

## HUMAN IDENTITY AND REFORMATIONAL SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY

ROEL KUIPER\*

### 1. *Introduction*

Reformational philosophy views reality structured as an original and meaningful order, created by God.<sup>1</sup> Reality is open to systematic research and contemplation because it reflects a coherent order in its structures. It is this order that also gives *human society* a systematic character. Institutions, communities, relations, regulations, cultural patterns, social customs and manners, all held together in a more or less coherent manner, shape society in a regular way. In this article I will concentrate on patterns and conditions of social life that serve as a framework for human identity. Identity refers to social belonging: the conscious consideration of someone's position in a given social order, like established communities, nations and families. We develop personal and collective identities in response to social and cultural patterns. It is impossible to gain an awareness of what it means to be a person without a structured social milieu. Being human means being part of a meaningful social order. My question is to what extent reformational philosophy — viewing reality as a meaningful order — provides a framework for the study of human identity. For an answer to that question I want to examine the social philosophy of Herman Dooyeweerd.

The study of human society as something structured and coherent is a central part of the systematic philosophy of Herman Dooyeweerd. Almost one-third of his *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* is dedicated to what we may call his 'social ontology.' Dooyeweerd himself declares his reformational philosophy to be 'transcendental' in character. Transcendental here bears two meanings. First, it means that the laws *for* the creation order are also the conditions *of* that creation order. In other words: it is through its functioning subject to these laws that social reality is possible.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, temporal structures point beyond the border of creation towards a supratemporal Origin of meaning. This is the second meaning: the created order, and also human society and human life, does not exist for and by itself but is concentrated and directed to this Origin. The created order (in its law-side and subject-side) reflects meaning, but this concentration on the totality of meaning transcends the temporal sphere. But how does this transcendental

---

\* I want to thank Henk Geertsema, Gerrit Glas, Sander Griffioen, Roger Henderson, John Kok, Dick Stafleu, John VanderStelt and Bruce Wearne for their comments on versions of this article and Alida Sewell for improving my English.

<sup>1</sup> See: Albert M. Wolters, "Creation Order: A Historical Look," in: Brian J. Walsh, Hendrik Hart and Robert E. VanderVennen (eds.), *An Ethos of Compassion and the Integrity of Creation* (Lanham/New York, 1993), 33-48, esp. 37.

<sup>2</sup> J. Dengerink adds here that these laws contain a 'program' or 'assignment' for created reality. "Structuur en Persoon", *Philosophia Reformata* 51 (1986), 33.

philosophy contribute to our understanding of what it means to be human? How does a transcendental social ontology ‘produce’ human identity?

In order to present our examination of these questions, let us give a brief idea of the main characteristics of Dooyeweerd’s social philosophy. What did he want to emphasize and what were his goals? First of all, Dooyeweerd wanted to show that society is not a monolithic whole but exists as a conglomerate of social *structures*: institutions, organizations and relationships. Those ‘individuality-structures’ are concrete ‘things’: families, companies, schools, courts of law, market places, art galleries, sports events and so forth. Dooyeweerd takes ordinary social structures very seriously. At the same time, these ‘typical’ individuality-structures and their mutual relationships are also founded in transcendental “structural principles.”<sup>3</sup> These principles, maintained by God’s ‘common grace’, enable the formation of the typical structures in society.<sup>4</sup> In short, Dooyeweerd wanted to show the origin and nature of *societal structures* as parts of a created cosmos.

Secondly, Dooyeweerd wanted to show that societies tend to be unfolding realities in time under the direction of a religious ground motive. Society is not conceived as a part of nature (as is maintained by naturalists), nor is it opposed to nature (as is maintained by idealists). Society is something dynamic and displays the unfolding of all kinds of mutually dependent natural and cultural aspects.<sup>5</sup> There is a systematic order to be observed in these ‘modal’ aspects. The numeric, spatial, kinematic, physical, biological and psychic aspects form the natural side of reality. They are considered to be the basis (substratum) for the cultural development of human life. Society is formed in a historical process more or less successfully opening up the successive cultural aspects. Hence, lingual, social, economic, aesthetic, juridical, moral and faith aspects will deepen their meaning-structure in a gradually unfolding society. The later aspects that have a “guiding or directing function” for the aspects that precede them will open up the “anticipatory spheres” of these aspects.<sup>6</sup> Dooyeweerd views unfolding societies in connection with the *structure of the created order, guided by a religious idea or perspective*.

Thirdly, the unfolding of this order in society depends on the processes of *differentiation, individualization and integration*, originating in the historical (or formative) aspect of reality. Taken in a cultural context these terms refer to the formation and integration of different *sociocultural roles* and the formation and integration of different *individuality-structures*. These processes, which require human action, are crucial for the development of societies. No society can avoid applying them. Dooyeweerd takes the sociological distinction between undifferentiated and differentiated societies seriously and tries to explain it. Undifferentiated societies remain bound to the natural aspects of reality, lacking any historical development, whereas differentiated societies

---

<sup>3</sup> H. Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* (Amsterdam and Philadelphia, 1953-1958), Volume III, 157. Hereafter: *NC*.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>5</sup> *NC II*, 201.

<sup>6</sup> *NC II*, 184-185.

open up their cultural potential through the norms of differentiation, individualization and integration. The historical aspect is the “nodal point of the entire normative meaning dynamics within cosmic time” and hence of the development of societies.<sup>7</sup> In this way, Dooyeweerd tries to explain the *structural dynamics* behind developing societies.

Dooyeweerd provides for structural frameworks to analyze and explain some important sociological questions. His social philosophy helps to discern between different social structures and their function in society. It also helps to understand the dynamics of modern developing societies and the formative, historical role of man. At the same time, when it comes to the realities of personal and social life, to the human response in time, these structural frameworks seem to lack explanatory insights. In fact, Dooyeweerd does not offer philosophical tools to examine personal and communal identities and makes it difficult to conceptualize relations between persons and communities.<sup>8</sup>

During the last decades, sociology and social philosophy moved towards questions regarding human identity, human relationships and what it means to be human in society.<sup>9</sup> The disintegration of social structures in modern society and deep concerns about social stability and social identity in a postmodern context are contributing to this approach. Now the fundamental question for reformational social philosophy is how to address these questions. As we will demonstrate, there are conceptual problems with Dooyeweerd’s social philosophy that hinder a broader understanding of personal and communal identity. The main question is: How can we develop a philosophical framework for an anthropological, social and cultural understanding of personal and communal identity that will be fruitful for further research? I want to offer a re-interpretation of reformational philosophy in order to develop such a framework. Of course, my re-interpretation is tentative and open for further discussion and correction.

## 2. *Problems and suggestions*

Dooyeweerd and reformational philosophy in general have struggled for decades to formulate a comprehensive anthropology and to bring about a convincing sociology. Paradigms of individual or social life did not emerge, or remained formal or unfinished. Why is that? Dooyeweerd was afraid to define man and society as a ‘totality-structure’ within the boundaries of his modal theory, because this would imply that man and society could be defined ultimately in temporal terms. Instead of doing this, Dooyeweerd asserted that

<sup>7</sup> NCII, 190.

<sup>8</sup> According to M.D. Stafleu these questions have to be addressed in terms of subject-subject-relations. See his “Being Human in the Cosmos,” *Philosophia Reformata* 56 (1991, nr. 2), 101-131. My point is (as I will demonstrate) that this approach remains formal and does not provide insight into the formation of human identity.

<sup>9</sup> I refer here to the works of A. Giddens en U. Beck about individualization, reflexivity and modernity. See also Leroy Aden, David G. Benner and Harold Ellens, *Christian Perspectives on Human Development* (Grand Rapids, 1992).

man transcends the temporal order (in his religious commitment). Here we confront the first conceptual problem. How is it possible to give an account of being human, when the very core of human existence is supratemporal? Conceiving of persons and societies within this transcendental framework makes it difficult to see human beings and societies as a “subject unity” (as Hart called it) within time.<sup>10</sup> In addition, it is difficult to see human beings as socially related persons that form temporal identities in history. H. Hart and M.E. Botha noticed these problems at an earlier stage.<sup>11</sup> They already pointed out that these conceptual problems make it difficult to situate personal and social identities in Dooyeweerd’s reformational social ontology.<sup>12</sup>

The second problem concerns the rigid distinction between ‘primitive’ societies — still part of a natural order — and ‘higher’ civilizations. The difference is marked by the opposition of interrelated terms: nature-culture, undifferentiated-differentiated, unhistorical-historical. Several authors have questioned Dooyeweerd’s depiction of primitive societies. Griffioen pointed to the fact of social differentiation in primitive societies and he also noticed that within these societies an unfolding linguistic richness could be found.<sup>13</sup> Seerveld agrees with Griffioen and proposes to speak of “less differentiated societies.”<sup>14</sup> In Dooyeweerd’s order of aspects, the differentiation of linguistic and social aspects take place on the basis of historical development (they are ‘later’ *cultural* aspects). But now, given the validity of this criticism, we have to recognize major ‘cultural’ developments *apart from and prior to* historical development. At an earlier stage Dengerink was already convinced that the process of individualization can also take place in undifferentiated societies and does not depend on historical development.<sup>15</sup> So we can state that at least the process of differentiation is not confined to the historical aspect of reality and that we must assume that there is social differentiation in so-called ‘primitive’ societies. The question here is how to take these insights seriously in Dooyeweerd’s account of an unfolding social order.

The third problem is connected to this last problem and concerns the assessment of language in social and cultural processes. It can be argued that

<sup>10</sup> See H. Hart, “Problems of Time: an Essay,” in *The Idea of a Christian Philosophy. Essays in Honour of D.H.Th. Vollenhoven* (Toronto, 1973), 30-42. What Hart develops here would be the guiding vision of his *Understanding our World* (1983).

<sup>11</sup> For Hart see note 10. M.E. Botha addressed this issue in her *Sosio-kulturele metavrae* (Amsterdam, 1971). Gerrit Glas recognizes this problem also in his article “Ego, self, and the body”, in Sander Griffioen, Bert Balk (eds), *Christian Philosophy at the Close of the Twentieth Century. Assessment and Perspective* (Kampen, 1996), 67-80.

<sup>12</sup> Griffioen recognizes this problem when he states, “Klapwijk wants to make place within Reformational philosophy for a ‘depth hermeneutics’ of meaning. I cordially sympathize with him. Yet I do not know how such a hermeneutics of the concreteness of the *condition humaine* comports with the universalist thrust of a transcendental philosophy,” in *An Ethos of Compassion*, 53.

<sup>13</sup> S. Griffioen, “Dooyeweerd’s ontwikkelingsidee,” *Philosophia Reformata* 1986, 91-93.

<sup>14</sup> Calvin Seerveld, “Dooyeweerd’s Idea of ‘Historical Development’: Christian Respect for Cultural Diversity”, *Westminster Theological Journal* 58 (1996), 46. Seerveld denotes Dooyeweerd’s observation of primitive culture as an “inaccurate generalization.”

<sup>15</sup> J.D. Dengerink, *Critisch-historisch onderzoek naar de sociologische ontwikkeling van het beginsel der ‘sovereiniteit in eigen kring’ in de 19<sup>e</sup> en 20<sup>e</sup> eeuw* (Kampen, 1948), 199-200.

Dooyeweerd underestimated the importance of language in his modal theory. He is certainly right when he conceives language to be a substratum of social processes. It is through language that we learn to interpret and understand social behavior. And it is through social behavior that language is fundamental for the formation of human identity. But there is another dimension of language to be recognized here. The point is that language also functions in close connection to logic. When we accept ‘discernment’ or the cognitive and deliberate activity of ‘discerning’ to be the core of the logical aspect, we can establish that language enables (symbolic) expression of what is discerned in logical human experience. But if this is accepted, it is difficult to understand why Dooyeweerd did not consider viewing the linguistic aspect in close connection to the logical aspect and *before* the historical in his modal theory. Is it not correct to state that language enables us to make social and cultural distinctions? In other words, a re-ordering of the logical, linguistic, social and historical aspects is required to emphasize the relative weight of language in social and cultural processes.

I will try to resolve these problems by suggesting that we need an account of the *formation of personal and social identities* at the subject-side connected to a redefined social law-sphere of reality. In any analysis of the social structures of reality there should be an account of the fact that there is a subjective consciousness of the categories of *I* and *We*. This *I-consciousness* and *We-consciousness* is to be considered as crucial in any *genuine social process*, and recognizes the fact that human beings are deeply relational and responsive and belong to communities. The awareness of personal and communal self-consciousness precedes the further development of personal and communal identities in society. In other words: the unfolding of the norms of differentiation, individualization and integration presupposes persons and societies that have already formed an idea of their identity. We will demonstrate that Dooyeweerd hesitated to give full account of this — relational — fact. We will argue that *I-consciousness* and *We-consciousness* is necessarily part of any human society (also in undifferentiated or lesser differentiated societies) and depend on the development of language in order to be able to formulate social distinctions. These social distinctions also determine further social behavior: our recognition of others as brothers, friends, husbands or strangers, and the way we mark these distinctions in so far as we greet, respect or neglect others — forms of human interaction that Dooyeweerd considers to be the core of the social aspect. In re-ordering the lingual and social aspects, we hope to gain new insights in the development of reformational perspectives on personhood, community and society.

### 3. *I-consciousness and We-consciousness*

Being human means having an awareness of one’s personal identity, which is necessarily formed within a social context. This *I-consciousness* and *We-consciousness* is the foundation of any social understanding. There is a close correlation between the development of one’s personal identity and the awareness of being part of a community. I learn who I am in relation to others.

I am a unique person, different from others, and at the same time just like others. With regard to the human person this fundamental distinction corresponds to the distinction between 'I' and 'self'. The *I* is the unique self-conscious core of our existence — reformational philosophy calls this the 'heart' — and our self is connected to our social performance. As Douglas explains, "The part of us that is different from the others is the 'subjective I', the willing and intending person. The part of us that is socially defined is the 'social me.'"<sup>16</sup> The process by which the *I* becomes aware of itself can be called 'individuation,' and the process by which our selves are formed can be called 'socialization.' These processes depend on the existence of others and require a *I-You*-relationship. However, the unity and individuality of a person depends on the *I-self*-relationship. In order to develop a sense of identity selfhood is essential. But a person is not just a conglomerate of selves; there is an *I* that directs and conducts the self as a socially active personality. Therefore, personhood means having an integrated *I-consciousness* and *self-consciousness*. (In order to keep my terminology simple I will speak of *I* or *I-consciousness*).

*I-consciousness* is closely connected to *We-consciousness*. I understand myself also as part of a community, and this community is more than the sum of the individual dispositions.<sup>17</sup> There are some aspects of my self that I can only understand as communal aspects, like my kinship and the language I share with others. In worship or in cultural activities we can sometimes only operate as a collectivity. Being human means being a social being. It is through the processes of individuation and socialization that I become aware of the distinction between myself and others. Charles Taylor, pointing to the role of language, demonstrates the close and indissoluble connection between individuation and socialization. "There is no way we could be inducted into personhood except by being initiated into a language."<sup>18</sup> I learn my language of discernment in dialogue with others. I grow up in the midst of conversations that fix meanings of words for me and help me to orient myself in the world. There is a use of language, expressing a *We-consciousness*, which makes me aware of my place and role in a socially defined common space. Although I am a unique person, the full description of my identity involves at least some reference to what Taylor calls a "defining community," which gives direction and control to my life. Language is therefore intimately involved in the awakening of human consciousness in the basic forms of *I* and *We*. In other words: language supports the processes of individuation and socialization.

This initial *I-consciousness* and *We-consciousness* is obviously not the same as a full description of personal and communal identities, as they may develop in time. It is still a "primary structure,"<sup>19</sup> a starting point for the further development of human relationships. We can refer to it by using the terms "individual intentionality" and "collective intentionality" (in the formulation of

<sup>16</sup> J. Douglas, "The emergence, security, and growth of the sense of self," in Joseph A. Kotarba and Andrea Fontana, *The Existential Self in Society* (Chicago and London, 1984), 70.

<sup>17</sup> This was already the observation of Emile Durkheim.

<sup>18</sup> Charles Taylor, *Sources of the self*, (Cambridge, 1989), 35.

<sup>19</sup> NC II, 181. Dooyeweerd means by this the modal aspect and its retrocitations before its anticipatory functions are opened.

Searle).<sup>20</sup> There is a personal *I* that is able to direct and control individual behavior, and there is a social *We* that directs and controls collective behavior (like cooperating individual musicians when they perform in a concert together). Being human means understanding the call to become a person and a social being as well. In other words, it means understanding the call to be responsible in all relations. (We may think here of Levinas' 'face' of the 'other' that calls upon us.) The biblical understanding is that our heart is created to respond to others, and in and through those others to respond to God.<sup>21</sup> Hence, we see that the subject unity represented by the *I* and the *We* do not only refer to each other, but also point beyond themselves to their divine Origin. Their interrelatedness shows a general characteristic of the creation order, namely that nothing is self-sufficient and that everything is related to God. God's call is part of the dialogical relationships of man. Being human also means to respond to this call.<sup>22</sup> This directedness towards God is the last and deepest insight in personal and communal identities and responsibilities. Nevertheless, the *I-consciousness* and *We-consciousness* come into being within specific historical circumstances. They relate, shape, and mould each other intensively in a process of social differentiation and as such they represent the real core of the social aspect of reality.

This brings us to Dooyeweerd's account of social reality and personhood. There are two lines in Dooyeweerd's thought on this particular point. The most dominant idea is that the 'center of human existence' is not to be found within the horizon of modal aspects.<sup>23</sup> Man is a spiritual being and has an urge for the transcendent. In terms of Dooyeweerd's systematic philosophy: man transcends all temporal spheres to find his central unity in an I-ness that is supratemporal. Temporality means modal diversity and this diversity is concentrated in the heart, where the totality of meaning is experienced and which is the seat of religious self-knowledge.<sup>24</sup> Self-knowledge is only possible before the Origin and exists in the true knowledge of God. The *I*, as religious center of human existence, is supratemporal and not temporal, supramodal and not modal. Accordingly, this transcendental existence is also true for what Dooyeweerd calls the "spiritual community of the *we*."<sup>25</sup> This is reflected in the "fact that the ego is centrally bound with other egos in a religious community."<sup>26</sup> Here we find Dooyeweerd's idea about the transcendental interrelatedness of the *I* and the *We*. "The central and radical unity of our existence is at the same time individual and supra-individual; that is to say, in the individual I-ness it *points beyond* the individual ego toward that which makes the whole of mankind spiritually *one in root* in its creation, fall and redemption."<sup>27</sup> The

<sup>20</sup> J.R. Searle, *The construction of social reality*, (New York, 1995), 24-25.

<sup>21</sup> Psalm 27:8

<sup>22</sup> H.G. Geertsema speaks of the structure of 'call and response'.

<sup>23</sup> H. Dooyeweerd, "De taak ener wijsgerige anthropologie", in: *Philosophia Reformata* 1961, 40 ff.

<sup>24</sup> Dooyeweerd already gives a clear and powerful formulation in his "Kuyper's Wetenschapsleer," *Philosophia Reformata* 4 (1939), 204.

<sup>25</sup> *NCI*, 60.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*.

spiritual community of the *We* is also directed to a 'Divine *Thou*.' Dooyeweerd discerns the social categories of *I* and *We*, personal and communal existence, but emphasizes that these categories are supratemporal in a fundamental way.

Dooyeweerd tried to resolve different philosophical problems with this rather complicated transcendental approach.<sup>28</sup> Essential to Dooyeweerd was that the human *I* could never be understood in theoretical thought, bound to the temporal horizon as thinking always is. But it is clear that this transcendental understanding of personal and communal life makes it difficult to give a full account of the "ethical and societal context in which people of our time try to define who they are," as Glas puts it.<sup>29</sup> The way personal and social identities are interwoven and formed in history cannot be understood from this "transcendental condition both of individual and social temporal existence."<sup>30</sup> Obviously, Dooyeweerd was highly critical about existentialists and phenomenologists who tried to define human identity immanently. But one may wonder whether it is really necessary to build a construction that ensures human identity in its "center and root" in a supratemporal, supramodal sphere. The denial of the temporality of the heart, as part of the created world, is a problematic side of Dooyeweerd's philosophy. One of the consequences is the difficulty of giving a full account of the *I-self-relationship* as the core of human identity in time. This, however, is unsatisfactory and contrary to our sense of personhood.

Did Dooyeweerd recognize this in his later work, attempting to stress the fact that man is deeply relational? There is indeed another line in Dooyeweerd's thought, acknowledging the importance and dynamics of social relationships between human individuals. He expresses in his later work an appreciation for Buber's I-thou-relationship.<sup>31</sup> He also acknowledges that Theodor Litt's "theory of the social interwovenness in temporal individual existence...contains an important moment of truth."<sup>32</sup> But he could not incorporate this in the conceptual framework of his transcendental philosophy and finally denied that *immanence-philosophy* had found the right approach.<sup>33</sup> His own anthropological approach was primarily concerned with the structural unity and functionality of the human *body*.<sup>34</sup> Consequently, Dooyeweerd could

---

<sup>28</sup> Like the problem of the 'Archimedean point' in philosophy, breaking through the 'autonomy of theoretical thought,' the dilemma's of historicism, the problems of unity and diversity.

<sup>29</sup> "Ego, self, and the body," 74.

<sup>30</sup> *NC II*, 200.

<sup>31</sup> H. Dooyeweerd, "De taak ener wijsgerige anthropologie," *Philosophia Reformata* 26 (1961), 43. Also in his *In the Twilight of Western Thought* (New Jersey, 1965), 181-183.

<sup>32</sup> *NC III*, 261.

<sup>33</sup> "Immanence-philosophy cannot recognize the real religious transcendence of the human I-ness above all temporal societal relationships". *NC III*, 260-261. Also: *Twilight*, 183.

<sup>34</sup> In his "De taak ener wijsgerige anthropologie" Dooyeweerd concludes about the task of reformational philosophy in this field to deliver an "analysis of human integral bodily existence as enkaptic structural whole," 57. In *NC I*, he states that temporal selfhood lacks a central and radical unity and dissolves in the structure of its acts. "As soon as this transcendental character of the ego is overlooked, and the ego is conceived of as merely immanent centre of its acts, its radical unity disappears and the ego is viewed as a merely *structural* unity in the diversity of its mental acts," 51. Therefore it is impossible to "understand the relation

not deal with issues such as the ways people develop their identities, the formation of personhood, the different stages of spiritual life, and the different narratives by which individuals and communities understand themselves. This requires a thorough study of the human I-ness placed and shaped *within* temporal societal relationships.<sup>35</sup> In order to obtain temporal identity human beings must develop an I-self-relationship (and an I-We-relationship) and this requires an *I-self-consciousness* in a temporal way.<sup>36</sup> What is needed here is a re-interpretation of reformational social philosophy that would bring to the fore an aspect Dooyeweerd never wanted to emphasize that much.<sup>37</sup> The framework of his transcendental philosophy inhibits a concentration on the temporal nature of the *I* and the *We*.

Turning to Dooyeweerd's account of the modal theory, there is — *in abstracto* — a way to conceive the human subject in its temporal existence. In his modal theory man is subject of the opening-process. All aspects are *aspects of human experience* and therefore it is possible to consider man in the framework of the modal theory. M.D. Stafleu has suggested to study human identity by investigating all possible human subject-subject-relationships.<sup>38</sup> But this approach still requires an idea about human sociability at the law-side of the modal order. Otherwise the account of human identity in terms of subject-subject-relationships would remain formal and unfocussed. Such an investigation will only discuss *aspects* of human identity and fragment the notion of human identity itself. The problem is that this idea of human sociability is not anchored in the framework of the modal theory. It is implied in the formative-historical notions of differentiation and integration and

---

between you and me merely form the temporal order of this earthly human existence," because "this relation presents the same diversity of aspects as our own temporal existence," *Twilight*, 183.

<sup>35</sup> This is in fact what is proposed by D.Th. Vollenhoven and K.J. Popma. In rejecting the concept of supra-temporal time they came to other conclusions with regard to the *I*. Peter J. Steen has summarized their position in his *The Structure of Herman Dooyeweerd's Thought* (Toronto, 1983) and calls for a "reconstruction," 284-332. Dooyeweerd's "construction of God, soul, temporal cosmos cannot be maintained," Steen states, 290. He continues: "The whole man is temporal in the sense of being subject to the ordinance of time. Man as the 'creature with a heart' as well as man as body with all his functions, is subject to time."

<sup>36</sup> This is also the point of Arnold H. de Graaff in his "Towards a New Anthropological Model", in John Kraay and Anthony Tol (eds.), *Hearing and Doing. Philosophical Essays Dedicated to H. Evan Runner* (Toronto, 1979), 111. According to De Graaff, Dooyeweerd's anthropology has a "static character" and "cannot do justice to the developmental side of human functioning." In advocating a more complex model he continues, "Such a model needs to account for the total stages of development of the person as a unity and, as part of and within those total anthropological stages, the (order of) development of the distinct modes of functioning." This approach is similar to ours.

<sup>37</sup> Dooyeweerd does not deny that man's existence presents itself in the temporal order, but he denies that the *I* is part of that temporal order. "It is true that our temporal existence presents itself as an individual, bodily whole, and that its different aspects are related to this whole, in fact, are only aspects of it. But as a merely temporal wholeness, our human existence does not display that central unity which we are aware of in our self-consciousness." *Twilight*, 181.

<sup>38</sup> M.D. Stafleu, *Een wereld vol relaties. Karakter en zin van natuurlijke dingen en processen* (Amsterdam: Buijten en Schipperheijn, 2002). Also, "Evolution, History, and the Individual Character of a Person," *Philosophia Reformata* 67 (2002), 3-18.

explained in terms of social intercourse, but its normative principle is not defined. Surprisingly, Dooyeweerd points to logical control as the normative principle behind the opening-process of society. Rational consideration and distinction are foundational for cultural development.<sup>39</sup> “Only creatures with a rational power of distinction, with an analytical ‘sense of meaning’...can be *subjects* in history.”<sup>40</sup> Culturally relevant human I-consciousness has a starting point in the logical sphere.

This account of human consciousness shows no relation to any idea of human sociability or social dynamics. The self seems to discover its own existence just by thinking.<sup>41</sup> The mind that thinks appears basically unrelated to others. We may call this ‘surprising’ not only because of Dooyeweerd’s critique of rationalism but also because of his rejection of human autonomy. Hence Seerveld remarks: “it makes good antirationalistic, biblical sense to deny analysis the privilege of being the gateway to normativity.”<sup>42</sup> To our understanding, it is not the rational person who acts in history, but the person who is aware of his or her personal and social identity. We need to reframe the modal theory in order to include the interrelated categories of *I*- and *We-consciousness*, categories of human sociability, at the law-side of the created order.

#### 4. *The idea of society*

I will now approach the question from the angle of society. As already explained, Dooyeweerd’s social ontology is of a transcendental character. Human beings are rooted in a religious community. This community is bound together by a religious ground motive. Any attempt to define this community in temporal terms will prove idle. It will result in economic, legal or moral reductionism. Social structures point beyond themselves to their Origin. Society is an “essential trait of temporal human existence” that is rooted in “the central spiritual community of mankind.”<sup>43</sup> This spiritual community can also be experienced in concrete forms. Humanity is called to develop and shape social structures in history.

According to Dooyeweerd, “human society” is subject to historical form giving. “The cultural mode of form-giving is always a *social* human modality.”<sup>44</sup> It is a “modal aspect of empirical human society.” In history there is a vocation to “control” and “master” the “*successive cultural development* of mankind in its *temporal social existence*.”<sup>45</sup> The question that arises here is: How can this “empirical human society,” this “temporal social existence” be understood? Here the picture becomes confusing. Firstly, Dooyeweerd wants to treat human

<sup>39</sup> NC II, 237-238. See also: NC III, 594-595.

<sup>40</sup> NC II, 230. See also NC II, 69.

<sup>41</sup> Given the modal order consciousness, then, is the logical elaboration of sense-experiences.

<sup>42</sup> “Dooyeweerd’s Idea of ‘Historical Development,’” *Westminster Theological Journal* 58, 52.

<sup>43</sup> NC II, 200.

<sup>44</sup> NC II, 199, italics mine.

<sup>45</sup> NC II, 196.

society as something given, connected somehow with the “community of mankind.” Secondly, he refuses to view human society as a whole; it consists of several societal structures and communities. Thirdly, considered from a modal perspective, social life is connected to the historical aspect (as differentiation, individualization and integration). Fourthly, again considered from a modal perspective, social life appears in the aspect of social intercourse (as social behavior). These distinctions are not easy to comprehend and hinder a clear understanding of social reality. They also give rise to some serious questions.

What should we think of the opening-process and the fact that social structures emerge and differentiate through historical form-giving? What comprehension, then, do we have of the *social* character of primitive societies? Do important social processes, like differentiation, integration and individualization, not *presuppose* a starting point of social integration and organization (as subject of differentiation and integration)? How can we conceptualize this social integration as something *prior* to the historical form-giving of society? These questions make clear that we must reconsider the relationship between the historical and social aspects.

According to Dooyeweerd, social change presupposes dynamic cultural activity on the foundation of the historical aspect, opening up the anticipatory spheres of all the post-historical aspects, including the social aspect. Hence, social change can only take place as part of historical development. Dooyeweerd claims that human societies that are not touched by historical development have a static social life bound by nature and determined by natural processes: family-clans, tribal life, and traditional religion. But, as Griffioen and Seerveld pointed out, Dooyeweerd made the distinction between ‘undifferentiated’ and ‘differentiated’ too sharp and too rigid. Their criticism makes clear that there are genuine social processes, shaping communities and personalities *prior* to their further historical development. The social dimension is prior to the cultural dimension, as is also suggested by anthropologists.<sup>46</sup> What I have in mind are processes of individuation and socialization, shaping personal and communal identities, as the core of the social aspect of all human life, in all kinds of societies. *Individuation and socialization* are universal key features of human social life and form the modal starting point for social change.

I can make this observation even stronger by pointing out that there is quite a difference in character between individuation and socialization on the one hand and differentiation, individualization and integration on the other. These processes are not the same. Individuation and socialization are *social* processes and bring about the two basic dimensions of social life, the person and the community. The *cultural* processes of differentiation, individualization and integration deal with the structural development of a given society in its cultural and institutional forms. It includes a general idea of cultural development and produces such things as institutions, schools, economic relationships, technology, political parties, labor unions, congregations, and so on.

---

<sup>46</sup> See Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, 2000), 44-45, 91-94.

They shape and refine what Dooyeweerd calls a “Personskultur” and a “Sachkultur.”<sup>47</sup> However, the cultural unfolding of given structural possibilities in persons and societal structures is built on a socialized subjectivity, which is the result of processes of individuation and socialization. This socialized subjectivity is open to further cultural formation and differentiation. There must be a consciousness of personal and social identity and responsibility, before further cultural developments can take place. Dooyeweerd’s social philosophy requires it but does not provide it. We consider these processes of individuation and socialization as the normative core of the social aspect of reality.

##### 5. *The social aspect*

This brings us to a re-consideration of the social aspect of reality. How do these norms of individualization and socialization relate to the norms Dooyeweerd viewed as central to the social aspect? Dooyeweerd defined the social aspect as the aspect of “social intercourse.” The meaning-nucleus designates social behavior and a set of social norms like good manners, courtesy, fashion and so on. Dooyeweerd himself never elaborated on this modal social meaning-structure and actually only referred to it briefly. He often explained that all cultural aspects were also social aspects and that the study of social reality was not to be confined to the social aspect. His focus was much more on society at large. In effect, the modal social aspect of reality appears to be rather empty, engaging some minor social characteristics. The study of social manners and customs does not touch the mainstream of sociological studies, which is concerned with the nature of social relationships and *social systems* in general. According to Dooyeweerd, the nature of these issues is not sociological but philosophical.<sup>48</sup> Consequently, Dooyeweerd tried to confine positive sociology to its own field of research. As a result, the attempts to build a reformational social science on this modal social aspect showed in fact a limited scope.<sup>49</sup>

A more comprehensive account of what it means to be human would be possible if the norms that Dooyeweerd addresses to the social aspect were brought in close connection to the norms of individuation and socialization, which I consider to be primary social norms. They constitute the core of the social aspect in my perception. Courtesy, customs and social conventions are secondary social norms and should be seen as a function of personal and communal identities. They are used by persons and communities to affirm their social identities. Social behavior is one of the ways by which individuals and communities want to show who they are and how they will be recognized.

---

<sup>47</sup> These terms refer to a distinction Martin Buber made between the worlds of ‘you’ (relational) and ‘it’ (impersonal), *Ich und Du* (1923)

<sup>48</sup> H. Dooyeweerd, *A Christian Theory of Social Institutions* (La Jolla, California, 1986), 37. See also D.F.M. Strauss, “Philosophy and Sociology”, in Paul A. Marshall and Robert E. Vandervenn (eds.), *Social Science in Christian Perspective* (Lanham/New York/London, 1988), 120. According to Strauss, this delimitation of Dooyeweerd is “not clear.”

<sup>49</sup> M. Vrieze, *Nadenken over de samenleving* (Amsterdam, 1977). B.C. Wearne, “Recasting the Sociological Encyclopedia”, in *Signposts of God’s liberating Kingdom. Perspective for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Potchefstroom, 1998), Vol. 2.

So, by bringing those primary and secondary norms together, we can reformulate the social aspect of reality in a much richer way. Having established the close connection between the norms that regulate social identity and social behavior, we must also take the next step: the reformulation of the meaning-nucleus of the social aspect. I believe that “intercourse” is an unsatisfactory description of this meaning-nucleus. A more comprehensive description is given by what we may call a sense of ‘social belonging’ enabled by our ‘relational responsiveness.’ Being responsive in all human relations indicates that I belong to certain social communities and as such I exhibit the expected social manners and customs. Responsiveness, social interaction and this sense of belonging remind me that I am a heteronomous human being. By interacting, I obtain a sense of personhood in relation to others and ultimately to God. Therefore I would describe the meaning-nucleus as ‘social belonging.’<sup>50</sup>

How do we know that we made a proper decision by reformulating the meaning-nucleus and the social norms in this way? The answer must be given on the basis of the entire modal theory. For the social aspect is part of an order of mutually coherent aspects, irreducible to each other and placed in an irreversible order. Each aspect refers back to others by its retrocipatory spheres and refers forward in the transcendental direction of time by opening up its anticipatory spheres. The norms of individuation and socialization, showing the meaning nucleus of ‘social belonging,’ cannot be reduced to the biological or psychological aspects, because those aspects are confined to the ‘natural side’ of our existence and do not necessarily involve consciousness. Nor can it be reduced to the logical aspect of discernment or the linguistic aspect of signification, because social dynamic cannot be reduced to logical or linguistic patterns. Nor is ‘social belonging’ reducible to any of the aspects of cultural meaning, because the growth of an *I-consciousness* and *We-consciousness* is basically not a cultural process.

As I will demonstrate in the next section, the norms of individuation and socialization refer back to the biological, psychic, logical and linguistic aspects and open its anticipatory sphere for the historical and successive cultural (economic, aesthetic etc.) aspects. In this process, the already designated personal and communal identities, together with all their developing manners, customs and so on come to fuller expression. In each of the cultural spheres the basic-forms of human identity adopt new shapes and manners in different subject-subject-relations. But the most important thing to be mentioned is that the two dimensions of social life — the *I* and the *We* — come to full recognition of their temporal meaning-structures in the two last modal aspects of human culture, namely that of moral solidarity and faith, which connote the ultimate dimensions of personal identity. Individuation and socialization do have temporal purposes, serving the well-being of the human person and the well-being of civilization. To see what this entails, we have to relocate the social aspect in the framework of the modal theory.

---

<sup>50</sup> After writing this passage I discovered that H.G. Stoker also developed the concept of social belonging.

### 6. *The opening-process of reality*

In reality, all the aspects are given in indissoluble coherence. We can only discern and separate them in analysis. As soon as we analyze them (which involves the logical activity of our mind) we see that they are more or less complex, support each other and build on each other. Biological processes, for instance, are built on physical processes, organic life using inorganic material. So we do not only discern aspects as they exist, but also the proper order between the aspects. That is why reformational philosophy talks about ‘retrocipations’ and ‘anticipations’: aspects refer back and forward within the modal order. How can this order be argued? What kind of criteria are involved in establishing the order between the aspects?

It must be admitted that we do not really have a yardstick to discern the proper place of all modal aspects. We can group them from less complex aspects to more complex aspects and try to determine the direction of the unfolding process, but still there remains some arbitrariness in the way the aspects are ordered. Of course, it is important to notice that the aspects are closely knit together and always present themselves together in close interdependency and mutual cooperation. Establishing a certain order between them means giving arguments for the proposed way of looking at them. We can do that because creation is not self-sufficient or independent, but intended to open all its potentials in a dynamic process, because it seeks fulfillment in closer relationship to its Creator. It aims at something that is higher than itself, ultimately its transcendent Origin. The aspects open their normative law-spheres up for each other in a coherent way and while they open themselves, they reveal why they are needed in a successive order.

Taking ‘social belonging’ as the irreducible meaning-nucleus of the social aspect and determining that this aspect has to be placed somewhere between the ‘natural’ and ‘cultural’ side of the spectrum of modal meaning-aspects, I need to demonstrate how this opening-process includes this social aspect in its dynamic order. I cannot do that by just examining the social aspect and its norms. It must be demonstrated that there are already social ‘analogies’ in other aspects, indicating the proper place of the social law-sphere. In other words, I need to show how the norms of the aspects that are involved in the shaping of personal and communal identities support each other in an irreversible way. It should become clear how the irreversible connection of law-spheres can be explained by their inner normative structure. Because the law-spheres are irreducible to each other, their inner coherence is not *causal*. They are original and engage their analogous meaning-possibilities in mutual cooperation.

Now I want to demonstrate how this works for the succession of especially the logical, linguistic, social and historical aspects. Compared to traditional accounts I put the linguistic and — redefined — social aspects between the logical and historical aspects. This emanates from the different choice I made concerning the development of the *I-consciousness* and *We-consciousness* as a mode of existence within the temporal order. To be convincing, this emendation should be proven by considering the consequences for the opening-

process. By reformulating some characteristics of reformational social philosophy I am looking for a more convincing idea of the opening-process at the subject-side of human temporal existence.

### 7. *The modal succession*

I will concentrate on the three modal relations to be examined: the relation between the logical and linguistic aspect, between the linguistic and the social aspect and between the social and the historical aspect. Of necessity, I must keep my argumentation short and incomplete, but what follows will be enough to indicate the validity of my re-ordering of the modal aspects.

1. The logical aspect is the first one that presumes the human *mind*. It refers to deliberate *consciousness* and requires cognitive discernment.<sup>51</sup> The logical sphere is the first of the *normative* law-spheres, different from the laws of the preceding natural law-spheres, because the human person is confronted here with freedom of choice. Introducing this aspect in the modal theory is to say that from now on the issue of right and wrong distinctions is introduced. Hence, the ability to make deliberate and conscious distinctions specifies the human mind. The ability to discern and to think deliberately is not the same as using language or having a developed sense of personhood. Babies are able to make intelligent distinctions before they use language. However, this ability deepens its possibilities when logical patterns can be put in significant symbols, numbers and language. Related to the context of social life these logical-lingual operations acquire new dimensions within the social processes of individuation and socialization. They acquire further meaning as theoretical thought within the cultural processes of differentiation and integration.<sup>52</sup>

Therefore, the logical aspect precedes the lingual, social and cultural aspects in its anticipations. In its closed function it points to the ability to make deliberate distinctions, in its opened function it points to the ability to develop reason and theoretical thought in a more disciplined way. We must emphasize here that, as a consequence, the ability to make deliberate distinctions does not assume a theoretical character before the historical aspect is opened. Indeed, the cultural mode of existence transforms pre-theoretical thought in theoretical thought.<sup>53</sup> But pre-theoretical thought is not bound to the *pre-logical* spheres, as Dooyeweerd holds, but to the *pre-cultural* spheres. Reasoning within the context of social life is not the same as theoretical thinking. Reasoning here is still bound to its social function. There is something to be discerned between the pre-logical and cultural aspects in the opening-process. It acknowledges the fact that in social life people use logic and language to express their individual and communal identities in a deliberate but not necessarily theoretical way.

---

<sup>51</sup> See also H. van Riessen, *Wijsbegeerte* (Kampen, 1970), 182 and *Op Wijsgerige Wegen* (Wageningen, 1963), 83, note 3.

<sup>52</sup> *NC II*, 120.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibidem*.

Let us now consider the linguistic retrocipation on the logical aspect. The meaning-nucleus of this aspect is signification (by signs, symbols, language). It is interesting to relate the linguistic aspect so closely to the logical aspect. Many authors have already suggested that the use and development of language-structures necessarily presuppose logic. The relation between logic and language is indeed intimate. Even Dooyeweerd once mentions “the opening of the historical anticipation in the modal structure of the analytical function is not possible without the opening of its linguistic anticipatory sphere.”<sup>54</sup> Several modern philosophers see language as an expression of underlying logical structures.<sup>55</sup> These philosophers can rightly do so because reasonable human beings use linguistic structures (symbols, numbers, signs) to express logical propositions. Hence, logic belongs to the restrictive function (or primary structure) of language.<sup>56</sup> In its closed function language is just symbol or sign, number, picture or verb. When opened, it is speech, talk and discourse in a social or cultural context. Here language becomes ‘speech-act.’ This brings us to the relation between the lingual and the social.

2. Language opens its anticipatory structures towards the social aspect. Although logical by structure, language acquires a deeper meaning in social relationships. The logical structure remains, because it is impossible to establish a language that is not distinctive and consistent. But, within social life, linguistic structures are deepened in many ways while they are used as media of communication. Communication is always communication between human individuals or within communities and this fact explains why language develops in a social way. To Dooyeweerd’s understanding, language is first of all a cultural phenomenon. He emphasizes the fact that language is shaped in history. In our understanding, language is first of all communication between human beings that use symbolic meaning for social reasons: to establish contact, to identify, to convey common interpretations. Communication (in terms of speech) is the same as establishing relationships between identifiable persons, which is not a cultural activity but a social one, recognizing I, you, we, and so on. Of course, language is also a cultural phenomenon, developed in the wider context of society, but language is first of all a communication-structure and secondly a cultural phenomenon.<sup>57</sup>

The social retrocipations on the lingual law-sphere concern the ways language is used in social communication. Language is one of the most profound means by which people express themselves. In the process of individuation and socialization, language and also symbols are used to express personal and

---

<sup>54</sup> NC II, 121. In our understanding the linguistic law-sphere is not opened by the cultural law-sphere, but by the social.

<sup>55</sup> I am thinking of Wittgenstein, Ayer and Strawson.

<sup>56</sup> Therefore philosophy is not properly defined as the relation between logic and language as Ayer tends to do in his *Language, Truth and Logic* (New York, 1946), 57-58. Logic is opened up in all pre- and post-logical spheres and philosophy is concerned with all these spheres.

<sup>57</sup> This is also stated by Talcott Parsons in his social “theory of action.” There is language as medium in a “social system” where it develops and gets a fixed meaning as part of the “cultural system”.

communal identities. These expressions are part of an intentional way of using language: we express personal or communal meaning by it. Specific expressions, phrases, dialects, accents are used as significant means of identification. They are the means of deciding to what social world and status people belong. Apparently, this is the most important function of communication. There is a language that is used by teen-agers, there is a language used by hooligans, there is a language used by lovers, there is private language and there is a language expressed in prayer. Language can also signify different social attitudes. Those are expressed in the ways language is used: commanding, begging, crying and so on.

Again, it is important to distinguish between the “social system” and the “cultural system” as some social scientists do.<sup>58</sup> Therefore, the social use of language has to be distinguished from the cultural use of language.<sup>59</sup> Social use of language (like the language used by teenagers or lovers) is intentional and meaningful, but does not necessarily bear a cultural meaning. Much of this social language remains obscure and is culturally insignificant. Language obtains cultural significance if and when the language of given communities or persons is used and shaped within the context of the cultural aspects of the modal order. Not all cultural linguistic practices convey the personal intentions of an individual speaker or author, as is the case in public political speech or in the text of a piece of legislation. In this utilization of language there is a cultural intentionality that dominates. This cultural significance of linguistic structures is shaped within the context of the cultural aspects. There is a political-symbolic language, signifying the community of the political body; there is an economic language, used by businessmen, there is an aesthetic language used by artists, there is juridical language used by lawyers, and so on. Language, performed in the framework of the cultural aspects, is always an interpretation of culture at the same time.

We can approach this from another angle as well. There is a social sphere and a historical (cultural) sphere, both interdependent and interpenetrative with distinct but pervasive usage of language. Culturally significant language — language interpreting the world we live in — is used as explanatory communication within the social context. Communication implies the communication of a meaningful perspective of the cultural world, which is integrated in the way we grow as persons and communities. A meaningful idea about the world we live in is always part of our *I-consciousness* and *We-consciousness*. The perspectives on our world that we learn by communication form our identities. That being so, the language that surrounds us in our ‘defining communities’ is directive: it teaches us to understand our world in prescribed ways. In that sense they are also directive for human action. The acting agents in history are

---

<sup>58</sup> Here again I am thinking of Talcott Parsons, although I do not speak of “systems,” which gives too much of an ontic status to social and cultural patterns, but of “spheres.”

<sup>59</sup> This distinction is one of the cornerstones of the research project of Robert N. Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton. In their book *Habits of the Heart. Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (New York, 1985) they distinguish between a “first language” that is personal and social and a “second language” that is cultural, 20, 334.

identifiable persons and communities. When it comes to historical activity we encounter true persons and communities, each with their own life-story and perspective. This brings us to our last examination about the relationship between the social and historical aspect.

3. The social aspect opens its anticipatory spheres towards the historical aspect. The differentiated self-conscious personality and community need further development. They need to be shaped further within the context of society. Individuation and socialization provide the basic dimensions of society, but these processes cannot form society. Therefore, they anticipate in their social differentiation the *cultural* norms of differentiation, individualization and integration, which are shaping society. Those norms mark the transition between the closed forms of social life and the structurally disclosed forms within society. They mark the transition between what might be called “Gemeinschaft” (community) and “Gesellschaft” (society). In the social sphere there was already differentiation, although limited and confined to the primary structures of social life. The nuclear family could be discerned but was still embedded in the wider tribal or extended family-structures.

The norms of the historical law-sphere shape society in its structural forms. This is possible because of the fact that a mature *I-consciousness* and *We-consciousness* will lead to intensified social intercourse.<sup>60</sup> Subsequently, the exchange and exploration of ideas and new possibilities touch the self-image of personal and communal identities. Social forms are seen from a cultural perspective and become objects in history. Now social life is going to be shaped in a structural way and brings about national institutions, companies, associations, congregations and so on, all of them still communities, but culturally shaped and functioning and interrelating within the context of a developing society.

In examining the role of the historical aspect in this further development of persons and communities, we have to remember that the historical aspect is the “nodal point of the entire normative meaning dynamics” in Dooyeweerd’s understanding.<sup>61</sup> It is a cardinal point in the entire order of aspects that bridges all *normative* aspects. According to Dooyeweerd, there must be some “resting-points” in the modal order, “on whose modal opening of meaning the whole opening-process depends.”<sup>62</sup> The historical aspect takes the meaning-structure of the pre-cultural normative aspect as “given structure” and has a “foundational function” for the subsequent cultural aspects by exercising formative human power. We can easily see that this notion of formative power does not exist in the formation of an *I-consciousness* and a *We-consciousness*. These social processes are just relational. We have already demonstrated that the way logical and linguistic structures are used in social communication is

---

<sup>60</sup> Dooyeweerd noticed that social intercourse opened the process of differentiation and integration. In our understanding, social intercourse makes these processes possible. Differentiation and integration presuppose social intercourse.

<sup>61</sup> *NC II*, 190.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibidem*.

also relational and not cultural. It is here, when that moment of formative power is introduced, that basic social forms are going to be shaped within the context of a developing society. What exactly is going to be shaped?

In answering this question, we remain close to what Dooyeweerd means by the function of the historical law-sphere. "Culture is bound to human society, which in its turn demands cultural formation, i.e. a controlling manner of shaping the social relations between men."<sup>63</sup> Our emendation implies that these social relations are founded in the processes of individuation and socialization. To be clear, we are speaking about persons and communities that are the self-conscious subjects of history. This is the same as stating that they are also subjects of society, ready to play a more or less significant cultural role. Therefore, it is that entire structure of self-consciousness, that identity-structure formed by logical, linguistic and social patterns that is pushed forward and provides the 'given structure' to be formed within all the subsequent cultural aspects.

Differentiation, individualization and integration take place on the foundation of the social aspect.

The first historical task, then, is to shape the political body that will bring these persons and communities together under the leadership of a unifying authority. We-consciousness is the basic structure of this society, which is united by the exercise of formative power. This unity must be a logical one (for instance the nation) and able to form a coherent political body. This political body is affirmed by linguistic structures (national symbols, meaningful texts, verbs, songs). Those supportive logical and linguistic structures make sure that there is a meaningful political body, formed in history. Here society is entering the picture. Further differentiation and integration takes place on this foundation and concerns the opening of the subsequent cultural aspects: the economical, aesthetical, juridical, moral and pistical. They all develop within the wider context of a nation or a society that provides the broader communal framework for their differentiation and integration-process.

Logic and the language of society is what people have to learn at some stage in their lives. That is the purpose of all professional education: to shape the minds of people by teaching them the logic and language of their society. Education is rightly considered to be a major cultural goal. It carries the processes of individuation and socialization further in a cultural way. Education delivers the framework for cultural interpretation and well-informed public opinion. Students learn to assess their world and discern what is meaningful within the society in which they live. Education creates the tools for people to play a role in the further development of themselves as culturally formed personalities and of their society. The ability to assess and process coherent and meaningful information provides the basics for the opening-process of the next law-spheres. It is not difficult to see how these next law-spheres facilitate this opening-process. The economic law-spheres provide the means and limitations, the aesthetic law-sphere harmonizes the result of

---

<sup>63</sup> NC II, 246.

power-formation, and the juridical law-sphere applies the codes of justice within a given society and so on. In this respect, we do not change Dooyeweerd's picture of the opening-process.

#### 8. *Bordering aspects*

This re-interpretation of the succession of law-spheres, based on the insight that personal and communal identities have to be accounted for within the modal theory, results in a convincing sequence of the law-spheres in the opening-process of reality. The complicated relationship between the social and historical aspect, still to be understood in close connection to each other, could be clarified in a satisfactory way. Whereas the social modality creates a sense of social identity (engaging the logical and linguistic structures), the cultural aspects shape and deepen persons and communities in the context of society. The *I-intentionality* and *We-intentionality*, as basic structures of social experience, are directed towards the cultural aspects, which provide the content and material for the further development of persons and communities. The *I* and the *We* remain closely connected in their mutual development, but differentiate in society. Communities, restlessly striving forward, are heading for their goals in society. At the same time personalities strive forward to become free and responsible, loving and caring human beings before God.

These two goals are closely linked to the ethical and the pistical aspect. The ethical aspect is not directly concerned with ethical codes, but its normativity is concentrated on the biblical commandment to love one's neighbor.<sup>64</sup> Careful love between people, real solidarity, helps to reshape the structures of law and justice and engage them to the ultimate level of shalom, where justice and social peace come together. The highest level any community can reach is this level of *shalom*. Including all the previous stages of cultural development this is the highest level of civilization. Meanwhile, individual persons do not dissolve in this community in solidarity. The development of societies does not eclipse the fact that being human means being an individual and responsible person before the face of God. A community in solidarity cannot exist without individuals who take responsibility for the well-being of others. The caring and loving response of responsible individuals is a higher goal than having communities in solidarity. Hence, the development of human personality finds its goal, its temporal resting-point in the pistical aspect. Loving and serving God in a personal and responsive way also implies loving and serving people. Loving God and obeying his commands is the fulfillment of self-consciousness within our temporal world.

In this way we see that the ethical and pistical aspects are the borderlines of our temporal social experience. Here we find the limits of what can be accomplished in social life. We have seen that being relational also means that we bear in our *I-consciousness* and *We-consciousness* an awareness of our relationship

---

<sup>64</sup> This is Dooyeweerd's description. M.E. Botha proposed to take "care" — *sorg* in Afrikaans — as the proper meaning-nucleus. See her *Sosio-kulturele metaforae*, 268. I take the love for one's neighbour and care together.

with God. The way we respond in social life is also a response to the call of God. The *Idea* that guides us in the development of our personalities and communities in society is in this sense transcendental. We know that the fulfillment of our identities is to be found in our relationships with the God of grace. We know that we are finite and mortal. Yet in communicating our hope and expectation of an eternal destiny, we transcend the limits of our temporal existence and trust ourselves to God. This is the ultimate step we can make, knowing that our struggle for solidarity and shalom will fail to attain fully that for which we are longing. Therefore our temporal experiences are guided in the transcendental direction, aiming at the true relationship with God.<sup>65</sup>

### 9. *Anthropology and sociology*

The proposed re-interpretation of Dooyeweerd's social ontology may seem just a different choice within the systematic framework of reformational philosophy. We did not change this framework but rooted the transcendental I-We-relationship in the temporal order of time, by recognizing the modal character of it. Whereas Dooyeweerd insists on the 'transcendental structure of human experience,'<sup>66</sup> we emphasized that the structure of human experience requires a temporal understanding of human identity anchored in close social relationships in history. Dooyeweerd does not leave room for that position because of his battle against what he called "immanence-philosophy," but his social ontology is open for this re-interpretation.

At the same time, the consequences of this re-interpretation are profound. I offer this re-interpretation as a *possible* reading of reformational philosophy. Perhaps someone would argue convincingly that human identity could only be discussed as an individuality-structure. Others would argue that the investigation of all possible subject-subject-relations is a more promising road to take. In that case my re-ordering of aspects would prove to be unnecessary. I am open to discussion and correction. Still, I am impressed by the possible benefits of this approach. My reading of reformational philosophy enables a more *comprehensive* account of personal and communal identities than is given thus far. It offers a new opportunity to *study personal and social change* within a cultural context. Recently, Glas stated that there is a gap in traditional reformational philosophy in this respect. "We are in need of an anthropology that gives an account of the ways how central choices are mediated by someone's life-story...by personality...we need an account of human development."<sup>67</sup> My re-interpretation makes this possible. The same is true for our understanding of the development of societies. Wolterstorff once mentioned that reformational analysis of the social order demonstrates a 'deficiency' where it fails to see that "groups of *persons* are exploitatively dominated by other groups of

---

<sup>65</sup> This implies that I understand the heart transcending time only insofar as it is directed to God. Also, the experience of God in our heart is of a different nature than other human experiences.

<sup>66</sup> *NC II*, 597.

<sup>67</sup> *Beweging* (2003), No. 1, 27. My translation.

persons.”<sup>68</sup> According to Wolterstorff, there is a ‘conflictual aspect of our social order’ to be accounted for and, therefore, disclosure should bear the meaning of liberation. Also, christian historians wondered how they could handle Dooyeweerd’s modal theory in their analysis of civilizations.<sup>69</sup> What is needed is not only a transcendental *idea* of development, but especially an idea of the struggle for and unfolding of civilization in its temporal form. Will my re-interpretation prove to be fruitful in these fields? Let me try to give some insights.

#### 10. *The theory of man*

Reformational philosophy always wanted to be fruitful for the special sciences. Some special sciences involve a more or less developed anthropology, like psychology or the medical sciences. Who or what is man? Reformational philosophy did not want to be captured in the modern body-mind-dichotomy, but developed a structural-holistic view of man. According to Dooyeweerd, man is an integrated whole, consisting of four partial structures: the physical-chemical, the biological, the psychological and the act-structure. Those structures are interlaced and form an ‘enkaptic whole.’ These structures reflect the order of the modal aspects, the first three coincide with the ‘natural’ side, the act-structure with the ‘normative’ side of reality. Thus, in Dooyeweerd’s view, the act-structure reflects the logical, historical, linguistic, social, economical, aesthetic, juridical, moral, and pistic law-spheres within man. It is the act-structure that opens up the human personality.

It is difficult to see, in this picture, how personal identity is formed. The act-structure starts from the logical sphere and the next step is directly into the historical sphere. Therefore, the logically equipped human person starts to form and control culture. But who is this person? What is his life-story? Where do we find an account of the fact that he is deeply relational?

I maintain this idea of the human person as an integrated whole and do think that the theory of the four interlaced structures is still helpful. But the ‘act-structure’ must be perceived differently. Here I discern the logical, then the linguistic and social aspects, and subsequently the cultural aspects, as I explained them. These three aspects (logical, linguistic and social) together form human consciousness as a subject unity in time. Now we can see what we gained: the logical, linguistic and social spheres are indeed act-spheres, because the human personality is acting, but they are of a different kind than the cultural. Therefore they should be taken as a cluster. The logical, linguistic and social spheres point in the first place to the personal domain of human consciousness. The human person is active in shaping his or her identity, in discovering his or her mental life, in maintaining social relationships that are meaningful, in recognizing the *I* and the *Self*, the *We* and the *Thou*, in developing a sense of human responsiveness and responsibility. Having explored all

<sup>68</sup> Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace* (Grand Rapids, 1983), 67.

<sup>69</sup> See for instance the contributions of C.T. McIntyre and E.J. van Kley in: George Marsden, Frank Roberts (eds.), *A Christian View of History?* (Grand Rapids, 1975).

these dimensions of human identity and responsibility, people are able to act historically and build a society in which to live with those others. These reformulations enable an account of the formation of the human personality, not in cultural terms but in more intimate social terms. And yet I maintain the transcendental directedness of human existence. In the words of Arnold H. de Graaff dealing with human personhood: "His God-relatedness is constitutive for his functionality."<sup>70</sup>

### 11. *The theory of civilizations*

The theory of the opening-process of reality has always been related to a perspective of developing civilizations. In fact, when Dooyeweerd speaks of cultural development or the social process he has the notion of civilization in mind.<sup>71</sup> Sometimes, he openly refers to the "historical development of our Western Civilization."<sup>72</sup> The application of historical norms "enabled civilization to expand," and, of course, in primitive society, "civilization" is still enclosed.<sup>73</sup> But what exactly does Dooyeweerd mean by the term he employs here? He acknowledges that the term has a broader scope than the term culture. It was originally coined in contradistinction to the term 'barbarism' and refers to aspects of psychological distinctions, social behavior, political rights, and cultural achievements. In fact, it covers the entire range of normative law-spheres. Dooyeweerd tries to trace it back to the social aspect, but is uncertain, because his definition of this aspect does not give him a foothold. "In a special sense it is related to the modal aspect of social intercourse."<sup>74</sup> However, he had to admit that "the controlling manner of social shaping of the human mind and human behavior [civilization — RK]...has not itself the modal meaning of fashion, courtesy etc."<sup>75</sup> Therefore, there must be another way to make the connection, but Dooyeweerd does not provide for an answer to this question. Consequently, he cannot give an answer to the question what a civilization is and how it originates in history.

We consider the social aspect (in our new successive order of aspects) as fundamental to the idea of civilization. Here, in the mutual processes of individuation and socialization, the civilization-process starts, integrating the previous aspects in its growth and already grasping an awareness of the content of the cultural aspects. In this way we define civilization — marked by social differentiation — as something that is prior to cultural development. Civilization points to patterns of social behavior we tend to call 'civilized' and which are transmitted in education. There are patterns of human interrelatedness, forms of self-identification that can be seen as the initial stage of civilization. At the same time, civilizations are open to further development

<sup>70</sup> De Graaff, "Towards a New Anthropological Model", 108.

<sup>71</sup> NC II, 197-199. Dooyeweerd prefers the term civilization above culture.

<sup>72</sup> NC II, 227.

<sup>73</sup> NC II, 244, 259.

<sup>74</sup> NC II, 199.

<sup>75</sup> Ibidem.

and are directed towards 'higher' levels to express themselves. But every civilization starts with human beings who have already formed their personal and communal identity in their initial stages. By pointing to the social aspect as the starting point for the civilization-process we soften the rigid distinction between undifferentiated and differentiated societies. Civilization in its initial stage and prior to its cultural disclosure is simply less differentiated.

To conceptualize civilizations in this manner is promising and fruitful for historical, anthropological and sociological study. The subject matter of these disciplines is the study of individuals and communities in the context of a developing civilization. People express themselves as people belonging to a given social environment. The study of sociology is concerned with these issues. The social interrelatedness between people is retained when cultural development takes place. The study of history is concerned with explanations of the development of this *I-consciousness* and *We-consciousness* in a cultural context. Recognizing the fact that the idea of true solidarity and the free personality constitute the higher goals in history, history cannot be mere description but will also imply the assessment of civilizations. The study of man, history, society, politics and religion can be considerably enriched along these lines.