

# The Lasting and Enriching Significance of the Distinction between Concept and Idea

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## Samevatting

*Nadenke oor die betekenis van die onderskeiding tussen begrip en idee het allereers die weg van 'n paar belangrike historiese ontwikkelingslyne gevolg, deur oorsigtelik te let op elemente van die antieke Griekse wysbegeerte, die vroeg-middeleeuse filosofie (die erfenis van 'n negatiewe teologie) en sommige fasette uit die gedagtegang van Kant en Wittgenstein. Vervolgens is geargumenteer dat egte ideë lief is nie as grensbegrippe aangedui behoort te word nie, omdat die eintlike bedoeling daarvan is om rekenskap te gee van kennis wat die grense van begripskennis oorskry, terwyl die uitdrukking 'grensbegrip' mag suggereer dat die belangstelling oor kennis wat binne die grense van begripskennis val, gaan. Hartmann het begryp dat Kant wou onderskei tussen wat kenbaar en onkenbaar is met behulp van die onderskeiding tussen begrip en idee. Hy het verduidelik dat die onkenbare "Ding-an-sich" nie bloot 'n idee is nie, want daar moet 'n denkvorm bestaan waarin ons dit van wat onkenbaar is kan dink – en dit is die Kantiaanse idee. 'n Aantal kondisies of grense van begripsvorming is onderskei – soos byvoorbeeld universaliteit (wet en wetmatigheid), wat individueel is en die tydelike identiteit van entiteite. Teen hierdie agtergrond is geargumenteer dat modale terme beide op 'n begripsmatige en 'n idee-matige wyse gebruik kan word. Ten slotte is 'n verduideliking gegee van die vier mees basiese idee-stellings wat oor die heelal gemaak kan word: (i) Alles is uniek; (ii) alles hang met alles saam; (iii) alles is konstant; en (iv) alles verander.*

## 1. Introduction

Any student of philosophy sooner or later has to take notice of the term “idea” – at least in connection with Plato’s famed *theory of ideas*. The most familiar understanding of this term in the thought of Plato relates to his attempt to safeguard knowledge within the sensory world of becoming (*change*). Plato realized that if everything changes, then there is nothing knowledge can hold on to and consequently he postulated supra-sensory, eternal, static, ontic forms to secure (the possibility of) knowledge. However, these static forms participated in a *conceptual diversity* which actually pointed beyond themselves to an original unity in the *idea of the good*, seated in the divine *Nous (Reason)*, which is sometimes also designated as the divine Work-Master (Form-giver).

Within modern philosophy, owing to the psychologistic turn present in the thought of Locke, Berkeley and Hume, “ideas” got linked to *sensory representations*, while the apiori element in Plato’s epistemology continued to exert an influence, although twisted by the early modern science ideal of humanistic philosophy. Locke, in his *Essay concerning human understanding*, partially binds the contents of thought to simple (elementary) sensory representations (“ideas”). However, on the basis of the elementary sensory impressions according to him, thought can operate freely and actively in order to arrive at *compound representations*. The distinction drawn by Locke between empirical *factual knowledge* and the *necessary relations* between concepts (cf. Locke, Essay IV,1,9), as well as his introduction of *intuition* as basis of *exact* scientific knowledge (as found in the demonstrations of mathematics – cf. Locke, Essay IV,2,1-15) created a split in his psychologistic intentions, for with the aid of the mathematical method of proof mathematics and ethics can provide us with *apriori knowledge* and *infallible certainty*.

The intermediate era explored another fascinating line in the thought of Plato, one in which he focuses on the *negative side* of concept formation, particularly found in his dialogue *Parmenides*. The first antinomy discussed by Plato proceeds from the assumption that the One is *absolutely one* (that is, without any multiplicity). But then it is impossible to say that it is a *whole*, for a whole is that which contains *all* its parts, implying that the One then is *many* (Parmenides, 137 c 4d 3). Likewise the One is without limits (Parmenides, 137 d 7-8) and formless (neither round, nor straight: Parmenides, 137 d 8-e 1). In the further elaboration of this antinomy the narrator shows that the One is nowhere (neither in itself, nor in something else), that it does not move nor prevail in a state of rest, that it is not identical or different from itself, not similar or dissimilar to itself or anything else, and so on (Parmenides, 138 a-142 a). Thought through consistently, in this sense, nothing positive can be said of the absolute One.

Apart from concentrating a conceptual diversity upon a concept-transcending unity, philosophical reflection here meets an exploration of the *negative side* of concept formation by claiming that whatever is seen as *origin* exceeds all positive affirmations. During the middle ages this trend became known as *negative theology* – one cannot positively affirm what God *is*, but only state what God is *not*. Dionysius Pseudo-Areopagita, in his negative theology, explores this inverse path, for it starts with the finite nature of the lowest creature, denying it of God in order to confirm that God, in his transcendence above all things, is hidden in *utter darkness* (*De Mystica Theologia*, 2). What is immediately striking is that amidst the “utter darkness” there are still (unintended) *positive affirmations* found – such as speaking of God’s *transcendence* which is *above* all things. The terms *transcendence* and *above* are both derived from the spatial aspect.

In the author’s dissertation of 1973 the hypothesis guiding the investigation of the distinction between *concept* and *idea* mainly focused on the issue of a (logically objectified) *unity and multiplicity*. It was necessary to formulate a provisional hypothesis to guide an investigation of the different shapes these terms took on in the past. It had to capture what was more or less a shared element in the legacy of understanding concepts – and the common element is found in the bringing together of an analyzable multiplicity, that is in the (synthetical) unity of a logical concept. In terms of this provisional hypothesis every real unity in the multiplicity of analyzable moments is said to be within the reach of true *concept formation*.

What then is the nature of an idea? The author’s suggestion at that stage was the following one:

However, as soon as the conceptual diversity (conceivable multiplicity) is focused on something that transcends this diversity but nonetheless can only be approximated in terms of this diversity, we encounter the nature of an idea concentrating a conceptual diversity (Strauss, 1973:87).

## 2. Are ideas *limiting concepts*?

The distinction between concept and idea was therefore also articulated by employing phrases such as a *distinguishing concept* and a *diversity-concentrating idea*. From the historical investigation it appeared that every idea directs our thought towards its boundaries and in this sense it can be characterized as a (regulative) *limiting concept*. The related problems that surfaced were mainly elucidated with a focus on the relationship between a conceptual diversity and the concentration of the latter referred to in a specific idea of an origin – in such a way that particular emphasis was laid upon the *boundary function* of an idea (Strauss, 1973:87).

Since not only our experience but also our knowledge of reality are mediated by the various modal aspects of reality, the awareness of the *limitations* of conceptual knowledge by itself called for the accompanying awareness of concept-transcending knowledge.

For this purpose Immanuel Kant employed the German word *Grenzbegriff* – with the ultimate aim to safe-guard the domain of human freedom. For this reason, according to Kant, the principles of pure understanding do not allow an employment extending beyond the limits of experience (Kant, 1787-B:352-353). When understanding extends itself beyond its set limits a *transcendental illusion* emerges (Kant, 1787-B:352), and this natural and inevitable illusion is examined in the *Transcendental dialectic*. The term *transcendental* now obtains a new meaning, referring to that which *transcends* the limits of experience.<sup>1</sup> Kant assigns to the ideas of reason only a regulative function – it is only when they are employed in a constitutive sense that the mentioned transcendental illusion surfaces. Reason ideas can only be applied to the concepts of understanding and the latter only to sense impressions (Kant, 1787-B:185, 310). Kant also introduced the concept of a *noumenon* because he had to prevent “sensible intuition (*sinnliche Anschauung*) from being extended to things in themselves, and thus to limit the objective validity of sensible knowledge” (Kant, 1787-B:310).<sup>2</sup> For Kant the concept of a *noumenon* is a *limiting concept* (*Grenzbegriff*) which is meant to restrict the application of sensibility.

Of course, the true intention of the term *Grenzbegriff* is not properly accounted for when it is translated with the phrase *limiting concept*, for this translation may suggest that an idea is limited, while in fact the aim is to account for what transcends concept formation. For this reason it is better to relate an idea in this sense to what transcends conceptual knowledge and the best way to achieve this goal is to distinguish between *conceptual knowledge* and *concept-transcending knowledge*.

<sup>1</sup> “The principles of pure understanding, which we have set out above, allow only of empirical and not of transcendental employment, that is, employment extending beyond the limits of experience” (Kant, 1787-B:352-353). To Kant, *pure reason* is the seat of this transcendental illusion (Kant, 1787-B:355 ff.).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Kant, 1787-B:308: “... it follows that the employment of the categories can never extend further than the objects of experience”. This implies that the doctrine of sensibility is simply “the doctrine of the noumenon in the negative sense” (Kant, 1787-B:307).

<sup>3</sup> “The concept of a noumenon is thus merely a *limiting concept*, the function of which is to curb the pretensions of sensibility; and it is therefore only of negative employment. At the same time it is no arbitrary invention; it is bound up with the limitation of sensibility, though it cannot affirm anything positive beyond the field of sensibility” (Kant, 1787-B:310-311).

In the thought of Kant there is a distinction between what is *thinkable* and *knowable*. The so-called “thing-in-itself” is said to be *unknowable*. Hartmann explains that a thought-form is needed if we want to *think* the unknowable – and this is what Kant had in mind. The ideas of reason (*Grenzbegriffen*) are those forms of thought employed when we think the unknowable. Hartmann states: “because we cannot know the thing-in-itself ..., but can indeed think of it, there must be a form of thought, a kind of concept, in which – albeit as something unknowable – it is thought of. This is the idea” (Hartmann, 1957:311).

From a systematic point of view it is therefore quite remarkable to note that the Kantian distinction between concept and idea coincides with the demarcation of the domains of the (humanistic) science ideal and personality ideal. It is equally remarkable that in his *Tractatus* Wittgenstein is still concerned with the same problem of demarcating science: “Philosophy demarcates the contested domain of the natural sciences and at once the unthinkable is delimited from within what is thinkable” (4.113 & 4.114). Max Black even believes that the demarcation of the world is the root of Wittgenstein’s *mysticism* (Black, 1964:307). The connection with Kant is seen in that Wittgenstein’s delimitation of the world is rooted in his *metaphysical mysticism*, just as Kant’s demarcation of theoretical thought is rooted in his (metaphysical) ideal of the supra-sensory moral autonomy of the human being. A new dimension is provided by Wittgenstein’s distinction between *saying* and *showing* – which runs parallel both with the distinction between concept and idea and that between science ideal (nature) and personality ideal (freedom).

On the boundary of scientific knowledge (of the understanding) and the supra-sensory sphere of the (scientifically) unknowable thing in itself (namely the human person in its intelligible nature), Kant introduces reason (*Vernunft*). The transcendental (reason) ideas of the soul, world and God are never known as sensory appearances. The nature of philosophy in the thought of Wittgenstein has an analogous function compared to the function reason within the thought of Kant. Although demarcating the unthinkable from within, philosophy in the thought of Wittgenstein operates outside the thinkable in nonsensicalness (*Unsinn*). Just like reason in the philosophy of Kant approximates the bridging of the domain of nature and freedom, the task of philosophy in the *Tractatus* touches upon both the thinkable (‘knowable’) and what is unknowable (‘unthinkable’). This opposition is phrased in terms of what is sayable and unsayable, and also in terms of what can be said and what can only show itself. The German word for *showing* is *zeigen* – and the closer we get to the end of the *Tractatus* the more frequently these terms surface. Eventually it becomes clear that these distinctions served to *delimit* the unsayable from the outside, instead of from the inside and this underscores the

problem noted by Max Black: “There is, however, a serious difficulty in trying to say that some specific such and such cannot be said” (Black, 1964:196). The basic problem is that only of that of which nothing can be said is it said (!) that it *shows* itself. But of what nothing can be said one should be silent.

These glimpses on the history of the distinction between concept and idea, notwithstanding the unexpected forms it took on, constantly hinged on the delimitation of conceptual knowledge on the one hand and on what is found beyond the grasp of conceptual knowledge on the other. However, if one wants to account for what lies *beyond* the limits of conceptual knowledge, the expression *limiting concept* actually conveys the opposite of what is intended. What is at stake, as we noted, is what *exceeds* the limits of conceptual knowledge. For that reason it is preferable rather to speak of *concept-transcending knowledge*. But this option raises the question: which boundaries do we have in mind?

### 3. The limits (boundaries) of concept-formation

The view that concepts have boundaries or limits follow from the fact that universality always have been seen as *delimiting* cognitive configurations. Whoever *circumscribes* something is thought of as having *defined* it – and to define something entails that it is grasped in a concept. The first delimitation that we have mentioned above concerns the logical subject-object relation. A concept is a logical unity in the multiplicity of (logically objectified) characteristics. These features are *universal* and for this reason every concept has a universal scope. If someone has a concept of a *horse*, a *dog*, a *car* or a *book* then such a person will be able to identify any particular *horse*, *dog*, *car* or *book* as a *horse*, a *dog*, a *car* or a *book*.

These examples of concepts are made possible by the type laws holding for these different kinds of entities. Whatever is *individual* therefore cannot be grasped in a concept. Within language the universal and what is individual are reflected in the articles “a” and “the” (“this” or “that”). The proposition “*this* horse is *a* horse” captures both what is *universal* and what is *individual*. Yet, a more precise account is required, because within the domain of what is universal one has to distinguish the universality of a law from the universal way in which what is subject to such a law shows its subjectedness in a universal way – through its *law-conformity* or *orderliness*. Within the context of the distinction between the law side and factual side of reality one therefore has to differentiate between the universality of a law and the universal side of factual reality. Concept formation is conditioned by this twofold nature of universality which at the same time *delimits* it. In other words, the different kinds of universality we can discern, indeed serve as the limits of concept formation. At the factual side of reality one also has to acknowledge – as

the correlate of its orderliness – its *individual side*. Because, as noted, what is individual exceeds the grasp of a concept, factual individuality also highlights the limits of concept formation.

Dooyeweerd emphasizes that the temporal identity of any concrete entity – as an individual whole or totality – always *precedes* our theoretical knowledge of it. He writes: “The transcendental Idea of the individual whole precedes the theoretical analysis of its modal functions. It is its presupposition, its cosmological a-priori” (Dooyeweerd, 1997-III:65). In its directedness towards the universal, science appears to have serious difficulties in accounting for knowledge of what is individual. De Vleeschauwer even concludes that “knowledge of what is individual is simply impossible” – something about which philosophy, according to him, had clarity since its inception (see De Vleeschauwer, 1952:213). Although concepts are indeed *blind* to the *unique, contingent* and *individual* it cannot be denied that we do have *knowledge* of what is unique, contingent and individual. This position of De Vleeschauwer is therefore actually typical of the rationalistic restriction of knowledge to *conceptual knowledge*, that is, to knowledge obtained on the basis of universality. The best way to formulate this state of affairs is to say that we know what is individual only in a *concept-transcending* way. In this case we once more have a limit – conceptual knowledge – and a mode of knowledge transcending it, *concept-transcending knowledge*.

Another perspective on boundaries or limits is opened up once we consider the *uniqueness* of the different modal aspects of reality, which is guaranteed by their respective *meaning-nuclei*. Each meaning-nucleus is *primitive* in the sense of being conceptually *indefinable*.

#### 4. A twofold use of modal terms

While the author worked on a contribution to the *Festschrift* for Van Riessen (in 1980) he read the work of Sinnige on infinity in the thought of the pre-Socratics and Plato. Sinnige correctly points out that Parmenides’ description of *being* has been bound up to a high degree with “spatial images” (Sinnige, 1968:38). This means that spatial terms acquired a two-directional use, for he says:

it is fairly clear that Parmenides gives us two distinct descriptions of Being. The first of these is intended to be understood in a metaphysical sense: Being is determined in all respects (Parmenides, B Fr. 8 verses 26-42), the second is formulated in cosmological terms: Being is a spatial whole, kept in balance from within and not bordered upon by another Being (Parmenides, vs. 42-49). The two descriptions overlap to a certain extent, which means that most terms have at the same time a metaphysical and a spatial connotation (Sinnige, 1968:86).



The “metaphysical” description mentioned by Sinnige corresponds to verse 4 where the key-idea is: not subject to change (*atremes*), and it is intended to deny all movement to being. Evidently, here we are also confronted with *static spatial terms* used in a metaphysical idea-context.

The important point to observe is that one can employ terms residing within the aspect of space in order to characterize (or analyse) spatial states of affairs or one can stretch the use of such terms to exceed the boundaries of the spatial aspect. This awareness allows for an alternative significant account of the nature of an idea, in a rudimentary form already present in the author’s Ph.D. from 1973. What is prominent in the school of Parmenides is not an interest in a *geometrical* analysis of the way in which different entities function within the spatial aspect, for this school simply used these *spatial notions* to develop their *metaphysical theory of being*. Nevertheless, in doing this, they actually *discovered* and eventually *used* crucial features of *spatial extension* – for instance its implied whole-part relation, revealing the infinite divisibility of something continuously extended.

If we take a step backwards it is immediately clear that *every* modal aspect allows such a two directional employment of its meaning. The first direction concerns universal functions of entities in the modal aspects – identified as the lawfulness or orderliness of their functioning, or it concerns universal modal relations as such. The second direction is in a certain sense the first one turned upside down, since in this direction terms which have their original and primitive seat in a specific mode, in an approximating and referential sense is used to speak of something *transcending* the limits of the modal aspect concerned.

In 1981, in a key-note presentation to the *Philosophical Association of Southern Africa* (PASA) at the bicentenary of Kant’s *Critique of pure reason* (1781), this insight – namely that the meaning of the different modal aspects not only provides a starting-point for concept-formation but also furnishes us with the possibility of using modal terms in an idea-context – was further explored while considering the various aspectual functions of a chair. The way in which a chair functions within the quantitative aspect of reality is evident in the fact that it is *one* and has *four* legs. Clearly, in this context we have employed the numerical terms “one” and “four” in a conceptual way, referring to realities occurring within the boundaries of the numerical aspect. However, this *conceptual* use of *numerical terms* may be reversed, namely when we say something pertaining to the concrete individuality of this chair while still merely using *numerical terms*. In this case we may say that this chair is *unique*, that it *distinct* from every other chair. This *idea* of its uniqueness is nothing but a referring way in which our numerical intuition of *discreteness* (*being distinct*) is used in a way referring to that which exceeds the



boundaries of the numerical aspect. What is individual about this chair embraces all its modal functions, not merely the numerical aspect. Mentioning the individuality of a chair embodies a concept-transcending employment of our numerical intuition.

Dengerink stumbled upon this insight without being able to articulate it properly, owing to the absence of the distinction between a conceptual and a concept-transcending use of modal terms. With reference to the quantitative aspect and its analogies within other aspects, he says that it also functions (just like all other aspects) up to the heart of reality (“tot in het hart van de werkelijkheid”), explaining why he alluded to the (central) unity of the cosmos [“de (centrale) eenheid van de kosmos”]. He realizes that this central unity is not a mathematical point, although it cannot be divorced from the original meaning of number. The next step, not taken by Dengerink, would have been to distinguish between a conceptual use and an idea-use of modal terms. In his final explanation in this context he comes even closer to this view when he explicitly alludes to the referring nature of an idea:

Also in respect of the numerical we therefore have to avoid a mathematical functionalist reduction, that is to say, of identifying the numerical with what rightfully belongs to the field of investigation of arithmetic. The numerical in turn stretches far deeper than the numerical in its mathematical meaning. As such it is only possible to be understood in a referring idea<sup>4</sup>

It is not the numerical itself that stretches (or functions: ‘fungeert’) “far deeper” for the issue is rather that referring to the (central) depth dimension of reality inevitably uses numerical terms stretched beyond the limits of the meaning of the quantitative aspect. What is approximated in a “referring idea” is not the numerical in its deeper stretching than its mathematical meaning, but the depth dimension of reality referred to by employing the modal quantitative term ‘unity’ in a concept-transcending way.<sup>5</sup>

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4 “Ook ten aanzien van het numerieke moeten we ons derhalve hoeden voor een mathematisch-functionalistische vershraling, d.w.z. voor een identificate van het numerieke met datgene wat rechtens tot het veld van onderzoek van de getallenleer behoort. Het numerieke reikt op zijn beurt veel dieper dan het numerieke in mathematische zin en is als zodanig slechts in een verwijzende idee te vatten” (Dengerink, 1986:240). The anticipatory direction within the numerical aspect opens up a different direction in which the significance of the distinction between concept and idea can be explored, focused on the distinction between the potential and actual infinite (what I prefer to designate as the successive and the at once infinite). See Strauss, 2009, pp.239 ff.

5 Note that in this explanation two spatial terms are also repeatedly used in a concept-transcending way namely the terms “central” and “depth”.

Likewise an idea-use of the spatial aspect (with its inherent meaning of *continuity*, i.e., *connectedness*, implying the original spatial *whole-parts* relation), allows us to form the *idea* of the *typical totality* (*wholeness*) of a chair, which also embraces all aspects of a chair. The modal meaning of *continuation* (*persistence, constancy*) reveals the irreducible nature of the kinematical aspect which can serve as point of entry to our *idea* of the *identity* of a chair. These ideas must be distinguished from the general concept of a *chair* for in the latter conceptual context the spatial dimensions (its size and shape) and its relative motion is at stake. Although the idea of the *identity* of a chair is intimately connected to the idea that it constantly changes, the latter remark pre-supposes the core meaning of the physical aspect because when energy operates change occurs.<sup>6</sup>

### 5. Implications of idea-useages of the meaning of the first four modal aspects

On the basis of an idea-use of the core meaning of the first four aspects of reality it is possible to formulate the four most basic concept-transcending statements that philosophy can articulate about the universe.

- (i) Exploring the meaning of the numerical aspect in a concept-transcending way provides a foundation for the statement that everything is unique.
- (ii) Stretching the meaning of space beyond its boundaries leads to the statement that everything coheres with everything else.
- (iii) An idea use of the kinematic aspect underlies the statement that everything remains identical to itself.
- (iv) Finally, the physical intuition of change may be stretched beyond its boundaries, yielding the claim that everything changes.

These propositions would be contradictory only if they were derived from the *same* modal aspect. They rather entail and complement each other. By the same token they illustrate what it means to say that the modal aspects are gateways (“toegangspoorten” – Van Riessen), for by using these four aspects as points of entry, statements about the entire universe are made possible. Although we had to employ two metaphors (*gateway* and *point of entry*) in our reference to modal aspects, a more precise characterization of aspects is possible once we revert to a concept-transcending use of modal terms derived from the first four modal aspects.

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<sup>6</sup> The impact of the Greek substance concept upon the theological distinction between “God in Himself” and “God as he revealed Himself to us” measured against the alternative theory of an idea-use of modal terms is discussed in more detail in Strauss, 2010.

That everything is *unique* translates into what has become known (since Groen van Prinsterer and Abraham Kuyper) as *the principle of sphere-sovereignty*. Within the theory of modal aspects, this principle implies that each aspect is sovereign within its own sphere. Likewise, the fact that everything coheres with everything else is expressed in the theory of modal aspects through the retrocipatory and anticipatory analogies within each aspect – known as the *sphere-universality* of every aspect. The *constant (enduring)* structure of the modal aspects lies at the foundation of the concrete functions of natural and social entities within the various aspects and account for the possibility to speak of *change*.

If we change our focus slightly while holding on to the conceptual and concept-transcending possibilities of terms derived from them, we can succinctly formulate what the idea of a modal aspect entails – while using terms derived from the first four modal aspects in a concept-transcending way:

Modal aspects are both unique (sphere-sovereign) and mutually cohering (their sphere-universality) while constantly conditioning (making possible) the functions that natural and social entities and processes have within them.

## 6. Rationality presupposes a more-than-rational foundation

It is interesting to note that although Dooyeweerd fully acknowledged the indefinability of the core meaning of the various aspects, merely intuitively accessible to us, he never contemplated the possibility of accounting for this intuitive knowledge in terms of the *concept-idea distinction*.

If we know the (indefinable) core meaning of modal aspects solely in a concept-transcending way, then we have to concede that all concepts ultimately rest upon the basis of *primitive (indefinable) terms*. In general we can therefore state that concept and definition ultimately rest upon the acceptance and employment of *primitive terms*. Therefore respecting what is indefinable is the only way in which a *regressus in infinitum* can be avoided in the *theory of knowledge* (epistemology). The *key terms* involved in a rational (conceptual) understanding themselves are not open to (rational) conceptual definition!

*Rationality* in this sense therefore rests upon a non-rational or a *more than rational* basis. Yet it should not be confused with something *irrational*. One may designate this basis, given in irreducible primitives, as the *restrictive boundary* of rationality. As such, it reflects a positive awareness of what may be called one of the most fundamental perennial issues in philosophy, namely the quest to account for the *coherence of what is irreducible*.

Since the structure of a modal aspect embraces its law side, its factual side, its analogical structural elements pointing backwards and forwards to all the other aspects of reality, its subject-subject relations and subject-object relations, its time order and factual time duration, as well as its qualifying meaning-nucleus, a proper understanding of an aspect ought to incorporate all these elements. Dooyeweerd distinguishes between the constitutive structural elements within a modal aspect (retroicipations) and the regulative ones (anticipations – the latter require the process of meaning-disclosure). It is therefore possible to speak of analogical (or: elementary) basic **concepts**.

What is at stake in these concepts is the combination of indicating a particular aspect, as well as the aspect to which the analogy refers. For example, the ethical meaning of love reveals itself through the coherence between the ethical and all the foundational non-ethical aspects. The concept of an *ethical order* (ethical unity and multiplicity) embodies the *quantitative analogy* within the structure of the moral aspect of love. Also in the case of typical concepts the ethical meaning of love may express itself – for instance when we speak of *love of country* (patriotism), *marital love*, and so on, where each one of the italicized expressions represent *typical concepts*. Typical concepts account for the typical way in which entities function within the boundaries of modal aspects and to this we have added the consideration that whenever modal terms are used to refer to similar instances of phenomena occurring within the boundaries of a specific aspect, they are used in a conceptual manner and when such modal terms are used to refer to whatever exceeds the boundaries of a modal aspect those terms are employed in a concept-transcending way. Compound phrases, such as *retributive balance* (physical analogy within the jural aspect) or *love life* (biotal analogy within the moral aspect), represent *modal concepts* in spite of the fact that, for example, the terms *retribution* and *love* can only be approximated through an immediate, intuitive idea (*insight*).

Does this not lead to confusion, for example when we realize that both the meaning-nucleus of the moral aspect and the central religious commandment are designated with the term “love” which can only be approximated in an idea?

Surely both the central commandment and the core meaning of the ethical aspect can be approximated in ideas of *love*. The idea of the central dimension of reality draws upon diverse modal terms (derived from various modal aspects) which are

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<sup>7</sup> In passing it should be mentioned, without arguing it, that concepts are foundational to ideas in a *constitutive sense*, while ideas are foundational to concepts in a *regulative sense*.

employed in a concept-transcending way. Referring to this dimension as *central*, as the *root-unity* (radical unity) of the meaning-diversity where the commandment of *love* is given, embodies instances of the use of modal terms where they exceed the boundaries of the aspects from which they are derived. The term “central” is a *spatial* term; the term “unity” is a *numerical* term; the term “root” is a *biotical* term and the term “love” is an *ethical* term. The designation Radical, Central and Total (RCT) – as distinct from what is Differentiated, Peripheral and Partial (DPP) – contains three modal terms employed in a concept-transcending way, that is, in a way that exceeds the boundaries of the aspects where they have their original modal seat.

For this reason the distinction between concept and idea indeed provides an account of the distinction between the meaning of the *religious dimension* of reality and the modal meaning-diversity (including the ethical modality). Note that the expression “religious dimension” is also dependent upon a concept-transcending use of modal terms, respectively the certitudinal (“religious”) and the spatial aspect (“dimension”). There is an important difference between the (i) religious dimension and the (ii) dimensions of modal aspects and entities. In respect of (i) we have no option but to employ all the terms used to refer to this dimension in a concept-transcending way, whereas regarding (ii) we can employ both modal and entitary concepts and modal and entitary ideas. The central command of love and the kernel of the ethical represent, regarding option (i), *ontic realities* that can only be approximated in ideas – and in the case of (ii) they also leave open the possibility of modal and typical concepts. In other words, also in the case of *typical concepts* the ethical meaning of love may express itself – for example where we spoke of *love of country* (patriotism), *marital love*, and so on, where each one of the italicized expressions represent *typical concepts*.

Owing to the modal universality of modal aspects – what Clouser calls the “principle of aspectual universality” (Clouser, 2005:254) – no single *typical function* within the ethical aspect can ever exhaust the modal meaning of moral love – all of them merely *specify* the meaning of this aspect (without ever being able to *individualize* it). From the perspective of the norm side of the ethical aspect these *typical functions* (and their correlated typical concepts or type concepts) are indeed *specifications* of the universal meaning of love according to the *normative* structural principles of the different *kinds* of ways in which distinct societal relationships (with their type laws – differentiated into collective, communal and coordinated types of social intercourse) function within the ethical aspect. The same applies to all the other modal aspects.

Many well-known expressions employed in referring to the religious dimension of reality are actually modal terms used in a concept-transcending manner.

Approached from the angle of the *fiduciary* aspect we meet the expression *religious* dimension, from the ethical or moral aspect we speak of the *love* command, approximated from the economic aspect we speak of *stewardship*, from the biotic aspect we refer to the *root*-dimension of reality (or that dimension which touches the *radix* of being human), from the perspective of the spatial aspect we designate it as the *central* (religious) dimension (or: just refer to it as the *depth*-dimension), from the lingual and spatial aspects we approximate it by referring to the *meaning-totality* of reality, and so on. These are all instances of modal terms or perspectives employed in concept-transcending ways (i.e. they are all instances of idea-knowledge – to be distinguished from the original modal seat of these terms where they can also serve instances of conceptual knowledge).

## 7. Concluding remark

Without an acknowledgement of the distinction between concept and idea the true meaning of rationality will escape us, particularly regarding the fact that the crux of rationality concerns concepts and that the key feature of concepts in this context is given in the fact that we can ultimately only *know* something through the employment of *primitive* terms exceeding the boundaries of conceptual knowledge. This may be called the *expansive boundary* of rationality.

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