# The *Central Commandment of Love* in discussion

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## Abstract

*Some of the key issues that surfaced in a recent discussion on* Thinknet *regarding the meaning of the central commandment of love and its relation to various aspects of reality, in particular the social and ethical modal functions, will be analyzed in this article. In its central and direction-giving meaning the central commandment of love comes to expression in a rich diversity of modal and typical norms and principles. Since the terms used to describe the central commandment of love are located within various modal aspects an account is required of the multiple ways in which they can be employed. By distinguishing between conceptual knowledge and concept-transcending knowledge it is possible to understand why a key term such as "love" may refer to the core meaning of the ethical or moral aspect and also be used to point at realities exceeding the boundaries of this aspect. Once this is understood it is no longer possible to deny the differentiated, peripheral and partial meaning of the social and the moral aspects of reality in relation to the central commandment of love. An analysis of the coherence between the social aspect and those aspects foundational to it constitutes a part of the task of reflecting on the elementary or ana-logical basic concepts of sociology as an academic discipline – embedded in a non-reductionist ontology and including a brief account of the inter-modal coherence between the social and moral aspects of reality.*

## Opsomming

*Hierdie artikel beoog om sommige sleutel-kwessies van 'n bespreking op* Thinknet *oor die sentrale liefdegebod en die verhouding daarvan tot verskillende werklikheidsaspekte, in die besonder die sosiale en etiese modale funksies, te ontleed. Die sentrale en rigting-gewende betekenis van die liefdegebod word in 'n ryke verskeidenheid modale en tipiese beginsels vergestalt. Aangesien die terme waarmee die sentrale liefdegebod beskryf word teruggevoer kan word na verskeie modale aspekte, is dit nodig om rekenskap te gee van die verskillende wyses waarop dergelike terme gebruik kan word. Deur tussen begripskennis en begripstransenderende kennis te onderskei, is dit moontlik om te verstaan waarom 'n sleutelterm soos "liefde" na die kern-sin van die etiese of morele aspek kan verwys en bykomend ook gebruik kan word om na gegewens te verwys wat die grense van hierdie aspek te bowe gaan. Wanneer dít verstaan word is dit nie langer moontlik om te ontken dat die sosiale en etiese aspekte in verhouding tot die sentrale liefdegebod 'n gedifferensieerde, periferale en parsiële betekenis besit nie. 'n Ontleding van die samehang tussen die sosiale aspek en daardie aspekte wat funderend daarvoor is, konstitueer 'n deel van die taak om na te dink oor die elementêre of analogiese grondbegrippe van die sosiologie as wetenskaplike dissipline – ingebed in 'n nie-reduksionistiese ontologie waarby 'n oorsigtelike verantwoording van die intermodale samehang tussen die sosiale en etiese aspekte van die werklikheid ingesluit is.*

## 1. Background

Recently a discussion regarding the central commandment of love occurred on *Thinknet*, the web-site initially erected in response to the appearance of Roy Clouser's work, *The Myth of Religious Neutrality* (2005). *Thinknet* serves as a platform for the discussion of any facet of the tradition of reformational philosophy. The recent discussion which I have in mind reflected upon the relationship between the central commandment of love and the various aspects and entity structures discernible in our experience of the world, including questions about the core meanings of aspects and the way in which one should designate them. What I intend to analyze in this article are some of the suggestions made by various *conversation partners*, with a view to the systematic issues flowing from these suggestions and questions.

## 2. Designating the core meaning of the social aspect

In Dutch and Afrikaans a neat way to designate the core meaning of the social aspect is found – given in the phrase "omgang en verkeer". The problem is that it does not have a suitable translational equivalent in the English language. For example, speaking of "inter-action" appears to represent mere analogies from the spatial and physical aspects. The term "inter" is related to spatial *position* and the term "action" is derived from (physical) energy operation. For this reason these terms need to be qualified as "*social* interaction", showing that it cannot be used in an unqualified way to capture the core meaning of the social aspect. Occasionally Dooyeweerd therefore also speaks of "*social* intercourse". An alternative option is to follow the German sociologist, Georg Simmel, who employed the German term "Vergesellschaftung". One way to translate it into English is to speak of "sociation" – which is of course different from "association"!

Keep in mind that the social aspect embraces all the different kinds of *sociations* found in a differentiated society. In Dutch and Afrikaans the various ways in which human beings can interact socially are indicated by distinguishing between "verband", "gemeenschap" and "maatschap". After some experimentation it appeared to be appropriate to render these terms in English as "collective", "communal" and "coordinational" (see Strauss, 2006:248 ff.) These distinctions are *modal-total* characterizations (compound or complex basic concepts of sociology), which do not say anything specific about those societal entities merely functioning *within* the social aspect (regarding their respective type-laws with their typical foundational and qualifying functions).

At this point a conversation partner suggested that the term "love" should be employed to designate the core meaning of the social aspect. But since the term "love" is usually associated with the ethical or moral aspect of reality, the issue appears to become more complicated. A part of this complication is found when the core meaning of the ethical is seen as *love in temporal (social) relationships*. When these suggestions are related to the fact that the term "love" is also employed in the formulation of the central commandment of love, it is clear that what is required is an account of the ambiguity present in these alternative usages of the word *love*. Is it meaningful to use the same term *love* to refer to the central

commandment of love and to the core meaning of the social or ethical aspects of reality?

## 3. Understanding the social and the moral

One conversation partner holds: "The social concerns human relationships and institutions and is an obvious part of human life properly (or improperly) studied by sociology and its central norm seems to be neighbourly love or social love, the second great commandment, differentiated into a range of located relationships of love – parent, husband, citizen etc." To this he adds: "The social concerns human relationships and institutions."

From a systematic perspective it must be clear that "human relationships and institutions" in principle function in *all* modal aspects. Therefore one should be more specific about the way in which they are functioning within the *social* aspect. As indicated above there are three ways in which humans and societal entities function within the social aspect, namely collectively, communally and coordinationally.

Next it is stated that "its [the social] central norm seems to be neighbourly love or social love, the second great commandment". Let us consider the possible meanings of the expression "social love". Although it may be seen as an anticipation from the social aspect to the moral aspect, it does not capture the core meaning of the social aspect – it is clearly distinct from "sociation" or "social intercourse" ("omgang en verkeer"). Moreover, the modal meaning of the social and moral aspects cannot be equated with the central meaning of the central commandment of love. Dooyeweerd holds that the core meaning of the moral sphere is found in *love* (see Dooyeweerd, 1997-III:274). The same view is found in the second volume of his *New Critique* where Dooyeweerd states: "On the other hand, every serious attempt at an analysis of the modal meaning-structure of the moral relation leads us back to love as its irreducible kernel" (Dooyeweerd, 1997-II:152).

By virtue of the social retrocipation within the moral aspect of love we may distinguish between coordinational, communal and collective *moral* relationships. Viewed from a broader perspective an analysis of the modal aspects is confronted with "undeniable states of affairs" which should be acknowledged in spite of the

various ways in which we may (philosophically) account for them. In the present context the question is: how do we account for the different usages of the term "love"? First of all it may designate the core meaning of the ethical. Then it may occur in multiple analogical usages and it may also express the way in which concrete societal entities function within the moral aspect – for example when we speak of marital love, love for a country, love for fellow believers unified within a local congregation, and so on. Finally the term *love* plays a key role in the central commandment of love.

## 4. Numerous uses of modal terms

Let us first consider another term, the term "life". Plants, animals and human beings are said to be "alive" or "living". Everyone, on the basis of our everyday experience, *knows* what is meant when the term "life" is employed in this way. It is equally undeniable that the *biotic term* "life" is derived from the meaning of the *biotic aspect* and that expressions such as *social life*, *economic life*, *legal life* and *moral life* all capture *biotic analogies*. But in what sense is the term *life* used when we say "God is life"? Does this mean that we have to acknowledge that God is dependent upon diverse *nutrients* and displays *metabolism*? Certainly not! Furthermore, since the *biotic descent* of the term *life* cannot be denied, is it possible to argue that its application to God reveals a *kind of knowledge* differing fundamentally from its use when it is referring to what we can indentify as *living* entities, such as when the discipline of biology produces a more refined scientific exploration of its meaning?

Similar questions may be asked in respect of expressions such as *God is love*, *God is just*, *God is* (I am who I am), *God is omnipresent*, *God is almighty*, and so on. In instances like these the challenge is to identify the modal seat of the aspects from which these terms are derived. Each one of these expressions contains a key term derived from a specific modal aspect. The term *love* derives from the moral aspect, the term "just" from the jural aspect, the phrase "I am who I am" (Exod. 3:14) from the kinematic aspect (echoing the meaning of uniform flow/persistence/constancy), the composite term "omni-present" partially from the spatial aspect (omni = *everywhere*), and the term *almighty* from the cultural-historical aspect where power (might) has its modal seat. ["I am who I am" reflects the idea of *endurance*, *sameness over time*, *identity*.]

The undeniable state of affairs here is first of all that everything, in its own unique way, functions within the various aspects of reality and that secondly this functioning is captured by employing terms reflecting the meaning of the various aspects in which things are functioning. But in addition to this the same terms may also be employed to point at realities exceeding the boundaries of the aspects in which they are located. Consequently such terms are capable of being used in a *twofold* way:

(i)   They may be used conceptually, in which case they refer to phenomena manifesting themselves *within the boundaries* of a specific aspect, and

(ii)  They may be employed in a way transcending the confines of these modal aspects. (The above-mentioned biblical expressions fall within this second category.)

In order to account for these two kinds of knowledge in a philosophical way my proposal is to call the kind of knowledge we have of phenomena appearing within the boundaries of any specific aspect *conceptual* and the kind of knowledge obtained by employing terms derived from a specific modal aspect, in order to refer to realities exceeding the confines of such an aspect, as *concept-transcending knowledge*.

At this point one of the conversation partners asked: "Am I allowed to think that all concepts have implications beyond themselves?"

One element of a concept is indeed that it *delimits* what is conceived and this obviously implies that cognitive acts have to contemplate what falls within these boundaries and what not. If a computer key-board is identified it has to be distinguished from the other things "beyond" itself, such as the computer screen to which it is attached, the desk upon which both the key-board and screen find themselves, and so on. But here we are merely distinguishing *distinct concepts*. Therefore the remark does not really embark on what is entailed in the distinction between *conceptual knowledge* and *concept-transcending knowledge*.[1]

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1   This distinction between conceptual knowledge and concept-transcending knowledge (idea-knowledge) has been employed by Troost in his recent last two books (see Troost, 2004:96, 97, 285, 304 and Troost, 2012:280-282).

## 5. The central commandment of love

Clearly, when the central commandment is formulated, the word "love" cannot be employed merely in a modal ethical sense. This follows from the fact that the central commandment of love is indeed *radical* (touching the *root* of being human), *central* and *total* (encompassing all issues from the heart and all walks of life). Within the differentiated relationships of human societal life there are more than merely *relationships of love* – as a conversation partner fails to appreciate by remarking that the central commandment of love is "differentiated into a range of located relationships of love – parent, husband, citizen etcetera". The moral aspect is just *one* modal aspect, and the proliferation of ways in which humans and societal entities function within all the aspects, to repeat it once more, should be classified as *coordinational*, *communal* and *collective* relationships (see Strauss, 2006, Chapter 4).

Terms from various aspects may be used in a concept-transcending way to designate the *central commandment of love*. The term "central" is derived from *space* or spatial figures – like a circle with its centre. The term "commandment" is derived from the jural aspect and the term "love" from the moral aspect. The equally well-known expression "religious root" uses the biotic term "root" and the certitudinal term "religious" in a concept-transcending way. Noticing this, presupposes a prior distinct understanding of the core meaning of modal analogies (retro- and anticipations) present within any aspect.

Interestingly, the lack of realization that modal terms can be used both in a conceptual way and in a concept-transcending manner, creates unnecessary problems. One conversation partner refers to the central commandment of love and declares that the "problem is the identification of the ethical with the kernel of love". However, Dooyeweerd does not identify the "ethical" with *love* for he merely holds that the moral or ethical aspect (encompassing its norm-side, factual side, subject-object relations and subject-subject relations), has love as its *meaning-kernel* which qualifies all other structural elements within this aspect (see Dooyeweerd, 1997-II:75). In other words, Dooyeweerd does not identify a *modal aspect* with its *meaning-kernel*.

This conversation partner continues: "I understand that Dooyeweerd in the quotation above is talking about all aspects and not just the ethical. It means that economic love, love of body, and the whole creation is to be seen in relation to love of God and God's love of the creation. But why then focus down on love as the kernel of the ethical?" This remark shows a lack of understanding of the fact that modal terms can be used in a conceptual and a concept-transcending way. The central commandment of love lies at the root of all its branches, which may be designated as *differentiated*, *partial* and *peripheral* in diverse modal norms and typical principles. For example, the way in which humans have to love God within the normative aspects is specified in modal and typical ways. Examples of modal normativity are found when someone thinks in a logically sound manner, socializes politely, or uses resources frugally. Likewise, when a state or a business firm proceed in a frugal manner or in a just way, we encounter typically normed societal entities. In other words, the central meaning of love does not first of all come to expression in something like "*economic love*" (which is merely an economic anticipation to the moral aspect), but in obeying modal and typical economic principles (and only one of the multiple modal norms is based on the ethical anticipation within the economic aspect).

## 6. Once more the core meaning of the social and ethical aspects of reality

While expressing his own preference for the central meaning of love, our conversation partner now asks: "But why then focus down on love as the kernel of the ethical?"

The mere fact that the ethical or moral term "love" is employed in a concept-transcending manner in designating an element of the central commandment of love, does not justify the conclusion that then "love" has lost its "ontic right" to maintain its existence in a *modal ethical sense* – as the meaning-nucleus of the moral aspect. Suppose we would do the same with the numerical and spatial terms as they are integrated in a concept-transcending way into the designation of the *central* religious *unity* of the central commandment of love. Would we then have to transpose these numerical and spatial terms also to the central religious dimension of creation and look for new designations of the core modal meaning of number and space? Avoiding excesses (the core

meaning of the economic aspect) may also be used in a concept-transcending way – just consider employing the idea (in its concept-transcending sense) of *stewardship*.

This conversation partner proceeds: "The subject matter of the ethical seems to me to be what it is normally understood as meaning – namely the normative choices made by human actors in a range of life situations."

Here our conversation partner subscribes to what might be called a "basket" understanding of *normativity*, locating all its forms within the *ethical*. Norms or principles are supposed to guide human conduct and therefore they immediately call forth the idea of norm-conformity and antinormativity (obedience and disobedience). Yet, this distinction, in turn, presupposes the (human) capacity to *identify* and *distinguish* the possible avenues of action and to freely choose between the available options. There are not many choices at any specific moment – just one choice among multiple options. Therefore a freedom of choice presupposes an accountable agent to which the choice made and its consequences can be attributed. Unfortunately the traditional awareness of what ought to be done was placed within the category of the *ethos of life* (the *ethical*), also designated as the domain of *morality* or what is considered to be *moral*. However, identifying all forms of normativity with the moral is rejected by Habermas, who, for instance, distinguishes between the "ethical" ("moral") aspects and the juridical aspect (Habermas, 1998:207). Moreover, he states that the "ought" remains non-specific as long as the relevant problem is not determined and the *aspect within which it must be solved* has not been identified (Habermas, 1998:197). From this it is clear that we have to distinguish between *moral normativity* and *a-moral* or *non-moral normativity* – which of course is different from the *immoral*. Acknowledging that the domain of normativity encompasses more than *moral* normativity liberates us from the traditional "basket" understanding of normativity according to which all instances of norm-guided behaviour must be located within the category of the "ethical" or "morality". This view simply denies other normative aspects their distinct ontic normativity.

For example, distinguishing what is *logically* norm-conformative from what is antinormative (*illogical*), requires the existence of logical principles. Such logical principles cannot be identified with

ethical normativity. In fact, the nature of moral normativity, expressing itself in the contrary moral-immoral, analogically reflects the logical-analytical contrary logical-illogical. Similarly, avoiding excesses and acting in frugal ways exemplifies the normativity underlying the distinction between proper and improper economic activities and also this normative domain does not coincide with the moral.

At this point our conversation partner expresses his preference to designate the core meaning of the ethical as "integrated choice". However, this suggestion cannot withstand critical scrutiny. The term "integration" has its original modal seat in the *biotic* aspect where every living entity displays its biotic growth through an increasing differentiation and *integration* of its vital activities. Without this *integration* living entities will *disintegrate* and die. Furthermore, the term "choice" (in the sense of *normed choice*) derives its meaning from the logical mode where the principles of identity and non-contradiction underlie our most basic normed choices between (alternative) norm-conforming and (alternative) antinormative options.[2]

## 7. The pluriformity of love

The "pluriformity" of love to which our conversation partner refers should be understood in a twofold way:

(a)  Owing to the social retrocipation within the ethical aspect we first have to discern, as indicated earlier, coordinational, communal and collective (moral) relationships.

(b)  Owing to the typical way in which societal entities function within the moral aspect they *specify* the underlying universal modal meaning of the moral aspect in a *typonomic* way, resulting in the specified (certitudinally qualified) love of fellow church members, the specified (jurally qualified) love of fellow

2  In passing it should be noted that our conversation partner adheres to the mistaken view that each normative aspect – such as the logical, social, jural or moral aspects – has just *one norm*. In reality each normative modal aspect, on its law-side, displays multiple modal norms by reflecting the intermodal coherence between the normative aspect under consideration and all the other modal aspects of reality.

citizens (their "patriotism"), the specified marital (ethically qualified) love, and so on.

With reference to Luke 6:45 Poythress acknowledges the centrality of the human heart and designates the "first and greatest commandment" as the "heart-beat of all the commandments". He rejects an understanding of *love* as "merely a happy feeling of friendliness or good will" and relates it to the claim of "situation ethics" that *love* replaces all the commandments.

> But that is not a Biblical conception of loving God. Love does not replace Commandments. Love gives us the right motive so that we genuinely can obey the Commandments (Poythress, 2000 – see also Troost, 1958:27-63).

This indeed highlights a proper understanding of the relationship between the *root* of human life and its various *branches*. Yet it does not mean that in its *central sense* there are no nuances. Levinas compares Cain, God and Abel: "To love Cain demands more loving than is needed for loving God, and it is not in the place of loving God. Nor in the place of loving Abel" (as explained by Havea, 2003:111).

## 8. Towards a Christian sociology

Although still connected to the issues discussed thus far, a conversation partner also embarked on the way in which a Christian sociology should be understood. Within this broader context the conversation partner alleges that the term *love* is absent in my work on reintegrating social theory (Strauss, 2006). Apart from the fact that it is not absent (see below), this suggestion displays a mistaken expectation from the modest place which an analysis of the elementary basic concepts of a discipline such as sociology occupies. While intimately cohering with the other dimensions of sociological theorizing, the overall framework of the transcendental-empirical method guides theoretical investigation towards those ontic realities making possible (in a *transcendental* sense) what we can experience in human society and also making possible how we can reflect on what we experience (empirically).

The transcendental-empirical method in principle aims at avoiding a priori constructions and for this reason it does not attempt to find "the possible kernel of the social first" as a conversation partner

alleges. Rather, we have to acknowledge that we experience the various modal aspects as "our own". In the sense of *making possible* our experience of concrete entities, relationships and societal realities, the dimension of modal aspects is *transcendental*. Non-scientific experience is fully embedded within the diversity of modal aspects. Once our theoretical reflection on the modal diversity commences, we have to account for the uniqueness of and coherence between different aspects. Identifying the uniqueness of a normative aspect may benefit from looking at the well-known typical normative *contraries* found within all of them. For example, the contrary logical-illogical is found within the logical-analytical aspect. Within all the post-logical aspects this basic logical contrary is analogically reflected. Just contemplate contraries like frugal and wasteful, legal and illegal, moral and immoral (love and hate), and of course the contrary polite-impolite. It is only within the social aspect that we can meaningfully "position" the last-mentioned contrary, polite-impolite.

To this we should add that once an investigation of the various modal aspects commences, we constantly have to keep two things in mind:

(a) The word used to designate whatever meaning-nucleus we have in mind always indicates a reality exceeding the confines of concept-formation. Such expressions are founded in our immediate, cognizing intuition and their formulation manifests instances of concept-transcending indications;  and

(b) the meaning of any aspect only comes to expression in its coherence with all the other aspects.

For this reason my work on the *Reintegration of Social Theory* (2006) does not commence with an attempt to find the "kernel of the social". In Chapter 1 it starts with an argument about *modal abstraction* as the distinctive feature of scholarly thinking. Then it proceeds (Chapter 2) with the debate about the nature of sociology as a discipline, and only after that it enters into a discussion of the issue of elementary basic concepts within sociology (Chapter 3).

Yet according to a conversation partner Chapter 3 is merely "a long reflection on the relationship of average sociological theorists to these analogical relationships, but no-where in this chapter is to be found their direct reflection of the character of social relationships and the social".

An implication of the earlier remark that the meaning of any aspect only comes to expression in its *coherence* with all the other aspects, is that the entire idea of elementary basic concepts aims at accounting for the foundational and indispensable building blocks constitutive for the structure of the social aspect and therefore also for the vocabulary of every theoretical design. Due to the fact that these conceptual building blocks are indispensable, every systematic foundational design of any discipline, including sociology, is in need of a clarification of its elementary (analogical) basic concepts, as well as its compound (complex) basic concepts and its typical concepts. One reason for this clarification is that the same terms are used by other disciplines, albeit in a different *sense*.

It should be noted that a discussion of *social relationships* is found in Chapter 4 of *Reintegrating Social Theory* (where the compound concepts are accounted for, including the distinction between coordinational, communal and collective relationships). From the perspective of the elementary basic concepts the term *relationship* represents a *spatial analogy* within the social aspect. Therefore one finds an explicit discussion of social relationships already within the context of an analysis of the elementary basic concepts, under the heading: "Factual social unity and multiplicity: diverse social relationships" (see Strauss, 2006:141 ff.). But since a meaningful classification of social intercourse within human society exceeds the domain of analogical concepts, the provisional contribution made by the spatial analogy within the structure of the social aspect ought to be integrated with an analysis of the compound and typical concepts of sociology. Within the context of Chapter 3 of *Reintegrating Social Theory* social relationships are directly discussed, for example when it is stated: "We often referred to the modal aspects as modes of being in which the various entities, processes and societal relationships concretely function. The nature of modal abstraction requires that some aspect should be lifted out whenever a special scientist wants to study reality from the angle of approach of a particular mode of existence. Sociology as a special science finds its gateway in the social aspect of reality. Through this gateway the sociologist can look at all possible entities, processes and societal relationships in reality – thus presupposing the difference between modal functions and entities" (Strauss, 2006:126-127).

According to this conversation partner the task of a "christian understanding of the social aspect" is "more contentfully Christian than this kind of analogically driven analysis allows". This objection touches the core of our view of Christian scholarship. Therefore we have to explain why an analysis of the elementary basic concepts of sociology is indeed "contentfully Christian".

Right at the beginning of *Reintegrating Social Theory* (see pages 4 and 5) it is explicitly acknowledged that an ultimate (religious) commitment is inevitable in scholarship. Here multiple levels within our theorizing are distinguished:

> The supra-theoretical ultimate commitment which directs the systematic theoretical perspective mentioned in the previous point indeed proceeds from the central conviction that the experiential world is enclosed in and determined by the God-ordained order-diversity manifesting itself within all dimensions of creation in the mutually related correlation of law/norm and whatever is factually subjected to it (Strauss, 2006:4-5).

The objection that the analysis in Chapter 3 of *Reintegrating Social Theory* is *entirely dominated by analogical inferences and therefore lacks what is contentfully Christian* is not sound. Within the domain of scholarship one of the primary requirements, in order to be Christian, is to abstain from *deifying* anything or *any aspect* within creation. Acknowledging the sphere sovereignty of the various aspects of creation *as* aspects of creation fully brings to expression a *Christian content* because in principle only in Christ are we liberated from the sinful inclination of the human heart to withdraw from God something within creation. Just consider how Dooyeweerd articulated this basic Christian attitude in his magnum opus.

> By belonging to Christ the Christian is in a daily fight, also in philosophical thought, against the 'flesh', in its Biblical sense, against our apostate ego, which absolutizes the temporal and withdraws it from God (Dooyeweerd, 1997-I:506).

In the *Mededelingen* of June 1950 Dooyeweerd rejects every conception of "a scriptural philosophy that looks for support in specific Bible texts for intrinsically philosophical and in general scholarly problems and theories. It actually merely boils down to

'positing a few privileged issues' about which the Bible would give explicit statements, while for the rest, where such special texts are not found, one at leisure can continue to fit into a mode of thinking driven by intrinsically un-biblical motives" (Dooyeweerd, 1950:3-4).

Dooyeweerd introduces the view that a basic motive, which transcends theoretical thought, directs the (fallible) hypothesis ((three-fold transcendental idea regarding the unity-in-the-diversity of creation, regarding the radical (transcendent) unity and fullness of meaning (given in Christ), and regarding the Origin of the universe)). Owing to its Christian root-motivation the Christian transcendental ground-idea is articulated in distinguishing the various dimensions of creation (time, modal aspects, entity structures, and the central religious dimension), in distinguishing sphere-sovereign modal aspects and (natural and social) entities, and in distinguishing between law side/norm side and factual side. Therefore, an analysis of distortive understandings of modal aspects and/or their analogical structural moments clearly embodies a *Christian content*. It is only when we want to uphold a quasi *biblicistic perspective* that a Christian structural analysis of reality is seen as lacking in Christian content.

This issue touches the root of the ideal of Christian scholarship and equally concerns the possibility of a Christian mathematics, physics, biology, logic etc. – where it will not be possible to find "directly applicable" bible texts.

Our conversation partner then claims that the entire chapter 3 (of 125 pages) does not "mention *love* (except as a single instance in a long quotation from Sorokin) nor does it mention patience, forgiveness, faithfulness, (only once in a summary way) social equality, humility or a range of other important Christian norms. How can these central Christian norms be so absent from Christian sociological formation"?

## 9.  What is constitutive and regulative within the social aspect

We noted earlier that every normative modal aspect, on its law-side, displays multiple modal norms by reflecting the intermodal coherence between the normative aspect under consideration and all the other modal aspects of reality. The just mentioned objection

concerns the deepened or disclosed analogical structural moments within the social aspect. Dooyeweerd distinguishes between the *constitutive* structural elements of an aspect (its retrociparory analogies) and the *regulative* structural elements (its anticipatory analogies). Since the analysis in *Reintegrating Social Theory* did not enter into a discussion of the deepened, anticipatory structure of the social aspect, it follows that the restriction to basic *concepts* of sociology does not include an analysis of the *regulative social ideas* (the anticipations to post-social aspects), as well (see Strauss, 2006:131). Should a section on the *regulatively deepened structure* of the social aspect have been added, all the terms mentioned by our conversation partner would have been involved.

Nonetheless the term *love* is not absent in *Reintegrating Social Theory*. In an analysis of a social event I wrote:

> The costs involved in the dinner – covered by the employer – represent the economic facet of the event. It includes the artistic decoration with flowers – the aesthetic aspect. The furniture, cutlery and the like belongs to the hotel owner – it is his property. Taking along a spoon as a souvenir is illegal – evincing the jural aspect of the event. Though taste may vary, certain people are extremely fond of attending similar social events – they just *love* it. In addition to mentioning the ethical aspect (of moral love) of the occasion, it should be noted that the employer trusts and believes that inviting and treating his employees in this special way would enhance their working relationship and indirectly help his business to be more profitable (Strauss, 2006:37).

The issue of Christian norms once again raises the problems of biblicism. Acknowledging *ontic normativity* liberates us from a biblicistic stance. In the Old and the New Testament we find situations and events reflecting both norm-conformative and antinormative instances, made possible by and founded in the creational order. When Christians give a positive shape (i.e., in norm-conformative ways) to creational principles, we may speak of *Christian norms* of Christian principles (whether or not they are recorded in the Bible). The mere distinction between what is norm-conformative and what is antinormative already presupposes the depth perspective of fall (evil/sin) and redemption.

When our conversation partner therefore utters his concern that

"the importance of human sin and fallenness, and of salvation in shaping the social" merely surfaced briefly in connection with "power relationships" it is clear that the entire biblical foundation of what is done in *Reintegrating Social Theory* has been missed. At this point my concern is that our conversation partner appears to super-impose pre-conceived misunderstandings upon *Reintegrating Social Theory*. Just compare his claim ["there is no strategic presentation in Danie's sociological formation of the importance of human sin and fallenness, and of salvation in shaping the social"] with what is stated in the Chapter 3 of *Reintegrating Social Theory* to which he refers:

> Dooyeweerd opposes both the objectivist perspective on meaning to be found in the *Logical Investigations* of Husserl (1900-1901) and the subjectivist analysis of meaning in the 'logology' of Paul Hofmann (1929). His own view proceeds from acknowledging the non-self-sufficiency of all created reality – seen in the createdness of reality from, through and to the Origin of all meaning. In a radical way the Bible stresses that everything is created by Christ and for Him, that He is before all things and that in Him all things hang together (Col. 1:16-17). The coherence of everything with everything else in reality points therefore towards Christ as the fullness of meaning of creation (Strauss, 2006:129).

Combine this with the second paragraph of the *Preface* of *Reintegrating Social Theory*, which states:

> It is indeed significant that leading sociologists throughout the 19th and 20th century did not realize that they over-emphasized one (or a selected few) elementary basic concepts and in doing that not only failed to appreciate the constitutive role of other basic concepts but also distorted the meaning of the social dimension of reality itself. The guiding supposition of the analysis of elementary basic concepts, namely that the meaning of the social aspect only comes to expression in its coherence with all the other aspects of reality, found in the diverging trends and sociological schools of thought more than enough examples to confirm its claim (Strauss, 2006:v).

Finally, our interlocutor does not consider what both Dooyeweerd and myself stated above in connection with the religious attitude of Christian scholarship. To repeat succinctly: In all the instances where I accounted for the nature of modal and typical norms, the assumption is that sin caused disobedience to them (it led to antinormative actions), and that in Christ we are in principle liberated to (individual and collective) norm-conformative actions.

Without a proper understanding of elementary basic concepts our conversation partner nonetheless continues: "sometimes [it] leads to unreliable concepts and a failure to critique sociological traditions like functionalism and systems theory as deeply as they should be"; and: "the analogical concepts actually seem poor theoretical concepts in many of the areas of sociology. The spatial analogy for looking at social distance and hierarchy does not help us to understand what these phenomena are in human relationships."

First of all, since the theoretical structure of the discipline of sociology encompasses much more than merely an analysis of its elementary basic concepts, it is a misguided expectation to think that functionalism and systems theory could exhaustively be challenged merely in terms of an analysis of the elementary basic concepts of sociology. Yet an analysis on this level does help to understand which are the distortions present in these theories owing to a *reductionist* understanding of the elementary basic concepts they are employing. The analysis of the system theory of Parsons found in *Reintegrating Social Theory* in fact shows the power of this kind of analysis (see Strauss, 2006:189-195). What is here designated as the "modal skeleton" of a (sociological) theory is everything but "unreliable". The challenge, for example, is to show what is lacking in the analysis of the reductionist LAIG scheme of Parsons?[3] No indication is given of what a "poor concept" is or what is meant by the statement that in certain "areas of sociology" the elementary basic concepts are "poor".

Since the elementary basic concepts of sociology are based upon the constitutive structural elements of the social aspect, the only theoretical issue can be whether or not each one of them is indeed

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3    L = latency; A = adaptation; I = integration; and G = goal-attainment.

indispensable. In *Reintegrating Social Theory* I argue that the following elementary basic concepts cannot be avoided by any trend in sociology: *social order*, *social stratification*, *social constancy* and *dynamics*, *social differentiation* and *integration*, *social sensitivity*, *solidarity* and *consciousness*, *social consensus* and *conflict*, *social power* and *control*, and *social symbolism*, *meaning* and *interpretation*. The conjecture is that these elementary basic concepts must be distinguished from true metaphors and that the (implicit or explicit) use thereof lies at the basis of the widely diverging multiplicity of theoretical designs in modern sociology. An explicit and articulated account of these elementary basic concepts may enable us to develop an integral perspective on sociology as a discipline, while such an analysis in addition will demonstrate the encyclopedic coherence of sociology with all the non-sociological disciplines.

With no criterion specified as to what a "poor concept" is the only other option is to demonstrate which of these basic concepts are dispensable. Perhaps the following remark regarding the spatial analogy within the structure of the social aspect may be an example of a "poor concept". Our conversation partner says: "The spatial analogy for looking at social distance and hierarchy does not help us to understand what these phenomena are in human relationships." But let us consider this analogy with a view to the difference between next-to-each-other relationships and relationships of super- and subordination (with an inherent authority structure). In *Reintegrating Social Theory* this issue is discussed under the heading: *Social super- and subordination*, *next-to-each-other and social distance* (Strauss, 2006:151). And on the next page the pitfall present in an attempt to eliminate relationships of super- and subordination is highlighted with reference to the theoretical view of Von Wiese who claims that the next-to-each-other of people is *the most fundamental trait* of the social. Such a remark not only illustrates that injustice is done to the other analogical moments within the social aspect, but also that the spatial analogy is *mispresented*. He *reduces* the (dimensional) *vertical* analogy of above and beneath (super- and subordination) to the (dimensional) *horizontal* analogy of the *next-to-each-other*. According to him the former is implied in the concept social distance. From the existence of relations without any super- and subordination he concludes that a vertical structuration can never serve as the basis for sociological analysis (see Von Wiese, 1959:76-77).

Behind this preference for the *next-to-each-other* we find the humanistic ideal of autonomously free and equal individuals. Locke portrays "man in the state of Nature" in such a way that such a person is free and is the "absolute lord of his own person and possessions, equal to the greatest and subject to nobody" (Locke, 1690:179; Chapter IX, §123). Combine with this utterance (on the same page) Locke's humanistic view that within the state of nature all persons are coordinated equally as kings: "for all being kings as much as he, every man his equal".

The emphasis of equality therefore highlights the humanistic assumption of human autonomy which cannot come to terms with any relation of super- and subordination.

## 10. Once again the kernel of the social

Our conversation partner at this point returns to his view of "neighbourly love" which, according to him, "is meant to characterize all social relationships". His question is: "why does love not have this place in a Christian philosophy of the social aspect?"

If "neighbourly love" is "meant to characterize all social relationships" then this love is understood in a radical, central and total sense, touching the root of our life and all its branches. The moral term *love* is here used in a concept-transcending way. The appeal to (neighbourly) love indeed reflects the encompassing meaning of the *Central Commandment of Love*, and as Christians interested in theoretical contemplation and investigations we have to know that the specified ways in which we love God and our neighbour are found in *modal* and *typical* norms. The radical (root-) meaning of love of God and fellow humans can never be identical to any specific branch of this root. This remark already provides the answer to the question "why love does not have this place in a Christian philosophy of the social aspect"? Both Dooyeweerd and I fully acknowledge the all-permeating meaning of the central commandment of love.[4]

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4   The central unity of God's law and the religious fullness of God's claim on whole-hearted loving service is expressed in differentiated ways in the diversity of (modal and typical) creational structures – linked to the historical level of development (differentiation and integration) and disclosure in effect in

My argument is that both the whole-hearted love of God and of our neighbour has a radical, central and total meaning. Therefore the central commandment of love embraces both the radical, central and total love of God and the radical, central and total love of fellow human beings.

Consider Gal. 3:28 where we read: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ." This is a radical, central and total unity, for it transcends the diversity of differentiated, peripheral and partial relationships that humans have within society. The unity in Christ does not eliminate the differences between nations, slaves or free-men, or between the sexes – yet it transcends all these differentiated, partial and peripheral ties we may have by providing a new root for them. [An ideology emerges when anyone of the branches of human life is elevated to become the pseudo-root, thus degrading the other branches of life into branches of this pseudo-root. Rome did it with the Church, Hitler with the German *volk* and Mussolini with his *fascist state*.]

The central commandment of love therefore encompasses both the whole-hearted love of God and that of our neighbour – in the radical, central and total sense of the word. However, in the argumentation of our conversation partner the radical, central and total meaning of the central commandment of love is restricted to its first part while the second part is then "uprooted" by positioning it within the multiplicity of differentiated, partial and peripheral relationships. The problem is that if the central commandment of love as a whole is understood in a radical, central and total sense, then it remains all-encompassing and precisely for this reason *non-specific*. Loving my wife and my next-door neighbour's wife in the

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a particular civilization. This explains again why we cannot biblicistically consider any particular positive form of the differentiated expression of the meaning of the central commandment of love as valid per se for all times. In the ten covenant words of God, the central commandment of love is given contemporary expression. The commandment: you may not commit murder, acquired an Old Testamental positive expression that must be understood in view of the relative undisclosed and undifferentiated legal system of the time. Disclosed, deepened jural-moral principles (fault, fairness, and so forth) were not prominent in this system (see in particular Strauss, 2009:259).

same way is wrong, for these relationships are *typically* different. A specified communal relationship is not the same as a specified coordinational relationship. The (radical, central and total) ways in which we love God and our fellow human beings are specified according to modal norms and typical norms. These specified norms are more-than-merely-social, more-than-merely-jural, more-than-merely-logical-analytical, more than merely cultural-historical, and so on.

Our conversation partner asks: "Why can I not take loving my neighbour as myself as a clear statement of the way other people should be treated in ordinary relationships and as obviously social in every normal understanding of the term?"

To my mind the phrase "loving my neighbour" could be understood in a twofold way: First of all it may refer to the second part of the central commandment of love – in the unspecified radical, central and total sense of the term. In this sense it gives direction to all human relationships. Secondly it can refer to specified inter-human relationships and actions coming to expression in all the normative aspects and normative societal entities. One group of these relationships, namely moral relationships of love, is similar to marital love, love of fatherland (patriotism), love between fellow members of a congregation, love between friends who are members of the same club, the love between colleagues working at the same academic institution, and so on. But each normative aspect in its own unique way brings the radical, central and total sense of the central commandment of love to expression. Consider the jural aspect and the differences between public law (including administrative law, constitutional law, criminal law and criminal procedure, international public law), civil and non-civil private law. Or look at the social aspect by asking how one can classify different ways of sociation (social interaction) (resulting in the distinction between collective, communal and coordinational relationships). Modal logical-analytical norms direct the way in which we love God and our neighbour (in the radical, central and total sense) towards making the proper distinctions and towards identifying properly. In other words, the way in which we love God and our neighbour *analytically* is by identifying and distinguishing properly (subject to the logical principles of identity and non-contradiction). Likewise, the way in which we love God and our neighbour *cultural-histo-*

*rically* is by avoiding reaction and revolution in search for constructive reformation. *Socially* it is done by being polite, *economically* by being frugal, *morally* by being loving, and so on.

In the New Testament the terms *love* and *faith* are in some cases used in a radical, central and total sense and in others in a radical, central and total sense. In Gal. 5:14 the entire central commandment of love is spelled out without even mentioning the first (love-of-God) part: "The entire law is summed up in a single command: 'love your neighbour as yourself'."The heart, as the religious center of human existence, is at the root of all the expressions of life. For this reason Christ requires a reborn heart – the wellspring of life (Proverbs 4:23). When faith or love is used in this radical sense, it cannot merely refer to one aspect of our experience of reality – then it refers to the fullness of our covenant relationship with God in Christ. This is evident when we speak of the central commandment of love or of faith as a heart commitment to God. These radical usages are not in conflict with those texts where the words love and faith are no longer employed in a root-sense, but used in a differentiated sense next-to-each-other, for then these references do not have a root-meaning but a branch-meaning as diverse expressions of life.

Compare for instance Gal. 5:22 where love is used in a differentiated, partial and peripheral sense: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." These terms find their "modal seat" in diverse normative modal aspects. Or consider I Tim 6:11 where a God-pleasing person is asked to pursue righteousness, faith and love, among others. ["But you, man of God, flee from all this and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness."]

The biblical perspective fully supports the distinction between the radical, central and total meaning of the central commandment of love and instances where terms such as love and faith are used in a differentiated, partial and peripheral sense.

When our conversation partner says: "Love, of course, is differentiated within the social into friendship, love of enemy, parenting, marital love and so on" the question is: are we speaking of moral love (which is aspectual) or are we speaking of central love

(which is all-encompassing)? If central love permeates all of life, then, in line with the argument that because (central) love comes to expression in the social aspect we have to acknowledge this by viewing *love* as the meaning-nucleus of the social aspect, the implication is that we then have to conclude that the meaning-nucleus of every aspect must be love, because the central commandment of love embraces all aspects in which it comes to expression. This will also turn upside-down the difference between modal differentiated, partial and peripheral relationships of love and a concept-transcending use of this modal ethical term, pointing at the radical, central and total meaning of the central commandment of love.

The examples given above are all dealing with the *way* in which particular societal phenomena function *within the ethical aspect*: "friendship, love of enemy, parenting, marital love". But then our conversation partner continues: "Social love is reflected in other areas as economic service, the feeling of love, citizenship and so on."

If "social love" is reflected in "economic service" the question is: are we dealing with a phenomenon of the economic (*economic* service), or with a phenomenon within the social aspect (*social* love)? According to the theory of modal aspects there is an *anticipatory connection* between the social and the ethical – *social troth*, *social integrity*, *social honesty*. But I don't think we can equate *social love* with *economic service*, they are modally *distinct*.

## 11. Concluding remark

In the context of the Christian world and life view the central commandment of love indeed represents the "heart-beat" of the loving service to God, coming to expression in all issues and walks of life. Its central and direction-giving meaning is specified in a rich diversity of modal and typical norms and principles. Although the terms employed in the designation of the central commandment of love are derived from various modal aspects it does not mean that these aspects themselves are absorbed in it. Rather, by distinguishing between conceptual knowledge and concept-transcending knowledge, it is possible to understand why a key term such as "love" may refer to the core meaning of the ethical or moral aspect and also be used to point at realities exceeding the

boundaries of this aspect. Once this is understood it is no longer possible to deny the differentiated, peripheral and partial meaning of the social aspect and the moral aspect of reality. An analysis of the coherence between the social aspect and those aspects foundational to it, constitutes the task of reflecting on the elementary or analogical basic concepts of sociology as an academic discipline – embedded in a non-reductionist ontology and including an account of the inter-modal coherence between the social and moral aspects of reality.

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