uses the designation "Absolute Origin" for God. Philosophically this is quite significant. Its meaning is closely related to the radical cosmic status of the human self. It points to the createdness of the human being. Creation, says Dooyeweerd, is radical.¹⁴ Therefore it is

10 Herman Dooyeweerd. **A New Critique of Theoretical Thought**, Volume I, p. 7.

11 Herman Dooyeweerd. Het tijdsprobleem in de wijsbegeerte der wetsidee I, II. *Philosophia Reformata* 5, 3, 1940, p. 182.

12 In using the expression "religion" I follow Dooyeweerd, although I am of the opinion that the term has lost its usefulness for today.

13 Herman Dooyeweerd. **A New Critique of Theoretical Thought**. The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1969, Volume II, p. 49.

14 Herman Dooyeweerd. **In the Twilight of Western Thought**, pp. 189-190.

personal: *I* exist createdly. In no way can I comprehend my own being. All my comprehending, all my knowing, and all my conceptualizing *presupposes* me. This constitutes our supra-temporality: just as ego presupposes time, time presupposes ego.

As irreducibly given to myself in *ipseity*, which is no doubt the way I was created, I appear to be passionately concerned about my existence. This ultimate concern constitutes the innate impulse to search for the Origin of my meaning.¹⁵ *Ipseity*, then, is not only a riddle, it also constitutes a religious-existential norm.

Time and self are equally enigmatic. In their bi-unity they constitute a double riddle.¹⁶ The self presupposes time, and time presupposes the self. There is no experience of time apart from a self, and there is no self-experience apart from time.

Cosmic self-hood

The human being is a self in cosmic coherence. It can for this reason be referred to as cosmic I-ness.¹⁷ The human individual is continuously taken up in the actual weaving into cosmic totality. For example, in seeing a bird's nest. That seeing occurs in actual time.¹⁸ It is an instance of the cosmos actually and coherently being woven into totality.

Primary cosmic reality, including the self, is experienced as dynamic and coherent, even though these qualifications only appear in philosophical analysis. Philosophy is to answer the question how everything actually and coherently weaves itself into the whole. This whole is not apart from the "subjective totality," Dooyeweerd's term for the human ego.¹⁹ This subjective totality is actually operating in *all* the functions in which it expresses itself within the coherence of our temporal world.²⁰

Cosmic time constitutes the basis of Dooyeweerd's theory of reality,²¹ while human beings exist in a status of *being-universally-bound-to-time*.²² The cosmic weaving into totality, therefore, takes place along the lines of cosmic time. It occurs continuously and according to the order of time's modes and types. This implies that the cosmic totality is continuously changing. There is never an

15 Herman Dooyeweerd. **A New Critique of Theoretical Thought**. Volume I, p. 57

16 Time is only a riddle in its continuity, for the cosmic time we know allows of modal analysis. Herman Dooyeweerd. Het tijdsprobleem in de wijsbegeerte der wetstidee III-VI. *Philosophia Reformata* 5, 4, 1940, pp. 193-234.

17 According to Verburg, this is what Dooyeweerd did in 1922. Marcel E. Verburg. Herman Dooyeweerd. **Leven en werk van een Nederlands christen-wijsgeer**. 1989, Ten Have, Baarn, p. 36.

18 Herman Dooyeweerd. **A New Critique of Theoretical Thought**. Volume III, p. 109.

19 Herman Dooyeweerd. **A New Critique of Theoretical Thought**. Volume I, pp. 4-5.

20 Herman Dooyeweerd. **A New Critique of Theoretical Thought**. Volume I, p. 5.

21 Herman Dooyeweerd. **A New Critique of Theoretical Thought**. Volume I, p. 28.

22 Herman Dooyeweerd. **A New Critique of Theoretical Thought**. Volume I, p. 24.

“entire” reality. Reality can never be closed off in time. Human supra-temporality must have a temporal meaning.

Conclusion

By 1926 Dooyeweerd was on the track of temporal dynamics and its supra-modal coherence. He distinguished “absolute time” and “absolute movement” from modal time,²³ and already at the age of seventeen he viewed the world of humans as *continuously in motion*.²⁴ Ever since 1926 he showed increasing interest in the dynamics of cosmic reality, until finally cosmic time appeared as the basis of his theory of reality.

The seemingly hierarchical scheme of diversity, coherence, and unity in Dooyeweerd’s transcendental philosophy does not allow of an interpretation in quasi-spatial terms. Cosmic reality is temporal through and through. The transcendental critique has to be understood against the background of cosmic time. Only towards its end is religious knowledge discussed, but this does not mean that religious knowledge is dependent on theoretical knowledge. From the outset Dooyeweerd’s transcendental analysis of philosophical thought was directed at the self in its primary religious self-awareness as temporal radix of cosmic reality. Without a human ego, which experiences itself in self-hood, there would be neither abstraction, nor synthesis, no theoretical thought at all. The ego is the presupposition without which transcendental thought does not make any sense. Dooyeweerd’s transcendental critique brings the philosophers right back to their concrete selves. *We return to the self*.²⁵ It then appears that theoretical philosophy has no foundation in itself, but that it is dependent on actual concrete time and on the actual concrete ego, which *as such*, in its primary experience, is religiously in search of the fulfillment of its relativity of meaning.

According to Dooyeweerd, philosophy is *inherently* religious. It is not self-sufficient *in its own sphere*. It is not dependent on another sphere. Nor is it structurally dependent on Christian belief. Structurally it is only dependent on religion as such.

The transcendental ideas at the base of every philosophy concern the root *qua* root: the continuity of *its* time, the *root* of time’s modal coherence, the origin of *root*. That these ideas are “religious” means that they concern the status of the self *qua* self. The root of cosmic reality, *as such*, in its very *ipseity*, is religious. It is a personal focus of religious passion. The transcendental basic ideas of diversity, coherence, and unity derive all their meaning from the radical status of cosmic humankind and the individual human being. It follows that all our knowledge is conditioned by the law for the cosmic root in relation to the rest of cosmic reality. In that sense human knowledge is *radically subjective*. It is this radical subjectivity which determines human beings and human

23 Herman Dooyeweerd. Calvinisme contra Neo-Kantianisme. *Tijdschrift voor Wijsbegeerte* 20, 1926, p. 58.

24 Marcel E. Verburg. **Leven en werk van een Nederlands christen-wijsgeer**, p. 19, my emphasis.

25 Herman Dooyeweerd. **A New Critique of Theoretical Thought**. Volume I, p. 7, my emphasis.

knowledge as “religious.” Religious self-knowledge does not transcend naïve experience. We *are* concrete unities of self-awareness and awareness of God.²⁶

Without due recognition of the radical status of the human ego not only will the basic denominator for the comparison of the irreducible modes of meaning disappear from sight, but the very idea of meaning as such will disappear as well. The idea of meaning and its dynamics depends on recognition of the *absoluteness* of the root’s Origin. Directedness towards God, therefore, implies a dynamic openness that can never be closed off.

So, yes, there is meaning to reality. Reality *is* meaning. That is its essence.²⁷ It consists in the relativity of cosmic reality’s pointing to the Absolute Origin. It follows that we can live our lives in a meaningful way by following the example of the New Radical Master.

26 Herman Dooyeweerd. Het tijdsprobleem en zijn antinomieën, *Philosophia Reformata* 4, 1939, p. 204.

27 Herman Dooyeweerd. Het tijdsprobleem en zijn antinomieën II. *Philosophia Reformata* 1, 1, 1936, p. 65.

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Bruce Wearne divides his time between walking along the coast, pruning ever-growing trees and bushes of his garden, reading and discussing the books of Bob Goudzwaard and David Koyzis with Val, acting as secretary for his son's literary endeavours, reviewing an occasional submission for The Journal of Sociology and Christianity and reading the Bible. Having to some degree clarified sociology's disciplinary focus, he hopes to develop further insights for Christian sociological theory and the practise of social research.

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