

# Is the Idea of the Historical Aspect of Reality Tenable?

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## **Samevatting**

*In hierdie artikel word spesifiek aandag gevra vir die erkenning van die historiese aspek van die werklikheid. Midde-in die historistiese smeltkroes van die vroeg-twintigste eeu was dit dringend nodig dat fundamentele prinsipiële besinning oor die vermeende historiese relatiewiteit van alles sou gestalte aanneem. Teen die agtergrond van die tradisionele (rasionalistiese) natuuregsteorieë het Dooyeweerd die idee van die historiese aspek na vore gebring. Hierdie idee het tegelyk 'n bevrydende perspektief gebied op die impasse van 'n historisties-irrasionalistiese relatiëring van die natuuregtelike idee van 'n universeel-geldende reg vir alle tye en plekke. Teen die agtergrond van 'n ontleding van die aard en sin van die historiese aspek in die denke van Dooyeweerd word in die besonder aandag geskenk aan die kritiese besware wat C.T. McIntire geformuleer het teen die idee van 'n historiese aspek. Die kritiese konfrontasie waartoe hierdie analise aanleiding gee bied enersyds 'n geleentheid om die positiewe meriete van die erkenning van 'n historiese aspek in perspektief te plaas en demonstreer andersyds hoedat vermeende kritiek op Dooyeweerd se filosofie dikwels mank gaan aan 'n gebrekkige verstaan van die hele konteks van sy filosofie. In die geval van McIntire blyk dit dat veral die idee van 'n modale aspek en die oorspronklike tuiste van modale terme – ook van ander aspekte – tot fundamentele misvattinge in sy eie kritiek aanleiding gegee het.*

## **1. Introduction**

In the face of modern historicism<sup>1</sup> – which, by and large, emerged in the age of Romanticism and acquired its full-grown form during the 19<sup>th</sup> and

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1 Perhaps the most accessible discussion of *historicism* in Dooyeweerd's writings is found in his work on the *Roots of Western Culture* – see Dooyeweerd, 2003:43 ff.

20<sup>th</sup> centuries – Dooyeweerd distinguishes between the concrete *process of becoming* – embracing all aspects of reality – and the *historical aspect*, as merely *one* of these modal functions of reality. In German, Dutch and Afrikaans one can designate this difference by employing *different* words for the many-sided (genetic) process on the one hand and for the historical aspect of it on the other. Words such as “Geschichte” (German), “geschiedenis” (Dutch) and “geskiedenis” (Afrikaans) are often employed, or the encompassing meaning of the all-inclusive *process of becoming* whereas the words “historisch” and “historie” may assume the more restricted meaning solely referring to one aspect. Dooyeweerd is of the opinion ‘history’ in the sense of a modal aspect of reality, alongside all the other modal aspects, belong to the dimension of *universal* and *constant* functional modes our experiential world. This distinct *dimension* of reality conditions the existence and functioning of things, events and societal relationships.

Although the integral nature of non-scientific experience in an unproblematic way refers to “history” as “what happened in the past”, this habit does not articulate any specific aspect or category of concrete events. His example of a person who smoked a cigar demonstrates this insight, for the event as such is not *historically significant*. Nonetheless this does not mean that it lacks a historical aspect, for in the Middle Ages one did not smoke cigars (cf. Dooyeweerd, 1999: 60).<sup>2</sup>

Because this new approach to the problem inspired critical reactions amongst scholars working within the reformational tradition, it is worthwhile to appraise the issues involved in asserting or denying the reality of the *historical aspect*. With that aim in view we first proceed with some preliminary remarks highlighting crucial elements of Dooyeweerd’s philosophy of history. Against this background attention will be given in particular to the criticism formulated by C.T. McIntire (1985a).

## 2. General background

M.C. Smit once told the author that, according to his estimation, Dooyeweerd reached clarity about the *historical modality* in the year 1929. When Dooyeweerd published his first independent work in 1931, *The Crisis in the Humanistic Theory of the State*, both his philosophy of time and his general theory of the modal law-spheres of reality already obtained their first formulation.

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2 Harry van Dyke once remarked that Dooyeweerd’s eventual struggle with lung cancer did make his own smoking historically significant!

During the previous decade Dooyeweerd – in the initial development of his *legal philosophy* – wrestled in particular with the problems of *natural law* and *historicism*. There are two options available in this connection:

- (i) either one claims a universal validity for normative principles *per se*, or
- (ii) one subscribes to the view that there are no universal or constant starting-points for human action since all positive decisions taken by human beings are variable. Traditional theories of natural law chose the first option and legal positivism opted for the second one.

The former orientation accepts universal principles (supposedly) *valid* for all times and places that are rooted in human reason, whereas the latter emphasizes the *historical changefulness* of reality at the cost of *constancy* and *universality*.

The human *competency* to shape (i.e. to give *positive form*) to underlying constant principles in *varying* historical circumstances, without elevating any particular positive shape (designated as a *positivization*)<sup>3</sup> to the level of a conditioning principle, is understood by Dooyeweerd as a “subjective moment on the law-side” (Dooyeweerd, 1997 - II: 239) of the post-psychical (i.e. of the *normative*) aspects. This insight enabled him to side-step the one-sidedness of natural law theories – which (rationalistically) postulated *valid* principles *already applied* (i.e. *positivized*) for all times and places<sup>4</sup> – and also to side-step *historicistic* approaches that deny the acceptance of universal and constant principles by merely acknowledging varying historical shapes and form(ation)s.

In passing it should be noted that in spite of his thorough rejection of the natural law and historicistic modes of thought he did not fully escape from the *terminology* of the natural law tradition, because he continued to speak about *universal validity* as a characteristic feature of underlying *principles* – without realizing that insofar as principles are *universal* and *constant*

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3 Habermas explicitly uses this term, for example where he speaks of “the positivization of law” (Habermas, 1996:71).

4 Hommes summarizes the traditional concept of natural law as follows: “Natural law in its traditional sense is the totality of pre-positive legal norms (not brought into existence through a human declaration of will in the formation of law) that are immutable, universal and per se valid as well as the eventual subjective natural rights and correlating duties, based upon a natural order (whether or not traced back to a divine origin), such that the human being can derive it from the natural order aided by natural reason” (Hommes, 1961:55).

(i.e. insofar as they are *pre-positive*) they are *not yet valid* (i.e. not yet enforced or *positivized*),<sup>5</sup> and insofar as principles are *given* a positive shape and form (i.e. are positivized) they have lost their *unspecified* (pre-positive) *universality*.<sup>6</sup>

### 3. Properties of the historical aspect

It should be noted, however, that since Dooyeweerd distinguishes between *power* over persons – a *subject-subject relation* linked with the idea of an *office* and the accompanying presence of the (above-mentioned) subjective moment at the norm-side – and power over things (artifacts), a *subject-object relation*, the historical aspect cannot be designated as the (formative) *technical* aspect (as Seerveld and others tend to do) because then it would be limited to subject-object relations only. Dooyeweerd refers to the German distinction between “Personkultur” and “Sachkultur” (cf. Dooyeweerd, 1999: 64; Dooyeweerd, 1997: 198).

Furthermore, Dooyeweerd’s theory of modal aspects, in addition to the distinction between law/norm-side and factual side, contain two key-ideas: (i) the *uniqueness*, *indefiniability* and *irreducibility* of an aspect which is guaranteed by its core meaning (its *meaning-nucleus*) and (ii) the idea that the *meaning* (“zin”) of an aspect comes to expression only in its *coherence* with the other aspects of reality.

The second idea pertains to a further distinction, namely that between the *constitutive* – not yet opened up – structure of an aspect (“populated” by retrocipatory analogies) and the *regulative* (anticipatory/ opened up) structure of an aspect, which is not *given* but must be deepened through a process in which those analogical structural moments referring to cosmic later aspects are disclosed (this occurs both within the aspects of nature and within the normative aspects of reality). The *basic concepts* (based upon retrocipatory analogies) and *ideas* (reflecting the anticipatory

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5 Every principle requires human intervention in order to be made *valid*, i.e. no (pre-positive) ontic principle holds by and of itself. Only human beings are capable to “enforce” them (as Derrida correctly emphasizes). Derrida says that there “are a certain number of idiomatic expressions” in the English language that “have no strict equivalent in French,” such as the phrase “to enforce the law,” or the phrase “the enforceability of the law” (Derrida, 2002:232).

6 In passing it should be noted that Habermas is sensitive to the problem of a *double validity* that is present in traditional theories of *natural law*. He points out that modern “natural law, in preserving the distinction between natural and positive law, assumed a burden of the debt from traditional natural law. It holds on to a duplication of the concept of law that is sociologically implausible and has normatively awkward consequences” (Habermas, 1996:105).

analogies) of every special science are therefore indispensable intellectual tools in the practice of any discipline. The combination of (i) and (ii) entails that it is an *aspect* that has analogies (and *not* its meaning-nucleus). Yet the analogical structural moments appearing within a particular aspect are always *qualified* by the unique meaning of the aspect under consideration. Analogical structural moments within a specific aspect refer to the meaning-nuclei of other aspects.

The *historical* aspect relates to the *how* – the *functioning* – of entities and processes and not to their concrete *what*. Its normative meaning is evinced in the contrary *historical* – *unhistorical*. This already shows that it presupposes the meaning of the *logical-analytical* aspect, similar to other contraries like *polite* – *impolite*; *frugal* – *wasteful*; *legal* – *illegal*; *love* – *hate* (moral – immoral); and so on. Furthermore, historical norms are – from a theoretical point of view – discernable as *analogies on the norm-side of the historical aspect*. Students of Dooyeweerd’s philosophy of history tend to think that Dooyeweerd only distinguishes *three* historical norms, namely *continuity*, *differentiation* and *individuation* (or: *integration*). But what he actually had in mind is that each modal analogy on the norm-side of the historical aspect reveals a distinct *modal* norm based upon the coherence between the historical and the other aspects of reality.

Against the background of these brief remarks highlighting some of Dooyeweerd’s basic ideas regarding the acknowledgment of the historical aspect we may now assess the arguments of McIntire designed to deny the existence of this aspect.

#### **4. McIntire’s attempt to deny the aspectual status of the historical modality**

C.T. McIntire published a Chapter on *Dooyeweerd’s Philosophy of History* in the work: *The Legacy of Herman Dooyeweerd* edited by himself (Lanham: University Press of America, 1985: 81 - 117). Arguing for the existence of an irreducible mode requires one to take various criteria into consideration. In *Volume 1* of *Series C* of the *Collected Works* of Dooyeweerd: *Contemporary Reflections on the Philosophy of Herman Dooyeweerd*, the author discussed this issue in a contribution entitled: *The Order of Modal Aspects* (Strauss, 2000: 1 - 29). Naturally some of these perspectives will be useful in the subsequent discussion.

##### **4.1 Time and history**

McIntire mentions the broad scope intended by Dooyeweerd’s philosophy of time because the latter constitutes another unique dimension of reality.

According to Dooyeweerd *time* expresses itself within every modal aspect – at the law-side as *time order* and at the factual side as *time duration*. McIntire is therefore mistaken when he remarks that “the cosmomic side is also the side of the totality of meaning, of the unity of reality” and that the factual, “subject side is the side of the diversity of meaning, the multiplicity of reality” (McIntire, 1985: 85). Dooyeweerd does not identify the distinction between *unity* and *multiplicity* with that between *law-side* and *factual side*. Furthermore, he distinguishes between the law-side and factual side not also within the diversity of aspects but also when he discusses the *totality of meaning* (Dooyeweerd, 1997 - I: 101).

Another fundamental incorrect explanation is found when McIntire (McIntire, 1985a: 85) refers to Dooyeweerd’s theory of “individual structures” – in stead of “individuality-structures.” Structures of individuality are intended to be typical laws with their own (specified) *universality*; they hold for individual entities but they are not themselves *individual*.

Having mentioned the frequent use of the adjective *temporal* – in the phrase “temporal reality” – McIntire then suddenly concludes that three terms, which “have the appearance of being arbitrary,” are associated by Dooyeweerd with time, namely “succession, simultaneity and duration” (McIntire, 1985a: 85). Before the status of these three terms is discussed it should be noted that this is a strange remark, since McIntire has to know that according to Dooyeweerd cosmic time expresses itself in *everyone* of the fifteen modes distinguished by him – indeed more than merely *three terms*.

Of course a rich legacy is captured by mentioning the three terms, namely *succession*, *simultaneity* and *duration*, but still they do not exhaust at all everything Dooyeweerd has in mind when he philosophizes about *time*.

In respect of the history of philosophy we may mention Leibniz who juxtaposed time – as an order of succession, with space – as an order of coexistences (Leibniz, 1965:199). Kant distinguished three modes of time: *duration*, *succession* and *coexistence* (Kant, 1787 - B: 219).

Why is it alleged that these three terms appear in an *arbitrary* way? The only answer the author can find is that McIntire did not realize that they relate to the way in which the cosmic dimension of time expresses itself within the first three modal aspects of reality, viz., the aspects of *number*, *space* and *motion*. Within the numerical aspect one can distinguish an order of succession and correlated with it the factual succession of any row or sequence of numbers. Within the aspect of space coexistence also

allows for the same law-side/ factual side distinction: dimensionality is an order of coexistence delimiting and determining the existence of factually extended spatial figures (in the simultaneity of all their parts). Within the kinematical aspect the order of constancy (or, as Stafleu prefers, the order of uniformity) is correlated with the duration of factual motion. Of course time finds a unique expression in all the other modal aspects as well – and there is nothing *arbitrary* in acknowledging this. Therefore Dooyeweerd did not “conflate” the “theme of unity and diversity with the question of time” – as McIntire mistakenly asserts (McIntire, 1985a: 86).

#### **4.2 Is the “prism” a “static symbol” for cosmic time?**

The image of the prism that Dooyeweerd employs is intended to convey something about the *irreducibility* of the modal aspects and their relation to the fullness of meaning of temporal reality– “there is but one law of God” (Dooyeweerd, 1997- I: 102). The refraction of meaning through which “each aspect in its modal structure reflects the fullness of meaning in its own modality,” is achieved through *cosmic time* (Dooyeweerd, 1997 - I: 102). Alternatively Dooyeweerd explains that cosmic time is the “prism that achieves this refraction” (Dooyeweerd, 1997 - I: 102). From this McIntire concludes: “And the prism image, whatever its worth in illustrating unity and diversity of meaning, is too static to serve as a symbol for time” (1985a: 86). Clearly, the “prism” does not serve as a *symbol* for *cosmic time*, but as a symbol for the *way in which* cosmic time *refracts* meaning!

The use of the term “static” by McIntire in this context is also problematic. Those who want to emphasize the inherent *dynamics* of reality, for example exemplified in its *historicity*, tend to juxtapose the “static” and the “dynamic” – normally without realizing that “historicity” itself has its own universality and constancy. But there cannot be an *opposition* between different aspects – such as the spatial (to which the feature of being ‘static’ is attached) and the physical (linked with dynamics and change). These aspects are unique and different, but they are also fitted into an unbreakable coherence.

#### **4.3 The untenable (historicistic) opposition between “static” and “dynamic”**

If the mistake made by McIntire is rectified and it is realized that Dooyeweerd does not view the prism as the image cosmic time, then the question remains whether or not there still remain other grounds for accusing Dooyeweerd’s conception of time as being *static*? Apparently the

reason for this accusation is that McIntire wants to opt for a more “dynamic” understanding of time. Does this mean that McIntire does not want to acknowledge time as the *constant* horizon within which we experience the modal and structural diversity of reality?

This question employs a *different* term (“constancy”) and therefore actually introduces a *new* perspective as alternative for the negatively loaded opposition of what is supposed to be *static* and *dynamic*, namely the *foundational coherence* between *constancy* and *dynamics*.

When Dooyeweerd argues for the uniqueness of the kinematical mode he is justified in referring to *force* as a *physical term* and in speaking of the primitive meaning of *uniform motion* (Dooyeweerd, 1997 - I: 99). Unfortunately two important consequences of this basic insight remained unnoticed by him: the first one is that change (in a physical or post-physical sense) can only be detected on the basis what endures, and secondly that a concise term capturing the foundational role of the kinematic aspect is *constancy* (in other words, the insight that the original “modal seat” of the term *constancy* is found in the *phoronomic aspect* of reality).

#### **4.4 The nature of revolution and reaction**

Since constancy (and spatial simultaneity) can never be *opposed* to change and dynamics (as their foundational condition), this perspective unambiguously transcends the negative opposition of the *static* and the *dynamic* – which is an offspring of the historicistic view (also dominant in contemporary postmodernistic trends of thought), namely that *change* ought to be acknowledged *at the cost of constancy*. As a distinct dimension of reality cosmic time constantly embraces the modal aspects and the individuality-structures in the continuum of an inter-modal and inter-structural dynamics.

Earlier it was briefly remarked that every modal analogy on the norm-side of the historical aspect represents a distinct modal historical norm. Consequently, the foundational coherence between the historical aspect and the kinematical and physical aspects enables the identification of the normative meaning of *historical constancy* and *historical dynamics*. Denying or neglecting the former leads to the anti-normative configuration of radical change (= revolution), whereas the opposite extreme leads to traditionalism (= reaction) that attempts merely to continue the *status quo*.

#### 4.5 “Ontological order” confused with “time order”?

In connection with an explanation given by Dooyeweerd in a different context, McIntire holds that Dooyeweerd mistakenly identifies “ontological order with time order” (McIntire, 1985a: 86). Dooyeweerd writes: “It is an undeniable fact that in the first life-phase of a suckling baby feeling precedes the first development of logical distinction; the latter precedes the controlling manner of forming sounds, which in turn precedes the primitive symbolical designation of concepts by words etc. But that does not prove that the higher mental functions originate from feeling as their undifferentiated origin. Rather it testifies to the truth of our view of the order of the modal aspects of experience, as a real *temporal* order, related to subjective duration in the genetic process” (Dooyeweerd, 1997 - II: 112 - 113). What was left out by McIntire is Dooyeweerd’s argument in the paragraph *directly preceding* the quoted statement, where Dooyeweerd states: “It is impossible to regard real acts, like the volitional or noetic ‘Erlebnisse’, as modal *aspects* of experience. On the contrary, every real act functions necessarily in the integral modal horizon of human experience, which embraces the totality of all the modal aspects.”

The author does not think Dooyeweerd here argues for the human being “starting to function in a temporal order one mode at a time” (as McIntire concludes). What is given is the infant as an acting human being, in principle functioning in all modal aspects of reality. Dooyeweerd only refers to the foundational order pre-supposed in the (genetic) *development* of these (already active) functional capacities. Take his example of the primitive symbolical designation of concepts by words and look at the following useful example in this context. A little child who first notices a *dove* and learns its name may soon afterwards encounter a different *bird* to which the *same* name – dove – is then applied.

What happened here? This child, amongst other aspects, definitely functions within the logical-analytical mode *and* in the lingual (sign) mode. Yet clearly the logical capacities of this child are *more articulated* (*better developed*) at this early stage than its lingual competency, since the child already performed that kind of abstraction characteristic of non-scientific thinking and concept formation, namely *entitary-directed abstraction*.

This logical act of abstraction enabled the child to grasp the concept “bird” by *lifting out* the similarities between different birds (such as having a beak, wings, feathers, etc.) while simultaneously *disregarding* whatever may be different between them (such as their respective colors, sizes,

shapes, and so on). Because the lingual abilities of the child are not that well-developed as yet (in spite of the fact that the child undeniably already actively functions within the lingual mode), the *wrong word* is chosen (dove) for a *correctly* formed (logical) *concept*, namely the concept “bird”. The given subject-functions of human beings are *further developed* in a subjective genetic process determined by the temporal order of the successive aspects. This does not imply that the modal aspects themselves are successively “added” to previous ones. If Dooyeweerd advanced the latter perspective he would have contradicted himself explicitly in two subsequent paragraphs and McIntire would then be justified in criticizing this identification of ontical order with temporal succession (to reformulate McIntire’s objection in a more appropriate fashion).

McIntire shows a positive appreciation for expressions like the “Divine order of creation” or the “Divine world-order” and rather wants to substitute them for what Dooyeweerd calls cosmic time (McIntire, 1985a:87). Perhaps there is not an opposition between these two designations, because the moment Dooyeweerd enters into an articulation of what God’s world-order entails, he distinguishes between four dimensions: the *central religious dimension*, the *dimension of time*, of *modal aspects* and that of *individuality-structures*.

The discussion of super-temporality which follows (McIntire, 1985a: 88) could be left aside on the basis of two considerations: (i) Dooyeweerd first realized that the human self-hood is supra-modal and supra structural, then developed his theory of cosmic time underlying the modal aspects and individuality-structures and on that basis equated *supra-modal* with *supra-temporal*; (ii) it could hardly be denied that humanity has an *eternal* destination and that being human therefore hinges on the boundary-line of time and eternity – justifying at least some sense of the *time-transcending* nature of the core meaning of being human. In his response to the critical questions of Van Peursen we find that Dooyeweerd conceded that he might have contemplated an alternative designation: “Probably the term supra-temporal, with which I never meant a static condition but merely intended to capture a central direction of consciousness transcending cosmic time, can best be replaced by another one” (Dooyeweerd, 1960: 137).<sup>7</sup>

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7 “Het is genoegzaam bekend, dat hierover ook onder de aanhangers van de W.d.W. geen eenstemmigheid bestaat en misschien is het woord boven-tijdelijk, waarmede ik nimmer een statische toestand, maar slechts een de kosmische tijd transcenderende centrale bewustzijnsrichting bedoeld heb, beter door een andere term te vervangen”

#### **4.6 The historical aspect**

McIntire questions the existence of the historical aspect (McIntire, 1985a: 89 ff.). He holds that Dooyeweerd claims that historical study “examines the historical aspect of anything” (McIntire, 1985a:89). This is a fairly common misunderstanding of Dooyeweerd’s position – many scholars took him to say that each of the various disciplines studies a particular aspect of reality. But in fact Dooyeweerd holds that an analysis of the modal structure of any aspect belongs to the *philosophical foundations of a discipline*. Special sciences merely look at reality through the point of entry/ angle of approach/ “glasses” of particular aspects. Dooyeweerd writes that the investigation undertaken by a special science “does not focus its theoretical attention upon the modal structure of such an aspect itself; rather, it focuses on the coherence of the actual phenomena which function within that structure” (Dooyeweerd, 1996: 11).

#### **4.7 The meaning-nucleus of the historical mode**

In respect of the meaning-nucleus of the historical aspect McIntire immediately relates the idea of *power* in the sense of *mastery* and *control* with “a master craftsman” (McIntire, 1985a: 90) – thus restricting his interpretation to (formative) historical subject-object relations. We have noted above that the historical aspect also encompasses power over persons (subject-subject relations). The actual Dutch phrase is “beheerschende vorming” (Dooyeweerd, 1935 - II: 143) – formative control. Yet McIntire suggests that ‘power’ should rather be related to “its primary meaning as energy or force” (McIntire, 1985a: 90) – without showing any awareness of the difference between the physical aspect of energy-operation and the normative meaning of power. Dooyeweerd holds that cultural power formations are indeed to be seen as a *calling* that could be performed in a better or in a worse way – evincing its *normative* content and meaning. Dooyeweerd also introduces the idea that the adjective “cultural” is a synonym for “historical” – compare the phrase the “cultural mode of form-giving” (Dooyeweerd, 1997 - II: 199).

McIntire claims that “[H]istorians would have little to study if they restricted themselves to accounts of control or mastery in human affairs” (McIntire, 1985a: 91). This remark is significant, because it demonstrates that McIntire believes that Dooyeweerd is of the opinion that only events *qualified* by die cultural-historical mode are open to historical investigation! But this is not at all Dooyeweerd’s position, for he is convinced that historically significant events actually occur under the guidance of *all* the normative aspects and within all the normative

individuality-structures of human society. It is therefore not surprising that McIntire does not pay any attention to the tremendous significance of giving shape to principles in the course of history, i.e. to the nature of positivizations cutting across all normative aspects and all societal collectivities.

#### **4.8 The process of becoming encompasses more than its historical (or any other) aspect**

The remark made by McIntire that the examples cited by Dooyeweerd concern “an individual or small groups in simplified relationships – thinkers, politicians, church leaders, military generals, inventors, and the like, whom he called ‘the moulders [formers] of history’ (see, e.g., NC 2: 243 - 44)” (McIntire, 1985a: 91) should have mentioned that Dooyeweerd here analyses the *historical formative will* as a psychical analogy on the law-side (NC - II, 1997: 243 ff.) before accusing him of being an idealist and individualist (McIntire, 1985: 91) in his view of history! The mere fact that Dooyeweerd as a legal scholar and philosopher did not involve himself with extensive historical studies does not warrant the conclusion that his view of history “gives historians little to go on in analyzing the vast complexity of factors and situations we face most of the time” (McIntire, 1985a: 91). The author has already pointed out that Dooyeweerd does not restrict any special science merely to the study of the structure of a single aspect since the scope of all the disciplines is always concrete reality in its totality – with the single provision: from the *angle of approach* of some or other aspect. This state of affairs can be elucidated with reference to a person wearing different kinds of *glasses* to look (in a special scientific way) at reality. Everything within concrete reality in principle falls within one’s view – of course with the exception of these glasses themselves through which one looks! In one respect we have to make an exception, because Dooyeweerd did engage in historical inquiry insofar as he extensively studied the history of theoretical conceptions in various disciplines (including amongst them a fascinating study of the historical development of Roman and Germanic conceptions of property).

#### **4.9 Historicism inversus**

McIntire mentions that Dooyeweerd frequently speaks about the *cultural development* – which for Dooyeweerd represents a *biotical* analogy within the modal structure of the historical aspect – but concludes from it that Dooyeweerd has substituted his initial designation of the meaning-nucleus

of the historical aspect (cf. Dooyeweerd, 1997 - II: 186 ff.) – which is not the case. At this stage the second point mentioned above in connection with the *properties of the historical aspect* must be reminded, namely that every aspect reveals its *meaning* only in its *coherence* with other aspects.

At the same time we once again discern the above-mentioned misconception as though Dooyeweerd intends to account for the meaning of history (in the sense of “geschiedenis”) solely in terms of this one aspect of the creation-wide *process of becoming* (“geschiedenis” as distinct from any one of its aspects, such as the *historical mode*). For Dooyeweerd the *opening process* indeed embraces reality in all its aspects. Where McIntire says this he adds a subsequent remark, namely that the opening process “involves every one of his modes and cannot be limited to any one of them” (McIntire, 1985a: 93). Although it looks quite innocent, the last qualification: “cannot be limited to any one of them” is significant, for it once more shows that he continues to uphold the *incorrect* idea that Dooyeweerd wants to enclose the field of study of the historian *within the modal structure of the historical aspect*. This conclusion is further confirmed by the next two sentences formulated by McIntire: “All of this appears to suggest that the historical reality Dooyeweerd had in view when he referred to cultural development is more total and encompassing than his theory could handle in terms of merely the historical aspect. Thus we have the first indication that calls into question the historical aspect itself” (McIntire, 1985a: 93).

In fact, Dooyeweerd could take sides with McIntire on this score, because the way in which McIntire presents the case actually – according to Dooyeweerd’s characterization of historicism – suggests that Dooyeweerd attempts to identify reality in the fullness of its many-sidedness and concrete eventuality merely with the *historical aspect* – and such an attempt cannot but *eliminate* the meaning of the historical mode itself. Dooyeweerd phrases his own immanent-criticism of historicism in a neat way when he argues that only that which in itself *is not historical in nature* can *have* a history – since speaking about the “history of a historical phenomenon” is a “*contradictio in terminis*” (Dooyeweerd, 1997 - II: 228 - 229). The claim of the historicist, namely that “everything *is* history” – like all *isms* – reaches the opposite than what it aims for: *if everything is history, there is nothing left that can have a history* (cf. Smit, 1951).

In stead of arguing against Dooyeweerd’s view of the historical aspect as a modal function of temporal reality, McIntire actually exercises a fatal critique against his own interpretation which attempts to identify reality in its fullness with its historical aspect. Yet the alternative option is not

explored by him. If it turns out that it is meaningless to fit all of reality within the mould of the historical aspect, there are not sufficient grounds for the conclusion that there *aint no such an animal* as the *historical modality*.

#### **4.10 Turning Dooyeweerd's theory of inter-modal connections upside down**

At this point McIntire enters into a discussion of the inter-modal coherence between the historical aspect and the other aspects of reality – in order to substantiate a “second” argument against Dooyeweerd’s theory of a modal historical aspect (McIntire, 1985a: 93). Take a look at his argument:

“I will merely illustrate. As an analogy in the historical mode to the aspect of faith, he [Dooyeweerd] would need something like power-faith, but that would make little sense” (McIntire, 1985a: 93). Indeed, such a construction does make “little sense” – but unfortunately it is not Dooyeweerd’s construction but merely McIntire’s misunderstanding of Dooyeweerd’s theory of the modal aspects.

It has been mentioned above that it is an *aspect* that contains analogical moments (retro- and anticipations) and not the *meaning-nucleus* of an aspect. Furthermore, these analogies point backwards or forwards to the *meaning-nuclei* of other aspects, although they are qualified by the meaning-nucleus of the aspect in which they appear as retro- or anticipations (cf. Dooyeweerd, 1997 - II: 75). Consequently the construction presented by McIntire presents a different theory – not the one advocated by Dooyeweerd. In this alternatively constructed theory the *meaning-nucleus* refers to another *aspect* in stead of an *aspect* referring to the *meaning-nucleus* of a different aspect! If the proper order is restored and if we adhere to Dooyeweerd’s theory, the situation should be phrased as follows: within the cultural-historical aspect one encounters an anticipation (antipatory analogy) to the certitudinal (or: fiduciary) aspect in the configuration of *historical certainty* (or: *historical confidence/trust*) – a perfectly meaning state of affairs – comparable to configurations such as *economic trust* (credit), *legal certainty* or *moral trust*.

On the basis of this misapprehension McIntire then continues to point out that Dooyeweerd “simply” refers to “faith or belief” and that “such faith is characterized not by his historical mode but by his ‘faith’ mode” (McIntire, 1985a: 93). Raising this point only has any meaning on the basis of the *false* assumption that Dooyeweerd’s argument for the existence of the historical mode is actually meant to absorb into this

cultural-historical function fully whatever the historian may be interested in. Yet, concrete events qualified by their faith aspect are just as susceptible to historical investigation as events qualified by any other normative aspect. How else would something like religious history, legal history or art history be possible?

The subsequent arguments raised by McIntire against the coherence between the historical mode and cosmic later modalities consistently suffer from this same shortcoming (McIntire, 1985a: 94 ff). In the course of his argument McIntire claims that Dooyeweerd's theory does not allow for anything in reality that is qualified by the historical aspect (McIntire, 1985a: 94). By contrast, both Van Riessen and Schuurman analyzed *tools* and *technology* in terms of a cultural-historical foundational and *qualifying* function: they are brought into existence on the basis of our free, formative fantasy (foundational function) in order to *form* something else (qualifying function) (see Van Riessen, 1948: 509). Another way of formulating this perspective is to say that it is typical of the most basic human tools that their 'end' is to be a 'means', since they are formed (foundational function) in order to produce something else (qualifying function). Schuurman continues this characterization in terms of a cultural foundational and qualifying function: "All technical objects are exceptional in the sense that both their foundational and qualifying functions are cultural or technical in nature" (Schuurman, 1980: 9 ff.). Of course also voluntary cultural associations may be qualified by the historical aspect.

The point that McIntire wants to make is of course still a victim of his repeatedly mentioned misunderstanding, namely that Dooyeweerd truly intends to account for the meaning of history by absorbing everything within reality into the "historical mode." The existence of anything transcending the historical aspect is then understood as an argument against Dooyeweerd's view – although, as we have seen, it actually supports Dooyeweerd's conception that every attempt to make one aspect all-inclusive *eliminates* the meaning of that aspect. This at once invalidates also the supposed shift to the foundational role of the historical aspect for nearly everything within human society.

McIntire is justified in highlighting the ambiguity in Dooyeweerd's analyses where the latter sometimes speaks of "historically qualified facts" that "would be more properly regarded within his system as political events" (McIntire, 1985a: 95). McIntire mentions Twilight (p.85)<sup>8</sup>

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8 See Dooyeweerd, 1999:87.

and NC - II, pp.193 and 223 as examples where Dooyeweerd speaks of historically qualified events. To this he should have added NC - III page 384 where Dooyeweerd asks whether or not the state could be seen as a transient historical phenomenon like “the battle of Waterloo”? His answer is: “evidently not” – and then he proceeds: “On second thought ‘the battle of Waterloo’ itself cannot be grasped in an exclusively modal-historical sense.” Nonetheless this ambiguity does not cancel Dooyeweerd’s solid argument in favor of the existence of the historical aspect.

### ***Remark***

In terms of what has been discussed thus far, we may be justified in the assessment that it seems as if McIntire’s analysis reveals that he made the error many other critics of Dooyeweerd’s thought have made – they did not enter into a thorough and encompassing study of his philosophy in all its facets – with the effect that they are often caught in basic misunderstandings from which they deduce fallacious consequences. These misunderstandings are then coupled with a *selective* account of certain facets of Dooyeweerd’s philosophy (of history) – a method of argumentation that gives the impression that justice is done to Dooyeweerd’s ideas, but which in fact is doomed to loose sight of the *context* of those facets.

### ***4.11 History and the distinction between past, present, and future***

McIntire asserts that the fourth indication of Dooyeweerd’s unsatisfactory account of the historical mode is found in the way in which he identifies “time in his historical aspect” (McIntire, 1985a: 95). He says: “Dooyeweerd posited that the prism of cosmic time yields the expression of time in the historical aspect as past, present, and future” (McIntire, 1985a: 95) and then proceeds with the question: “Does not every kind of manifestation of time in every mode exhibit past, present, and future?” (NC 2: 193).

It is clear that Dooyeweerd knows that the ‘past’ in “an unqualified sense comprises a great deal that cannot be considered historical in a modal sense” (Dooyeweerd, 1997 - II: 193). What Dooyeweerd calls the *process of becoming* belongs to the *what* of reality which is not restricted to one aspect since “it embraces all of transitory reality with regard to all of its aspects” (Dooyeweerd, 2002: 140). In terms of his distinction between “geschiedenis” (the concrete process of becoming embracing all aspects of

reality) and “history” Dooyeweerd indeed wants to point out that the succession of events in this process of becoming both transcends and at once functions within the historical mode. This position entails that the “historical aspect” of the “all-aspects-embracing” process of becoming – which obviously has a *transmodal* character – must be different from the other aspects in which it functions. If one equates the process of becoming with the concrete many-sidedness of the succession of events (in the “past,” “present” and “future”), then it is clear that Dooyeweerd intends to analyze this process also in its *historical aspect*. In other words, the concrete process of becoming (“past, present, and future”) functions in all aspects of reality, including its *historical aspect*.

However, when Dooyeweerd says that it “is exactly in its historical aspect that time assumes the threefold articulation” and that the “past and the future meet in the historical present” (Dooyeweerd, 1977 - II: 193), it seems as if the transmodal meaning of past, present and future suddenly assumes an *intra-modal historical* meaning. McIntire is indeed correct in pointing this out. If the process of becoming (encompassing present, past and future) is *more than* its historical aspect, this “threefold articulation” cannot be a product of merely one aspect of time, namely the *historical*.

But in itself this ambiguity does not provide sufficient ground for the *rejection* of the idea of the historical mode (aspect) of reality. Establishing a contradiction merely says that *both* statements cannot be true at the same time, but does not – in itself – decide which of the two is to be discarded. If all the other “arguments” advanced by McIntire thus far indeed were founded in solid grounds, their circumstantial evidence indeed would have suggested that one here has to discard the idea of a historical modality. However, since we have argued that this is not the case, the circumstantial evidence rather points in the opposite direction, i.e. in favour of the acknowledgement of the “historical aspect” of past, present and future. The question then becomes one of discerning different aspects of past, present and future – something indeed accepted by Dooyeweerd. What is required on this interpretation is simply to withdraw the conception that the process of becoming owes its articulation in past, present and future solely on behalf of its historical aspect. But once this is conceded, other arguments are required in order to disqualify the modal-functional status of the historical aspect.

McIntire is correct in arguing that Dooyeweerd here “landed upon a *transmodal* feature of time – all things manifest time as past, present, and

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9 Immanuel Kant already had a clear understanding of this fact – see Kant, 1787-B:84.

future”, implying that “his attempt to locate past, present, and future in one modal aspect is mistaken” (McIntire, 1985a: 96). But he is *wrong* in his attempt to conclude from this critique that as such it provides a sufficient justification for the rejection of the idea of the historical aspect *as such*. When geologists, biologists and zoologists study what happened to the physical universe, plants and animals in the past, these events are not observed according to the normative modal meaning of “history,” but merely according to the concrete “geschiedenis” (process of becoming) manifesting itself within distinct aspects and entities of nature.

#### **4.12 The significance of the distinction between concept and idea**

At this point of our analysis it indeed is necessary to highlight the significance of a different understanding of the nature of concept and idea. In order to explain this new meaning it should be realized that an important task of concept-formation within the various disciplines is to “locate” the modal aspect in which particular (modal) terms find their “original seat.” For example, McIntire discusses the use of the term “development” (alongside terms such as “evolution” and “growth”) without realizing that its *modal seat* is found within the *biotal aspect* of reality. Similarly, since *continuity* “resides” within the spatial mode, synonyms for continuity (such as *coherence*, *connectedness*, *uninterrupted*, *the whole and all its parts/ divisibility*) are all located within this aspect.

The phrase “a modal term” designates any term finding its seat within some or other modal aspect of reality. Whenever a modal term is employed in order to refer to phenomena manifesting themselves *within* the boundaries of any aspect, one can say that such a term is employed in a *conceptual* way. The numeral “one” is conceptually employed when the question: *how many* moons does the earth have? is answered by answering: *one*. This answer highlights the function of the moon *within* the quantitative aspect of reality. Similarly, determining the *size* or the *movement* of the moon requires the use of modal spatial and modal kinematical terms – all of them once again employed in a conceptual sense because they merely designate what functions *within* the boundaries of particular aspects.

Of course creation contains many things *transcending the limits* of any given aspect – the dimension of entities is distinct from that of modal functions precisely because the reality of no single entity is exhausted merely by one of its modal functions. Whenever modal terms are used to refer to realities *transcending* the limits of the aspect in which those modal

terms have their seat, such terms are employed in a *concept-transcending* way. For the sake of brevity one can also speak of using such terms in an *idea-context*.

Asserting for example that God is *one*, employs a numerical term in order to refer to God – not only transcending the numerical aspect but also creation as such. Similarly, distinct from the conceptual use of the biotical term “life” – for example when a plant is described as being “alive” – the Bible says: “God is life.” Here a biotical term is employed in a way transcending the boundaries of the biotical aspect, in an *idea-context*.

When the concrete “succession of events” occurring in reality is mentioned, as we have done above, we already implicitly used the numerical meaning of *succession* in an *idea-context*. Alternatively we can designate this process as a “*genetic* process” or as a “process of *becoming*.” In both cases we are using modal terms referring beyond their original modal seat to the said process. The term “genetic” has a biotical meaning and the term “becoming” sometimes takes on the physical meaning of “change” and at other times the biotical meaning of “growth.”

Take a look look at terms residing in the historical aspect of reality. Formative control, suggested by Dooyeweerd as an appropriate designation of the core meaning of the historical mode, is conceptually applied in the case of tool-making (as we have seen above, tool-making constitutes as historical subject-object relation – tools are made in order *to make* something else). When this notion of “to make” is employed with reference to the way in which God brought all of reality into being, our intuition of the meaning of the historical mode is stretched to the *idea* (concept-transcending notion) of “creation.”

Consider the following basic philosophical statements: *everything is unique, everything coheres with everything else, everything is constant and everything changes*. Although these four “*idea-statements*” clearly draw upon the core meaning of the first four modal aspects, the meaning attached to each one of them *transcends* the modal boundaries of the aspect in which it has its original modal seat.

As long as *idea-statements* like these are *balanced* by other equally legitimate *idea-usages* of (different) modal terms, we know that we are not implicitly confronted with a one-sided approach actually over-emphasizing merely *one domain* (or a limited number of modal domains) as the source of *idea-statements*. An atomistic approach in philosophy and the disciplines, for example, may be justified in employing numerical terms in an *idea-context* (such as asserting what we have stated above, namely that everything is

*unique* and *individual*) – but as soon as it turns out that this is affirmed at the cost of other equally legitimate idea-usages of modal terms, then it dawns upon us that we are here confronted with a one-sided *ismic* position. Atomism (individualism), for example, advances its emphasis on the uniqueness of whatever there is at the cost of acknowledging any genuine whole (totality) with its parts – it consistently wants to eliminate the idea of a *whole* or *totality*, thus ruling out in advance the meaning of idea-usages that are possible in employing these two terms.

When the Aristotelian-Thomastic tradition emphasizes the whole-parts relation in a biologicistic sense, we observe an excessive use of the “organic” idea (idea in the technical sense of a modal term used in a concept-transcending mode). The *ism* manifested in this abuse is known as *holism* or *universalism*. This “abuse” of the term “organic” is also found during the era of Romanticism – overarching the thought patterns of thinkers who may be in other respects adhering to entirely different views of reality. Kuyper and Dooyeweerd (during his early phase – until the late twenties and scarcely beyond the appearance of his *magnus opus* in 1935 - 36) are both “infected” by this universalistic legacy.

In terms of the qualification given above a balanced idea-manner in understanding reality ought to remain “dispersed” in the many options provided to us by the given modal diversity within creation. Therefore, when Dooyeweerd switched from the “organic” to an idea-use of a key term stemming from the lingual mode of reality (that may be preferably designated as the “sign-mode”), by exhaustively characterizing created reality as “meaning” (as the mode of being of all that has been created), he on the one hand evinced his own “linguistic turn” and on the other implicitly demonstrated that this characterization assumed a one-sided dominant role in his philosophy. An integral, all-encompassing sensitivity to the rich diversity of options provided to human reflection in this regard opens our eyes for the admissibility of *complementary* idea-usages of modal terms. For example, *merely* saying that *everything is constant* (thus employing the kinematical intuition of constancy in an idea-context) without at the same time being willing *also* to say that *everything changes* (an idea-usage of the meaning of the physical aspect), will lead one to a distorted understanding of reality. Similarly, exploring the sign-mode in speaking about the *meaning* of reality, or about the *meaning-coherence* of the cosmic diversity of reality, should not exclude the employment of modal biotic terms in an idea-context – such as speaking of the *organic* coherence between various aspects. Implicitly Dooyeweerd became allergic to the excessive employment of the term “organic” – which indeed

during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century took on a one-sided universalistic (holistic) connotation – but then he threw out the baby with the bath-water by subsequently almost totally avoiding any idea-usage of modal biotic terms.

When McIntire states: “[Dooyeweerd’s] designation of the nuclear moment of the historical aspect appears to be inadequate as a way of identifying the historical character of reality” (McIntire, 1985a: 96) the red lights of an implicit historicism are starting to flicker once more. Zuidema captured the historicism of existentialist philosophy in his inaugural oration when he chose the title: “De mensch als historie” (“The human being as history” – see Zuidema, 1949). Dooyeweerd argues that the historicism of Spengler, Heidegger and others identifies time with “true, authentic time” (Dooyeweerd, 2002: 139). McIntire does not realize that the phrase “historical character of reality” employs the modal meaning of the historical mode in order to say something about reality in its totality (i.e. in a concept-transcending way). Consequently, not acknowledging the modal seat of the term “historical,” he draws the invalid conclusion that there is no historical aspect. This argument amounts to claiming that the statement: “everything changes” eliminates the physical aspect (because what is referred to transcends the physical aspect). Without the distinction explained above, namely between *conceptual usages* of modal terms and *concept-transcending* applications of (in many cases the *same* terms), one will never realize that there are two sides to the coin: (i) the trans-modal (more-as-modal) reality referred to, and (ii) some or other *modal term* employed in a concept-transcending way in order to articulate the reference at stake in (i). When McIntire says that reality is “historical in character” he has an eye for (i) but totally neglects (ii).

Speaking about the *unity* of reality, about the fact that whatever there is *coheres* with whatever else there is, about the *constancy* of reality (even captured in the physical law of energy-constancy – mistakenly designated as energy-conservation), about the *meaning-character* of reality and so on, should all be part of an articulated idea-manner of employing modal terms in legitimate *concept-transcending* ways.

But it should be clear that the author’s criticism, in a differentiated sense, applies to the position of both Dooyeweerd and McIntire.

## 5. Concluding remark

What McIntire says about the disclosure and the differentiation of human society simply continues the shortcomings present in his misunderstanding

of the modal meaning of the historical aspect. He did not realize that the term “differentiation” has its original seat within the biotic aspect (see McIntire, 1985a: 100) – where we discern vital phenomena such as biotic growth, differentiation and integration. Although McIntire says much about Dooyeweerd’s view of differentiated and undifferentiated societies he does not give evidence that he has read or understood the crucial section in this connection (Dooyeweerd, 1997 - III: 346 - 376). And when he finally specifies those *features* of reality “that are indeed *historical* in character and not merely structural and ontological” he uses a number of *modal terms*, such as *continuity* (either spatial or kinematical), progress (change), development (biotical), “culture making” (formative control in Dooyeweerd’s sense of the cultural-historical aspect), “interpretation” (the sign mode), and so on (McIntire, 1985a: 113).

It therefore has to be concluded that McIntire did not succeed in making out a convincing case for denying the ontic existence of the cultural-historical aspect of reality – but rather demonstrated the negative outcome of someone attempting to argue his case without sufficiently understanding the (admittedly complex) theory he tries to criticize.

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