

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:
TOWARD A REFORMATIONAL CONCEPTION OF TRUTH

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This essay presents an emerging conception of truth and shows how it appropriates Herman Dooyeweerd's conception. First I compare my "critical hermeneutics" with other reformational models of critique. Then I propose to think of truth as a dynamic correlation between (1) human fidelity to societal principles and (2) a life-giving disclosure of society. This conception recontextualizes the notion of propositional truth, and it links questions of intersubjective validity with Dooyeweerd's emphasis on "standing in the truth." While abandoning his idea of transcendent truth, I seek to preserve the holism and normativity of Dooyeweerd's radical conception.

Theoretical thought never finishes its task. Anyone who believes to have created a philosophical system that can be adopted unchanged by every ensuing generation shows no insight into *the historical contingency [gebondenheit] of all theoretical thought.*

— Herman Dooyeweerd¹

How should one undertake a critical retrieval of Dooyeweerd's conception of truth? My book on *Artistic Truth* proposes a theory of truth in art. It also sketches in preliminary fashion a more comprehensive conception of truth. Both the proposed theory and the preliminary sketch have raised questions among reformational philosophers. In a March 2005 book symposium, Adrienne Dengerink Chaplin and Calvin Seerveld asked how the book's theory of artistic truth relates to the main lines of reformational ontology. A year later, in a review published in this journal, Sander Griffioen (2006) posed similar questions. Both Seerveld and Griffioen also wondered whether the book lacks the depth of criticism and structural insight that comes with the reformational project of transcendental critique.

Building on a previous article (Zuidervaart 2008b), the current essay explains how my emerging conception of truth appropriates Dooyeweerd's conception, in five stages. First I comment on how my approach differs from other reformational models of critique. Then I indicate how my theory of artistic truth incorporates reformational ontology. Next I show how my general conception of truth responds to issues in Dooyeweerd's conception. Then I take up the topic of propositional truth. Finally I show how my account of "authentication" incorporates insights from Dooyeweerd's emphasis on "standing in the Truth."

¹ NC 2: 556, WW 2: 487; my translation.

1. *Critical hermeneutics*

Let me first discuss how I am working out my conception of truth in critical dialogue with other philosophers. Like Dooyeweerd, I aim to address a contemporary philosophical audience. Yet the audience today differs significantly from his. In North America, and increasingly in Europe, the philosophical world divides into primarily analytic and primarily continental thinkers. This “continental divide,” as I call it, poses a challenge to communicating with one’s peers. My response is deliberately to cross philosophical divides: divides between analytic and continental philosophy, and, within continental philosophy, between Heideggerian thinking and Critical Theory. A primary question when I write is how to address this internally divided audience in terms they will understand.

That means, among other things, keeping unexplained jargon and religiously fraught language to a minimum. Yet any reader who is attentive should be able to figure out where I am coming from. The Preface and Introduction to *Artistic Truth*,² for example, clearly signal my religious affiliations; I dedicate the book to three philosophers in the Reformed tradition; and I name reformational sources at strategic points in the argument. I hope readers will pay attention to the reformational orientation of my work. If they find what I write genuinely worth their while, perhaps they will want to find out more about its orientation.

The desire to offer something substantial to an internally divided audience helps explain my manner of engaging the work of other philosophers. I employ two methodological assumptions: first, that one should understand such work from the inside out, and, second, that one should call upon a philosopher’s best opponents to help develop one’s position with regard to the issues at stake. These assumptions are motivated by a desire to develop my own position in critical dialogue with others. What sort of approach is this? Is it a version of immanent critique? Transcendental critique? Perhaps even thetical or transcendent critique? I would say it is all of these and none of them at once. My own label for it is “critical hermeneutics.”

Perhaps I can explain this approach using language from the Introduction to an earlier book on Theodor W. Adorno’s *Aesthetic Theory*. There, after describing the models of transcendent, transcendental, and immanent critique, I call my approach to Adorno’s text an *immanent critique with metacritical intent* (Zuidervaat 1991, xx). Such an approach takes seriously Adorno’s own issues, expectations, and criteria, but it moves beyond these when his text fails to meet its own criteria. As the book moves beyond Adorno’s position, however, it continues to depend openly on his position, so that the movement beyond takes on the character of self-criticism. The more recent book on *Artistic Truth* simply adds one feature to “immanent criticism with metacritical intent,” namely, to call upon already existing oppositions within philosophy to sharpen one’s understanding of the alternatives and to formulate one’s own position.

In other words, I do not follow the thetical approach of Vollenhoven’s systematic philosophy (Vollenhoven 1998, 21-65), nor do I simply take the route

² Zuidervaat 2004, ix-xii, 1-14; hereafter cited as AT.

of immanent criticism emphasized in his historiography of philosophy (Vollenhoven 1961). Neither do I follow the path of either transcendental critique à la Dooyeweerd or transformational critique à la Jacob Klapwijk (1986, 1987). What I attempt instead is a critical hermeneutics. I seek the contributions and limitations of a philosopher's position by trying to understand it from within his or her writings. And I assume that considering another philosopher's opposing position, and constructing a dialectical dialogue between the two positions, will yield greater nuance in one's understanding of both positions and stronger articulation for one's own position.

Behind this approach lies a posture of epistemic openness, a readiness to learn from others, regardless of their religious or philosophical convictions. But there also lies a recognition that various positions are better and worse in different respects, and that the task of a reformational philosopher is to sort these matters out — critically, to be sure, but with help from others. I believe this posture is in line with what truth requires in a pluralistic and public setting. Unfortunately, Dooyeweerd's conception of truth, and his mode of carrying out a transcendental critique, do not encourage such a posture. That is an important reason why, as I have argued elsewhere (Zuidervaart 2008b), Dooyeweerd's epistemology requires a critical retrieval.

2. *Reformational ontology and artistic truth*

Implicitly the book *Artistic Truth* has already launched this critical retrieval. Although it does not examine the work of reformational philosophers, it begins with two intuitions shared by Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven and explicitly stated by my mentors Calvin Seerveld (1971) and Hendrik Hart (1984), namely, that human knowledge is multidimensional, and that the arts are ways in which human beings acquire and revise their knowledge. If art is a form of knowledge, and if knowledge seeks truth, then questions arise about whether and in which respects the arts are capable of truth. It seems to me that the available answers, whether reformational or not, are not satisfactory, and that many contemporary philosophers, both analytic and continental, have abandoned these questions altogether. One reason for such shared inarticulacy is that we lack a general conception of truth on which the notion of artistic truth could make sense. Propositionally inflected correspondence theories of truth are perhaps the least plausible in this regard, and they have dominated Anglo-American aesthetics. The challenge, then, is to explain how artistic truth can be neither propositional nor governed by a correspondence with "reality" or "facts" or "states of affairs," yet still be true.

My response to this challenge has two stages.³ First I characterize what reformational philosophers regard as the "qualifying function" of the arts (AT 55-77). Then I employ this characterization of the aesthetic dimension to propose a nonpropositional and noncorrespondence theory of artistic truth (AT 118-39). The result is a trilateral conception of authenticity, significance,

³ See Zuidervaart 2008a, section 3.2, for a detailed account.

and integrity that gives as much weight to mediated intersubjective relations among artists and their publics as to the relational import internal to a work of art. This trilateral conception of artistic truth allows one to show how prominent figures in Anglo-American aesthetics ignore or misconstrue one or another of these relations. And it provides a systematic basis for understanding what I call “art in public.”

Dooyeweerd’s ontology provides a sturdy scaffold for constructing this conception. The fundamental distinction between “aesthetic” and “artistic” goes back to his distinction between modal and individual horizons. My characterization of the aesthetic dimension relies on a modal theory and refuses to collapse the “law side” into the “subject side.” My account of the three relations of artistic truth employs a distinction inherent to Dooyeweerd’s ontology, although not fully worked out there, among subject/object, subject/subject, and subject/product relations. I link these three relations with the aesthetic mode’s techno-formative, lingual, and logical analogies as well as with the x/y pattern to structures of individuality (Hart 1984, 146-7): authenticity pertains to an imaginative artifact’s mediated expression, significance pertains to the interpretable presentation it makes as an imaginative object of use, and integrity pertains to its configured import when it achieves relative independence as an artwork.

Yet my approach differs from Dooyeweerd’s in several important respects. First, I consider the law side to be historical when it pertains to human affairs. That is a stronger claim than Dooyeweerd’s insistence that the law side is temporal. Accordingly, I describe principles of validity, such as the aesthetic principle of “imaginative cogency,” as *historical* horizons, and not simply as belonging to the temporal horizon. Second, I do not think of these principles as “creational ordinances” or “divine laws.” Rather I characterize them as “societal principles” through which God’s call to love can be heard. Imaginative cogency is a societal principle, and so is the principle of logical validity. Third, I am wary about construing ontological structures as fully transcultural and transhistorical. Epistemic openness will acknowledge that one uncovers ontological structures within the societal formation one inhabits, and that one does not have the exhaustive knowledge needed to claim that they occur in precisely this way within other societal formations. Fourth, rather than speak of subjects and objects first, I speak of processes in which subjects and objects participate. I do this partly to recover the intersubjectivity that goes underground in Dooyeweerd, and partly to break with modern subject-centered tendencies that recur in Dooyeweerd. Finally, my characterization of the aesthetic dimension is much closer to Seerveld (1987) than to Dooyeweerd.

My account of artistic truth has two implications for truth theory in general. First, it allows one to forge significant links between imaginative disclosure and propositional truth, rather than hold them in either opposition or isolation, as many philosophers do. Second, my account suggests that truth in general is multidimensional, as Dooyeweerd understood. Indeed, reducing truth to propositional truth bearers and to a correspondence between propositions and facts leads to impoverished theories and practical dead ends. Hence the

account points toward a conception of truth that would not be a correspondence theory, yet would address the concerns of propositionally inflected correspondence theories. At the same time, this account of artistic truth draws upon an emerging general conception of truth, my primary research project in the years ahead. I turn to that general conception next.

3. *Fidelity and disclosure*

I propose to think of truth in its most comprehensive sense as a dynamic correlation between (1) human fidelity to societal principles and (2) a life-giving disclosure of society. Before I explicate each axis in this correlation, let me make two general comparisons with Dooyeweerd's conception.

First, by "truth in its most comprehensive sense" I mean something like Dooyeweerd's "fulness of truth." Like Dooyeweerd, I believe that theorists can and should propose a comprehensive conception of truth. Indeed, this effort belongs to the proper tasks of philosophy. While understandable, contemporary "postmetaphysical" efforts to avoid this task, in both continental and analytic philosophy, are misguided.⁴ Nevertheless a special challenge confronts attempts to propose a comprehensive conception of truth, for one must both presuppose and appeal to what one is conceiving. So the project has an unavoidable circularity. Because this circularity is unavoidable, however, the key is not to step outside the circle, by pointing with Dooyeweerd to "transcendent truth," for example. Rather, as Martin Heidegger says in a different context, the key is to enter the circle in the right way (Heidegger 1979, 152-3, 314-6).

Second, in characterizing truth as a "dynamic correlation," I mean to distinguish it from any static structure. As Hegel recognized, truth is a historical process that unfolds in time. Consequently I depart rather dramatically from Platonic and Aristotelian conceptions of truth. I do not regard comprehensive truth to be either an unchanging form or a fixed property. Dooyeweerd's conception embarks on a similar departure, for his "Truth" comes down to a proper relationship that is religious in character. Yet he structuralizes this relationship and construes it as supratemporal, thereby eliminating any possibility that it could be a temporal process, not to mention a historical one. While acknowledging continuities with Dooyeweerd's approach, then, I must candidly state that to regard truth as a historical process also marks a departure from his conception. Now let me fill in the two axes to truth as a dynamic correlation.

3.1 Societal principles

On each axis one finds a relation between "law side" and "subject side." The relation is more explicit on the first axis, where I speak of human fidelity (subject side) to societal principles (law side). Although I *distinguish* human responses from the "nomic conditions" (Hart 1984) that make them possible, I do not keep these *separate*. Societal principles, which are always already in

⁴ Cf. Zuidervaart 2007, 1-15, 48-76; hereafter cited as SP.

effect, take some of their shape from the ways in which we are faithful to them, and our efforts to enact what these principles require are always already informed by the shape they have taken in the societal formation we inhabit. This is why I describe societal principles both as “that which people hold in common” and as that which “holds them in common” or, more succinctly, as the “commonly holding/held” (AT 97). People hold these principles, and are held by them, within historically developed cultural practices and social institutions. Here I have in mind what Dooyeweerd calls the “law side” of modal aspects — resourcefulness,⁵ justice, and solidarity, for example, the “law side,” respectively, of the economic, juridical, and ethical aspects. But I do not *separate* the law side from the subject side in the way Dooyeweerd does. Instead I revise his ontology of principles, characterizing societal principles as historical horizons that people learn, achieve, contest, reformulate, and ignore in the midst of social struggle.

An “ontology of principles” is an account of the status and meaning of the conditions that obtain for normative practices and institutions. “Normative practices and institutions” are ones that can be better or worse for human flourishing and can be experienced as better or worse for human flourishing. Many reformational philosophers, like Dooyeweerd, wish to anchor such conditions in God’s creational ordinances. By contrast, I describe such conditions as “societal principles” and call attention to their historical embeddedness, their eschatological openness, and their vocational character.

I thereby revise the cosmonomic notion of “norm” in three respects. First, I claim that societal principles such as solidarity and justice are not in effect prior to their formation by human beings within cultural practices and social institutions. Second, societal principles were not simply given or fixed when human beings were created, but they emerge during the course of human history and could change in the future. Justice, for example, is continually contested and historically unfolded as a way to work out the flourishing to which human beings are called within their cultural practices and social institutions. Third, societal principles manifest God’s instruction and invitation and guidance, God’s call to love, addressed to societally constituted human beings and continually calling for their response. So I regard societal principles as historical horizons that cannot be anchored in creational ordinances outside human history, and I also regard them as “future-oriented callings in which the voice of God can be heard and traces of a new earth can appear” (Zuidervaat 2003, 8).

Accordingly, human fidelity to societal principles is ongoing and never finished, and part of such fidelity is to continue giving shape to societal principles. The ways in which people hold principles in common are significant for how societal principles hold people in common. What people actually hold in common at a particular time might not be in line with such principles. Yet

⁵ “Resourcefulness” is my term for what Bob Goudzwaard calls “stewardship.” For a more detailed account of these three societal principles and their interconnection, see the chapter on globalization in SP 107-131, which glosses “resourcefulness” as “the principle of carefully stewarding human and nonhuman potentials for the sake of interconnected flourishing” (129).

they cannot hold something in common without appealing or gesturing toward societal principles, no matter how self-serving the appeal or how ideologically distorted the gesture. Conversely, in order for a principle to hold people in common, they must hold something in common. From this angle, then, truth always involves people struggling over principles for human existence. At stake in the struggle is whether the commonly holding/held sustains and promotes life.

From Dooyeweerd's perspective, my account of societal principles calls up the specter of historicism. He would worry that a principle such as justice will come to be regarded as valid only for a historically limited time and place. And he would think that his anchoring justice in creational ordinances counteracts such a limitation, since presumably creational ordinances hold for all times and places. But if one locates creational ordinances outside human history, then one needs to explain how they become effective *within* human history, raising the threat of an infinite regress. Still, Dooyeweerd could wonder whether my talk of societal principles as historical horizons makes their content arbitrary. And he might insist that we have to regard the ontic grounding for human endeavor as real if we would avoid historicism, which he described in postwar Europe as the "fatal illness of our 'dynamic' times" (Dooyeweerd 2003, 63).

Although adequately answering these worries would require a lengthy response, I can at least indicate how the answer would go. First, the historical-horizonal character of societal principles such as justice and solidarity does not make their content arbitrary. It *does* mean that their content is never fixed once and for all, but ever emerges as history unfolds. As their content emerges, God's transhistorical call to love meets human responses, to which God responds in turn. Second, I do not say that societal principles *will come to be* commonly held. I say they *are* held in common, even as they *do* hold people in common. Further, if they were not commonly held, they would also not commonly hold. I follow Hegel in refusing to lift such principles out of the historical process to be either unchanging absolutes or merely regulative ideas. Finally, I have no problem calling societal principles "real," if we do not mean by "real" that they "exist" in the manner that concrete entities, communities, and institutions exist. Societal principles are real because they are always already in effect, and their being always already in effect is part of what it means to call them historical. Through them God calls human endeavor to account, even as human endeavor gives them shape. I take this conception to be in tune with scriptural teaching about God's ongoing and dialogical direction for human affairs. It is also not that far removed from Dooyeweerd's own insistence on the temporal character of the "law side" to creation.

3.2 Life-giving disclosure

The relation between "law side" and "subject side" is less explicit on the second axis. I characterize this axis as the "life-giving disclosure of society." By "disclosure" I mean a historical process of opening up society. This process is "life-giving" when human beings and other creatures come to flourish in their

interconnections. Here the “subject side” has to do with the contributions human beings make, within and through their cultural practices and social institutions, to opening society in a life-giving fashion. The “law side” has to do with what Dooyeweerd calls the “central religious law”: the call to love God and neighbor, suitably expanded to include the call to take care of creation — the so-called “cultural mandate.” To foster the flourishing of all creatures is to hear and live out this call.

At first glance the notion of life-giving disclosure may seem foreign to Dooyeweerd’s conception of truth. Yet it reworks his idea of the “opening process” (*ontsluitingsproces*) in order to forge a link with truth at which he hints in a few places. Dooyeweerd’s account of the opening process is primarily structural rather than genetic. Modally, it has to do with modal aspects’ disclosing their meaning in an anticipatory fashion within the transcendental direction of time (NC 2: 181-365, WW 2: 126-300). Societally, it has to do with how, on the basis of opened historical foundations, societal formations and the cultural practices and social institutions within them acquire enriched normative and structural meaning (Dooyeweerd 2003, 63-110). He does not emphasize what I take to be the telos of disclosure, namely, the flourishing of all creatures in their interconnections.⁶

Introducing the notion of interconnected flourishing serves to de-structuralize Dooyeweerd’s account and render it both historical and eschatological. Once one transforms the crucial temporal horizon into something historical and postulates interconnected flourishing as the telos of history, the notion of disclosure turns away from a “transcendent horizon” toward an eschatological future — *Van boven naar voren* (“From above to ahead”), to borrow the title of Geertsema’s 1980 dissertation on Jürgen Moltmann. This helps one avoid problems that beset Dooyeweerd’s account of the opening process, such as his odd notion of sinful disharmony on the law side (NC 2: 334-7, WW 2: 265-8), his tendency to install Western societal differentiation as a “structural hypernorm” for historical development (Zuidervaart 2003, 8), his under-appreciation of relative goodness within so-called “primitive” cultures (Griffioen 1986, Seerveld 1996), and his conflicted stance toward so-called “apostate” cultures, where false faith leads to genuine achievements. Today, in a world that is simultaneously globalizing and breaking apart along political and confessional fault lines, it is crucial to rethink his account, especially in the fields of social ethics and international law.

3.3 Dynamic correlation

Truth in its most comprehensive sense is not the same as disclosure. Nor is it identical with human fidelity. Rather it is a dynamic correlation between two

⁶ The notion of flourishing as a telos has affinities with the idea of “shalom” in Wolterstorff (1983), with the proviso that we regard it as already underway and not endlessly deferred. Wolterstorff criticizes the “Amsterdam School” for neglecting this idea and for making societal structures seem more important than the creatures that fashion and inhabit them.

“law/subject” axes, between human fidelity to societal principles, on the one hand, and a life-giving disclosure of society, on the other. In Dooyeweerd’s terms, although significantly modified, this means that truth involves an “accordance” between human responses to “modal laws” and the direction that the results of these responses take — the direction they take both with respect to the “central religious law” and with respect to the God who calls creation into existence and who meets human beings from an inexpressible future.

Like Dooyeweerd’s conception of the fulness of truth, the conception of a dynamic correlation gives truth a speculative reach that much of contemporary philosophy rejects or neglects. This speculative reach is eschatological, however, not transcendent. My conception of truth brings together a normative critique of societal evil with historically informed hope for God’s inexpressible future. Truth, we could say, is a gathering of hopeful critique. Yet one should not restrict truth to its speculative dimension. Reformational philosophers need to deal modestly and attentively with a complex interplay between normativity and eschatology.

Because of truth’s eschatological dimension, history cannot be the “final horizon” or “ultimate horizon,” nor can human beings have such a horizon “in view.” Rather, all the views we have occur within the historical horizons of societal principles that, being dynamic and comprehensive, always already inform whatever notions we have of “life” and “societal disclosure.” As a dynamic correlation, truth calls for our faithfulness to societal principles such as solidarity and justice. It also calls forth the flourishing of all creatures in their interconnections. This dynamic correlation is open to a future we have difficulty imagining or conceiving. Strictly speaking, and contrary to Dooyeweerd’s problematic notion of a “transcendent horizon,” there is no ultimate *horizon*.⁷

It might seem from such descriptions that my conception of truth is completely circular. I seem to define societal principles in terms of creaturely flourishing, and to define creaturely flourishing in terms of societal principles. Although I do not think my definitions of the two axes and their correlation are circular, I do regard fidelity to societal principles and life-giving disclosure to be indissoluble correlates. The point of such fidelity is to promote a process in which human beings and other creatures come to flourish. Correlatively, life-giving disclosure depends upon the degree to which cultural practices, social institutions, and entire societal formations align with principles such as solidarity and justice. Life-giving disclosure occurs in part by way of people being true — pursuing fidelity — in the various dimensions of their social existence. But only in part, for disclosure also occurs both beyond and despite our principles and alignment. As Dooyeweerd also acknowledges, there is always more to truth than our “being in the truth,” whether theoretically, politically, or in any other way. Consequently one must appeal to the notion of creaturely flourishing to motivate such fidelity, and one must employ societal principles to evaluate the

⁷ Jürgen Moltmann provides an important theological reason why philosophers should not posit an ultimate horizon: a biblical eschatology will distinguish between the future as *futurum* and as *adventus*. *Futurum* is the future we can foresee from within our present history. But *adventus* is an unforeseeable future (Olthuis 2009, 186-9). To maintain openness toward *adventus*, philosophers do well not to posit an ultimate horizon.

extent and quality of creaturely flourishing. Again, the hermeneutical key is not to avoid this circle but to enter it in the right way.

Central to my conception, then, is that truth is a dynamic process, not a fixed pattern, and that no practices, institutions, or communities either stand outside this process or have exclusive access to it. Closely connected with this central point is that the effectivity of, say, the call to be just depends on human fidelity to the societal principle of justice, yet human fidelity is never enough to bring about justice. Hence it becomes impossible to talk about truth in its most comprehensive sense as either structural or directional. As Dooyeweerd recognizes in his own way, truth is both structural and directional. One's conception of truth needs to acknowledge the dynamic this intersection opens up. Part of acknowledging the dynamic in one's philosophy is not to be overly prescriptive at first about the content of societal principles or the meaning of creaturely flourishing. There is always more to say about such content and meaning, and one needs other voices in order to say this. One should not present a comprehensive conception of truth as the absolute truth about absolute truth, but rather as an invitation to discussion. In this sense, too, "theoretical thought never finishes its task" (NC 2: 556, WW 2: 487).

4. *Propositional truth*

Elsewhere I have criticized Dooyeweerd's account of theoretical truth for ignoring the question of objectivity (Zuidervaart 2008b). It might appear that my own conception of truth falls into the same trap. That appearance could arise because I have said nothing specific about propositional truth or, as I prefer to call it, assertoric correctness. Although it would be premature to attempt a full-blown theory of propositional truth and objectivity, let me begin to fill the gap.

4.1 Heidegger's contribution

My account of assertoric correctness derives from a critical dialogue with the hermeneutical conception of truth in Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit*.⁸ To make sense of his conception, it helps to regard it as a deepening and transformation of correspondence theories. The mainstream of Western philosophy since Plato and Aristotle has been dominated by propositionally inflected correspondence theories of truth. Correspondence theories of truth hold "that there are truth bearers and that a truth bearer is true if and only if it corresponds to a state of affairs that obtains. They differ concerning the class of truth bearers (e.g., beliefs, propositions, sentences, or statements), the nature of states of affairs (whether they are facts, and whether they are mind-independent, as realists hold), and the type of correspondence required [congruence (e.g., Bertrand Russell) or correlation (e.g., J. L. Austin)]. In addition, most correspondence

⁸ What follows is a drastic abbreviation of Chapter 4 ("Truth as Disclosure") in *Artistic Truth*.

theories are propositionally inflected.... ‘Propositionally inflected’ theories ... regard propositions as the sole or the primary bearers of truth” (AT 6). On a correspondence theory, then, to say of the proposition “The cat is on the mat” that this is true is to say that it corresponds to what is the case — i.e., that kitty really is on the mat. When combined with logical empiricism, such a theory tends to treat propositions as “self-sufficient,” facts as “uninterpreted,” and the relation between them as timeless (Dreyfus 1991, 272).

Heidegger transforms propositionally inflected correspondence theories via three theses. First, he says that assertions or propositions, the supposed bearers of truth, derive from more fundamental processes and practices of interpretation and acquire their truth via interpretation. Second, he claims that the “states of affairs” to which a true assertion or proposition must “correspond” are themselves embedded in contexts of relevance, and their “truth-making” capacities stem from such embeddedness. Third, he regards the so-called “correspondence” between, say, propositions and facts, not as a fixed congruence or correlation but rather as deriving from the dynamic ontological condition he calls the “disclosedness of Dasein.” So the “propositions” are not self-sufficient, the “facts” are not uninterpreted, and the relationship between them is not a timeless “correspondence.”

When Heidegger (1979, 153-60) calls assertions a derivative mode of interpretation — his first thesis —, I take him to be saying three things. First, that making assertions is one of the many ways in which we make sense of what we can do and be. Second, that the practice of making assertions tends, in a universalizing and decontextualizing way, to draw our attention away from other practical involvements. And, third, because of this tendency, assertions and propositions come to seem as if they were totally context-transcending claims about isolated objects and their “universal” properties. In Heidegger’s own vocabulary, the making of assertions involves a transition from “handiness” to “objective presence.” By insisting that assertions are a *derivative* mode of interpretation, Heidegger reminds us that they could be neither “true” nor “false” if they lacked meaning within the relationships we have with ourselves, with other human beings, and with other creatures. Although he overstates the supposed tendency of assertions to cover up these relationships and to be cut off from other human involvements with the world, he is surely right to regard assertions as ways in which we make sense of what we can do and be. I also think it is correct to say that they play a universalizing and decontextualizing role in human understanding.

Heidegger’s second thesis is that the truth-making capacity of the entities about which an assertion can be made stems from their being embedded in contexts of relevance (1979, 214-19). Heidegger’s term for this truth-making capacity is “discoveredness” (*Entdecktheit*). He says the discoveredness of entities depends on the more comprehensive “disclosedness” (*Erschlossenheit*) of the world to which they belong. Similarly, an assertion’s capacity to discover an entity — an assertion’s “discovering-ness” (*Entdeckend-sein*) — depends on the more comprehensive “disclosedness” of the being that makes assertions — it depends on Dasein’s disclosedness.

Hence the truth of an assertion, and the truth of the asserted entity, are not fixed properties of isolated things that somehow “correspond.” Rather, they are dynamic tendencies embedded in larger contexts of relevance without which neither the assertion nor the asserted entity would make sense. This implies that the truth-making capacity of asserted entities stems from their embeddedness in contexts of relevance. Not only must asserted entities show themselves to us in the right way, but also they can do this only in connection with other of their aspects and together with other entities with which they are connected. Heidegger’s point, in my own terminology, is that the correctness of our assertions depends to a significant extent on how “an entity, in its predicative availability, offers or manifests itself in relevant accord with nonpredicative aspects of its availability” (AT 92). From now on I shall use the term “correctness” to indicate the truth of assertions and propositions.

Heidegger’s third thesis is that the so-called correspondence between assertions and asserted entities, or between propositions and facts, derives from a more “primordial” ontological condition, namely, the “disclosedness of Dasein” (1979, 219-26). “Dasein” is his term for what we might call “human existence.” Its “disclosedness” refers to the fact that human existence is fundamentally open to other creatures and oriented toward its own future possibilities. My version of this thesis is that assertoric correctness (i.e., propositional truth) is one mode of a more comprehensive truth. Suitably modified in a reformational fashion, Heidegger’s three theses bear directly on the question of objectivity.

4.2 Predicative availability

The question of objectivity has two parts. One concerns logical objectivity as such. The other concerns the relation between logical objectivity and non-logical objectivity.⁹

Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven agree that in general objectivity has to do with functions that certain creatures fulfill in relation to other creatures. A bird’s nest, for example, functions as a biotic object in relation to the bird as a biotic subject. It functions as a psychic object in relation to animals or human beings that can sense it and have feelings toward it. So too, any creature that can be known in a logical fashion functions as a logical object in relation to human logical subjects. These object functions are not simply created or assigned by the biotic or psychic or logical subject. In some sense they are inherent to the creature that functions as an object in a specific subject/object relation.

Yet the founders of reformational philosophy have significantly different accounts of the relation between concepts and logical objects. Dooyeweerd regards concepts as having an “intentional logical content.” Logical subjects must employ this content in order to disclose logical object functions that would otherwise remain hidden in temporal meaning-coherence. Moreover,

⁹ In line with Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven, I distinguish questions of *objectivity* from questions of intersubjective *validity*. I take up the first of these here.

logical objectivity requires our achieving a conceptual synthesis that accords with the logical “objective connectedness” in reality’s “systatic meaning-coherence” (NC 2: 389-90, WW 2: 321-2). Vollenhoven, by contrast, makes no mention of the “intentional content” of concepts. In fact he regards the logical subject function not as “conception” but as “perception,” along with the “interrelations” of “recollection” and “expectation” (IP 111-20). Concepts, for Vollenhoven, are not the intentional means of logical knowing. Instead they are its achieved results. Hence his primary consideration regarding logical objectivity is that the “[logical] subject has to direct itself in the first place to the [logical] perception of the [logical] object” (IP 122, with “analytic” replaced by “logical”). The concepts we form through such activity can be about either conceptual or nonconceptual “states of affairs.” And these concepts, like the judgments (*oordelen*) they enter, are “determined” not only by the logical norm of noncontradiction but also by the knowable and by the activity of knowing (IP 124-5).

Without attempting to adjudicate this implicit dispute over logical objectivity, let me say that I account for similar matters with the notions of predicative availability and predicative self-disclosure. Unlike Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven, I do not consider the logical dimension to be directly post-psychic. It presupposes the technical, aesthetic, and lingual dimensions as well. Accordingly my point of entry to the logical dimension is neither intentional concepts (Dooyeweerd) nor perception (Vollenhoven) but assertion as a speech act in which predication plays a more prominent role than it does in other speech acts such as promising, requesting, or confessing. Like Heidegger, I distinguish between “assertion” and “the asserted.” Thanks to Vollenhoven, I also distinguish more carefully than Heidegger does between the practice of *asserting* and the *assertion* that results.

One of Heidegger’s insights is that the relation between *asserting* and the asserted is direct: it does not need the intermediary of a mental representation. He derives this insight from Edmund Husserl’s notion of “self-giveness,” and Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven in their distinctive ways would agree.¹⁰ The relation between accomplished *assertions* and the asserted is not direct, however. As Vollenhoven puts this, “between what is knowable and the related result, there is always the analysis of the person thinking, who analyzes what is knowable correctly or not and, in turn, comes to knowledge concerning what is knowable” (IP 124).

In order for either the direct asserting/asserted relation or the indirect assertion/asserted relation to be in effect, Heidegger says, the asserted must show itself in an appropriate fashion. In order for the asserting and the assertion to be true (i.e., correct), the asserted entity must show itself to be just as it was asserted to be: “That an assertion *is true* means that it discovers an entity [as it is] in itself. The [true] assertion asserts, points out, ‘lets be seen’ (*apophansis*) the entity in its discoveredness [*Entdecktheit*]” (Heidegger 1979,

¹⁰ Vollenhoven is very clear about this — see IP 124. Dooyeweerd’s notion of the concept’s intentional content may compromise his critique of what Rorty (1979) calls representationalism.

218). Although there are some problems with this formulation, Heidegger argues correctly that the accomplished assertion is about an entity (or a range of entities) in a certain mode of its givenness. This ‘aboutness’ indicates a mutual mediation between the practice of asserting and the “object” of this practice. The object — i.e., the entity asserted — not only allows itself to be asserted but also calls forth the assertion.

To get at an asserted entity’s “givenness,” or, in Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven’s terms, a logical or analytic object function, let me introduce the term “predicative availability.” As both Heidegger and the founders of reformational philosophy recognize, entities are available (Heidegger: at hand) for human practices in many ways. One way is for entities to let us make assertions about them. An entity’s offering itself for our asserting is its predicative availability. This is only one of the many ways in which entities can engage us. We do not impose predicative availability upon them, nor does our asserting create their identity, even though it can help shape their identity, for better or worse.

4.3 Predicative self-disclosure

By itself such “logical objectivity” does not account for assertoric correctness, however. For that, one must explain how an “object’s” predicative availability relates to other ways in which it is available. Dooyeweerd might have this in view when he speaks of a systatic “objective connectedness.” But he muddies the waters by describing this as a *logical* objectivity grasped via conceptual synthesis. The requisite objective connectedness cannot be simply *logical* objectivity. Predicative availability does not suffice to make assertoric correctness possible.

To be correct, an accomplished assertion must discover the asserted entity not only in its predicative availability but also in a manner that accords with other relevant ways in which the asserted entity is available. When, for example, a carpenter correctly asserts to her helper “That hammer is too heavy,” she discovers its relative heaviness in a way that accords with the hammer’s (un)suitability for the task at hand. I call the capacity of asserted entities to let our assertions be correct “predicative self-disclosure”: “The predicative self-disclosure of an asserted entity lies in its offering itself for predicative practice reliably and in accordance with other ways in which the entity is available. ... When the hammer discloses itself as something about which one can accurately claim ‘The hammer is too heavy,’ it offers itself just as that hammer is available for a particular task of carpentry, say, for setting nails” (AT 93).

To be of use to a theory of truth, then, one’s account of logical objectivity must consider how logical object functions relate to nonlogical object functions. This, I submit, Dooyeweerd does not provide, and its absence may help explain his inattention to questions of objectivity when he discusses theoretical truth, for which intermodal synthesis is crucial.¹¹

Obviously more needs to be said on the topic of assertoric correctness or propositional truth. Other important factors, in addition to the asserted entity’s predicative availability and self-disclosure, contribute to such correctness,

¹¹ Cf. Geertsema 2005, 97-8.

and there are other ways in which our asserting can be off the mark: mis-speaking, for example, or giving inappropriate responses to questions, or deliberately lying. Moreover, a speech community can be so mired in ideology and miscommunication that incorrect assertions are not exceptions but the rule. Yet I hope to have sketched in enough to show how to repair the lack of objectivity in Dooyeweerd's conception of theoretical truth.

5. *Authentication*

Dooyeweerd's inattention to objectivity occurs in tandem with his not addressing questions of intersubjective validity when he accounts for theoretical truth. The closest he comes to such questions is when he says theoretical insights must be justified before "the forum of the [d]ivine world-order" (NC 2: 577, WW 2: 511). But this peculiar notion of justification begs questions of by whom, to whom, and in which respects the justification is to be offered. Moreover, Dooyeweerd does not distinguish between truth and justification, a topic that has become increasingly important in philosophical truth theory (Habermas 2003, van Woudenberg 2007). If he had taken up this topic, he might have recognized the need to account for epistemic intersubjectivity when one proposes a general conception of truth. He might also have noticed that a theory of theoretical truth should account for two different forms of intersubjective validity: intersubjective validity as it pertains to theoretical truth, and intersubjective validity as it pertains to the justification of theoretical truth claims. Because, arguably, an assertion can be justified but incorrect, and it can be correct but not justified, one needs to account for intersubjective validity in both regards.¹²

This Dooyeweerd does not do. Instead he substitutes for such questions an appeal to what I call "authentication." Dooyeweerd's phrase for authentication is "standing in the Truth." By making this substitution, he winds up in the same problems that afflict Heidegger and Adorno (SP 77-106), neither of whom stands where Dooyeweerd stands with respect to the fulness of truth. Yet all three of them also share a crucial insight that has gone missing in much of contemporary truth theory. All three understand that authentication is more comprehensive than a discursive justification of assertions and the like, just as truth is more comprehensive than assertoric correctness or propositional truth. Their challenge, which none successfully addresses, is to account for authentication in such a way that it neither replaces nor ignores discursive justification.

My own conception of truth responds to this challenge in three ways. First, I argue that assertoric correctness is an important mode of truth but not the decisive one. Second, I portray the justification of assertions as a mode of

¹² One can distinguish between truth and justification without subscribing to what van Woudenberg calls the "standard analysis" of knowledge (as justified true belief) and of truth ("a proposition is true, if what it says to be the case actually is the case"). I disagree with van Woudenberg's claims that Dooyeweerd's conception is "a form of correspondence theory" (van Woudenberg 2005, 106, 117) and that Jesus' "I am the truth" is an inappropriate point of departure when we address questions of truth theory (van Woudenberg 2007, 66-7).

authentication, but again not the decisive one. Third, I give an account of the connection between truth and authentication — and, by implication, between assertoric correctness and discursive justification — that neither collapses the one into the other nor lets authentication trump truth.

5.1 Bearing witness

By “authentication” I mean all of the ways in which people bear witness to truth. By “truth,” in its comprehensive sense, I mean the dynamic correlation already discussed. Given this correlation’s historical character, one can easily imagine its occurring without anyone bearing witness to it: it can occur behind our backs. Still, it is behind *our* backs that truth then occurs, and we cannot but have a stake in it, whether or not we acknowledge this. If we acknowledge our stake in truth’s unfolding, then we can also bear witness to it. Our bearing witness becomes an avenue along which truth itself unfolds. In this respect, authentication is an extension of truth. Yet our bearing witness to truth is not necessarily true. It is possible, indeed likely, that we sometimes bear false witness, even those who, on Dooyeweerd’s account, claim to be “standing in the Truth.” So authentication is not automatically an extension of truth. Intrinsic to authentication, however, also when it takes the form of discursive justification, is that it claims to be true. In other words, truth and authentication are distinct, even though they have an intimate connection.

What does it mean to bear witness to truth? In its fullest sense, to bear witness, to authenticate truth, is to offer testimony concerning specific correlations between societal disclosure and our fidelity to societal principles. We do so as we engage in cultural practices and as we participate in social institutions, and we do so to the extent that these practices and institutions enable us to attest to such correlations. This means, in turn, that authentication is intrinsically intersubjective. It occurs in the company of others and within the societal formation we inhabit. Further, bearing witness to truth is not simply a matter of raising and defending validity claims in a discursive manner, although it does include our engaging in discursive practices. It is practical and multidimensional, and it has an invitational quality.

To bear witness to specific correlations between fidelity and disclosure is to take part in them and, by participating, to invite others to do the same. *Social Philosophy after Adorno* gives the following example: “If ... the correlation of contemporary justice and human flourishing requires the elimination of systemic racism, one bears witness to this correlation by doing what one can, with others, to transform the racist practices and institutions to which one belongs, whether through gestures, policies, or public protests. To bear witness to the truth means to do what truth requires in a social context and with respect to others who co-inhabit that context. Bearing witness involves the full range of human activities, not only linguistic and discursive but also aesthetic, ethical, political, economic, and the like” (SP 103).

This example suggests that no confessional community, including Christian organizations and the Church universal, automatically “stands in the Truth” or,

as I prefer, walks and abides in truth and has truth abide in it. Conversely, no confessional community automatically stands outside the truth or, as I prefer, fails to walk and abide in truth or does not have truth abide in it. The struggle to eliminate slavery in Western countries gives ample evidence in both regards: the complicity of Christians in systemic racism, the courageous struggle against it by devout believers such as William Wilberforce and Sojourner Truth, and both complicity and resistance on the part of nonChristians. As Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven recognize, the antitheses between truth and falsehood and between good and evil do not line up neatly with existing confessional, political, economic, or cultural divisions in society. They run through every community and through each of our hearts: “The antithesis runs right through Christian life itself” (Dooyeweerd 2003, 3).¹³

5.2 Discursive justification

My account of authentication sheds new light, I believe, on practices of discursive justification. For they, too, are ways in which we bear witness to truth. That means they are ways in which people enact specific correlations between fidelity and disclosure, invitationally, and in specific contexts. Although that fact by itself does not explain how discursive justifications can be intersubjectively valid, it does indicate that justificatory validity is important for more than simply logical or academic reasons. Such importance stems from the unique structure of justification. A discursive justification tries to bear out the purported universality of the validity claims raised in other linguistic practices by appealing to its own purported validity. The validity of discursive justifications is not a matter of other societal principles such as solidarity and justice, however. It is matter of logic and rhetoric.

Such an account does not remove justification from the field of authentication, nor does it detach assertoric correctness from comprehensive truth, as if the latter in each case has nothing to do with the former. Instead the role of discursive practices within a multidimensional process of authentication both gives them impetus and makes them important (SP 104). Occurring within a more comprehensive authentication, discursive practices receive their context from other modes of authentication and make their own contributions. Like assertions, discursive justifications never have the final word, nor do they transcend truth and authentication.¹⁴

5.3 Correctness and truth

So too truth, although it does occur as assertoric correctness and also as theoretical truth, is not simply a theoretical concern. As Dooyeweerd recognizes, it is a matter of life and death, and it must be borne out in our lives. Unlike

¹³ Vollenhoven’s ontology is illuminating in this regard. He distinguishes the antithesis between good and evil as a “third determinant” in addition to modality and individuality. See IP 56-62.

¹⁴ Cf. Mekkes 1971, 318.

philosophers who consider propositions and assertions to be the “locus” of truth, I, like Heidegger and Dooyeweerd, regard them as only one way in which truth can occur. Making and discussing and debating assertions are only one way in which the correlation between human fidelity and life-giving disclosure is carried out. Yet the assertoric path is ubiquitous in the practices and institutions of contemporary society. It is not restricted to the arena of science or academic work. Whether in politics or faith, in art or education, we regularly engage in assertoric practices.

Assertoric practices are linked to comprehensive truth in three ways: by virtue of their internal structure, their societal role, and their dependence on other modes of truth. In the first place, assertoric practices involve a definite correlation between fidelity and disclosure, namely, fidelity to the principle of propositional validity, and predicative self-disclosure of that about which we make assertions. The second link lies in the role assertoric correctness plays in the pursuit of other societal principles. If we were unable to make correct assertions about what justice requires, and if we did not care about the principle of propositional validity, we would have difficulty recognizing the extent of injustice and the possibilities for removing it in a complex society. The third link consists in the context and support that other modes of truth provide for the pursuit of assertoric correctness. Assertoric practices primarily occur in nonassertoric contexts, and they presuppose that we are living the truth in nonassertoric ways. To pursue assertoric correctness while continually violating the principle of justice, for example, would eventually undermine the point of making correct assertions. So truth is to be lived, and not simply claimed. Yet making assertions and testing them are vital to the pursuit of truth.

With those hints of a larger research project, I come to the close of my discussion. One question remains. Does my own theoretical stance toward the idea of truth bear witness to truth? More pointedly, given the concerns of reformational philosophy to be attuned to the witness scripture bears to the truth, is my stance toward this idea biblically directed? Like Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven, I *hope* to bear witness to truth in my thinking about it. Indeed, I hope, as they did, to give testimony to what scripture tells us about truth. Offering my proposals in such hope, I would *invite* others to judge whether my stance toward the idea of truth is biblically directed. Accordingly I cannot simply *declare* it to be biblically directed. Yet I do *propose* that it is not unbiblical to regard other philosophers, for whom the Hebrew and Christian scriptures are not authoritative, as being in the truth philosophically. God’s grace is not confined to self-identified Christians, and the antithesis between truth and falsehood does not stop outside the walls of Zion. To pursue both of these biblical insights simultaneously and without compromise is, I suggest, the genius of reformational philosophy.¹⁵

¹⁵ Arnold DeGraaff, Peter Enneson, Henk Hart, Jim Olthuis, Cal Seerveld, Jan van der Stoep, and my colleagues at ICS offered illuminating comments on drafts of both this essay and Zuidervart 2008b, and Matt Klaassen gave helpful research assistance. Some passages come from the Kenneth Konyndyk Memorial Lecture I presented to the Society of Christian Philosophers in April 2007. I thank Bruce Benson for graciously inviting me, and Lee Hardy

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for providing astute comments. This essay is dedicated to the memory of my former colleague Ken Konyndyk.

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