

# Appropriating the Legacy of Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven

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*Hierdie artikel is primêr gerig op daardie sleutel-kwessies wat die denke van Dooyeweerd en Vollenhoven verenig. Daarna sal sommige van die verskille tussen hulle vermeld word, gevolg deur die beligting van enkele onopgeloste probleme binne hul onderskeie benaderings. Deur laastens van die duursame positiewe insigte in hul wysgerige denkarbeid te ontgin, sal 'n poging aangewend word om van die tekortkominge in hul denke te bowe te kom. In die proses sal aangetoon word dat hul denke eerder konvergeer as divergeer.*

## 1. Introduction

The primary aim of this article is to look at some of the core issues that *unite* the thought of Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd. Some of the important differences between them will then be mentioned, followed by highlighting some of the unresolved problems within their respective approaches. Finally, by exploring lasting positive insights within their philosophical work, an attempt will be made to point at ways in which some of the shortcomings present in their systematic philosophy may be transcended. While doing that it will be shown that their philosophical positions are rather converging than diverging.

## 2. Shared philosophical views

In general the *Wijsbegeerte der Wetsidee*<sup>1</sup> is associated with the philosophical legacy of its founders, D.H. Vollenhoven and H. Dooyeweerd. The former was the brother-in-law of the latter and it is

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1 *Philosophy of the Cosmonomic Idea* as it was eventually translated by Dooyeweerd in his *Magnum Opus, A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* (1997).

known that they have creatively interacted in their design of a new understanding of reality. Practically throughout their professional academic careers Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven never differed from each other in public. They were motivated and directed by the Biblical perspective that the distinction between God and creation is fundamental and that scholarship in particular has to take serious God's law for creation. Both emphasized throughout that nothing within creation should be deified (absolutized) and both understood that the Christian life in its Biblical sense is destined to serve God with all one's heart.<sup>2</sup> Both accepted the Biblical view that the "heart", as the (pre-functional or supra-functional) centre of human existence, cannot be identified with any function of human existence (sometimes designated as the "functie-mantel" – the functional garb).

According to them creation presents itself in a rich diversity of functions and entities (individual things). Within the sphere of scholarship the safeguard against *-ismic* distortions of this diversity is found in observing what both Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd identified as the "principium exclusae antinomiae" (*the principle of the excluded antinomy* – see Vollenhoven, 1933:29; Dooyeweerd, 1935-II:35). The lack of distinguishing properly between phenomena evincing themselves within the sphere of a particular aspect of reality – such as when a triangle is confused with a square (a "square triangle")<sup>3</sup> – results in a logical contradiction, but when two aspects are not correctly distinguished a genuine *antinomy* ensues – such as the familiar arguments of Zeno against *movement* and *multiplicity*.

It is noteworthy that Vollenhoven initially, in his discussion of fundamental philosophical distinctions (positions such a *monism* or *dualism*), spoke of "basic motives" (*grondmotieven* – see 1933:22 ff., 49 ff.) whereas Dooyeweerd initially used expressions like "basic scheme" or "basic theme" in order to capture the *dynamic* basic motivation of philosophical thought. According to him the theoretical distinctions of a thinker are embedded in a theoretical view of reality designated as the transcendental ground-idea (a tri-unity of ideas) embracing an idea of the coherent diversity, fullness or totality of meaning and the origin of all of

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2 During the early sixties of the previous century Vollenhoven visited Bloemfontein and the author can remember quite vividly that in his presentation he defined "religion" as "de dienst aan God met het geheele hart" (Probably in 1962 or 1964).

3 Cassirer speaks of a "round circle" (1910:16). A similar example of this is normally associated with Bertrand Russell, namely the illogical concept of a "square circle," but actually it stems from Kant (see Kant, 1783:341; § 52b)

reality. This transcendental ground-idea receives its central direction-giving motivation from the ultimate religious *dunamis*, the ground-motive of theoretical thought.

Although the provisional conceptions of the number and the order of succession of the modal aspects were not immediately settled, by 1930 the familiar 14 aspects appeared in the publications of both Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd. It seems as if they have agreed not to enter into public critical encounters about the more detailed systematic differences of opinion they had. It must have been obvious to any one who has read their publications between 1930 and 1950 that there were significant differences between them, although no one of them entered into a systematic discussion of these differences.

For example, this explains why since 1930 also Vollenhoven accepted the historical mode as a function of reality and only much later raised reservations in this regard (see below). The distinction of the kinematic and physical aspects has its own peculiar history. Once the theory of *functions* took on its first rudimentary form both thinkers contemplated a distinction between them. Already in his *Isagôgè Philosophiae* from 1930 Vollenhoven distinguished the *mechanical* aspect from the *physical* aspect of reality. However, in the edition of 1936 this distinction no longer appears. Dooyeweerd, on the contrary, initially maintained the order *numerical, spatial, physical* and thus identified the kinematic aspect with the physical aspect. Yet in an article from 1930 he toggles between acknowledging and not acknowledging the distinction between the aspect of motion and the physical aspect. In one instance he explicitly writes: “Within the internal meaning structure of the tree the numerical, spatial, kinematic and energy-functions are guided by the organic function of life (the biotic function) although it takes place while completely maintaining the sphere-sovereignty of each function with its own lawfulness” (Dooyeweerd, 1930:249).<sup>4</sup>

Roundabout 1950 Dooyeweerd did realize that a distinction between the kinematic aspect (of uniform movement) and the physical aspect (of energy-operation) is necessary in order to account for the fact that kinematics (phoronomy) can define a *uniform motion* without any

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4 “Zoo worden in de interne zinstructuur van den boom de getals-, ruimte-, bewegings- en energie-functies geleid door de organische levensfunctie (de biotische functie), doch met volledige handhaving van de soevereiniteit in eigen kring van iedere functie in eigen wetmatigheid.”

reference to a *causing force* (compare Galileo's law of inertia) (see Dooyeweerd, 1997-II:99). In his discussion of the problems surrounding the idea of time in 1968 Vollenhoven affirmed that he does not have any objections against "the order of succession of the mechanical as the lower and the energetical as the higher" (Vollenhoven, 1968:3).

### 3. Differences

In this context the following differences will be discussed:

- The historical aspect
- Time (time and supra-temporality)
- The position of God's law (God-Law-Cosmos versus Law-side and Factual side)
- The dimensions of reality/ the determinations of reality

#### **The historical aspect**

Vollenhoven speaks of *genesis* in a general sense but only in connection with humankind he speaks of *history* (1968:6). Many times Dooyeweerd explained that he distinguishes between the concrete process of becoming and the (functional) historical aspect of reality. Whereas the former functions in all aspects of reality – including the historical aspect – the latter concerns *formative control* and ought to be characterized by employing the adjective *cultural*. In fact something similar is defended by Vollenhoven, because he does not do away with the "historical aspect" but simply designates it differently: "We call the function intermediate between the logical and the lingual, for the sake of clarity, not the historical, but rather that of form-giving, to which the form-giving amongst others within the economic and the aesthetic retrocipates" (Vollenhoven, 1968:8).

This looks more like a terminological difference than a substantial one.

#### **Time**

Whereas both Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd consistently maintained the distinction between the central (pre-functional or supra-modal) religious root ("heart") of being human and the aspectual diversity within reality, Vollenhoven never accepted the idea of supra-temporality. Yet in his *Isagôgè Philosophiae* Vollenhoven explains that time is not an aspect and briefly explains that time is found in all modalities (§ 48 – see Vollenhoven, 2005:33), equivalent to the kind of analysis found in Dooyeweerd 1940 and 1940a.

In 1968 Vollenhoven mentions that initially he was influenced by Poincaré who believed that the succession of numbers is connected with or founded in the succession of time (Vollenhoven, 1968:3). He remarks that Dooyeweerd did not discern an impasse in connecting the succession of numbers with the succession of time but then proceeds to relate the problem to the distinction between temporal and supra-temporal. This means that Dooyeweerd does not feel an impasse from which he has to be saved or to find a solution, for if the functions are temporal this temporality includes also the first one, the arithmetical (Vollenhoven, 1968:3). But what Vollenhoven finds unproblematic is a distinction shared by both of them, namely that between the heart or soul and the functions (Vollenhoven preferably speaks of *pre-functional* in this regard). From a purely logical point of view the acknowledgment of time embracing all aspects (and entities) by itself does not turn this distinction (between modal and supra-modal) into an impasse. An additional argument is required to show this, for example that temporality also embraces the central religious dimension of reality. But then another “impasse” may lurk, because according to the Biblical perspective humankind has an eternal destination.

In his extensive reaction to the critical “marginal” remarks made by Van Peursen (on *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*) Dooyeweerd relativized his initial designation of the central religious dimension as “supra-temporal.” In his response Dooyeweerd refers to the sense in which we “do transcend time in the center of our existence even though at the same time we are enclosed within time” (Dooyeweerd, 1960:103) and later on in this article he explains that he is not wedded to the term “supra-temporal” for in response to the objection raised by Van Peursen to the term “supra-temporal” he says:

Now I am not once more going to enter into a discussion regarding the question if it is desirable to call the heart, as the religious centre of human existence, supra-temporal. It is sufficiently known that amongst the adherents of the *Philosophy of the Cosmonomic Idea* there is no consensus in this regard. 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).

A few years later the same issue surfaced in a discussion of the *Annual Meeting* of the philosophical association founded by Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd. In a transcription of this 1964 discussion it is reported that Steen asked a question to Dooyeweerd in connection with the idea of

supra-temporality. Dooyeweerd said that sometimes he can “tear the hair from his head” that he ever used this expression. Yet he still affirmed that the human being, in the centre of its existence, transcends the temporal cosmic order.<sup>5</sup> What is of importance for Dooyeweerd is the centrality of the human selfhood, in the sense that it cannot be identified with any modal aspect or with any “individuality-structure” – and not the distinction between temporal and supra-temporal *per se*. Those who consider this distinction to be of central importance to Dooyeweerd may want to reconsider their position in the light of the just mentioned remarks made by him.

There are numberless instances throughout *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* (and elsewhere) where Dooyeweerd simply refers to the *central* or *transcendent religious* dimension of creation within adding the qualification “supra-temporal”. In the light of his 1960 and 1964 remarks it is clear that the distinction between temporal and supra-temporal is not crucial for his philosophy. What is crucial is the distinction between God and creation and the centrality of the human selfhood (heart) coupled with the centrality of the core dimension of creation where the ultimate commitment of being human has its seat and from where direction is given to all of life. In this respect Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd are in full agreement. The human heart is either committed to God or to an idol with implications for eternity. Vollenhoven states that the Biblical sense of “immortality” means “not being subject to the power of death – in the Scriptural sense of this term”; that before the first death human immortality is not mentioned; that the Bible never speaks of an immortal *part* of a person (it does not know the expressions “immortal soul” and “immortal spirit”) and that the Bible solely knows of immortality of those who, after their death, are in Christ. Immortality means more than “continue to exist” while “being subject to death” does not mean annihilation (Vollenhoven, 1933, *Separate Appendix* with the footnotes, note 40). The repeated emphasis on the distinction between pre-functional heart and modal functions in the philosophy of Vollenhoven underscores the deeper convergence present in the thought of the founders of Reformational philosophy. Given Dooyeweerd’s relativizing of the

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5 The transcription reads: “... waar ik soms de haren uit mijn hoofd trek (you understand?), dat ik deze uitdrukking ooit zo gebruikt heb, ik geloof niet dat ik deze uitdrukking ooit zo gebruikt heb. Ik heb wel dit gezegd, dat de mens in het centrum van zijn bestaan de tijdelijke, de kosmische tijdelijke orde te boven gaat. Dat is wel iets anders” (the *Dooyeweerd Archives* available at the “Historische Documentatiecentrum,” Free University, Amsterdam – investigated during March, 2006).

distinction between temporal and supra-temporal their shared conviction concerning the eternal destination of human beings also gain in significance. When the central meaning of the love-commandment is lived out in every walk of life it would be meaningless to say that this integral kind of obedience turns the human being into something divine itself. The same applies to the acknowledgment of the eternal destination of being human.

It is now returned to the objection formulated by Vollenhoven. The implication of the way in which he stated it is that there cannot be an impasse if both the modal aspects and the central religious dimensions are considered to be *temporal*. In this case the connection between temporal succession and numerical succession then ought not to be viewed as problematic!

In Dooyeweerd's own thought there is a significant development in this regard. The analysis of the modal aspects (law-spheres) found in *De Wijsbegeerte der Wetsidee* is already embedded in his integral philosophy of time and the initial account of this time philosophy was made explicit in his first independent work, *The Crisis of Political Theory in Humanism, As seen from a Christian cosmology and epistemology* (Dooyeweerd, 1931:104 ff.). Four years later the '+' sign is explained in the original quantitative meaning of the numerical time order (Dooyeweerd, 1935-II:63). But he considers this numerical time order to be *irreversible*. Five years later, in his first more extensive article on the problem of time within the *Philosophy of the Cosmological Idea*, Dooyeweerd explicitly states that the number series exhibits "an irreversible time order of earlier and later." To this he adds a note in which he explains that the connection of this time order with temporal duration reveals the temporal character of this modal time order and that it is incorrect to view the succession of the number series as an essentially reversible time order. Interestingly he does concede that we can count forwards and backwards but nonetheless maintains that modal numerical time order remains *irreversible* (Dooyeweerd, 1940:167).

In 1955 Dooyeweerd changed his view by distinguishing between the '+' and '-' directions of the quantitative modal time order (Dooyeweerd, 1997-II:79). In an article of Stafleu where at the end he acknowledges Dooyeweerd for having corrected it, the view that within the first three modal aspects (number, space and movement) the time order is reversible is further explored (Stafleu, 1966:131 ff.).

The integral nature of Dooyeweerd's philosophy of time is such that although it is a distinct dimension of reality it expresses itself within the intrinsic nature

of modes and entities. On the law side of the quantitative aspect time expresses itself as the *arithmetical time order of succession*. This understanding differs from the account given by Vollenhoven, for according to the latter under the influence of Poincaré a view connecting the succession of numbers with the succession of time is found in Dooyeweerd's philosophy. This is a form of *transcendent criticism*, because implicit in it is a different view of time – explaining why Vollenhoven mentions a “connecting” of two different realities, namely “the succession of numbers” and “the succession of time.”

Likewise, the *spatial time order of simultaneity* (not discussed in Vollenhoven's critical remarks of 1968) constitutes another crucial (reversible) modal time order, on a par with the kinematic time order of uniform flow (constancy) that is also reversible. Only when modern physics discovered *irreversible processes* – in 1824 by Carnot, eventually in the formulation of the second main law of thermodynamics (1850 & 1865 by Clausius and Thompson), and finally by the discovery of radio-activity (1896) and the quantum of action by Planck (1900) – it succeeded in transcending the mechanistic main tendency of classical physics (since Newton). Max Planck characterizes this mechanistic legacy as follows:

The conception of nature that rendered the most significant service to physics up till the present is undoubtedly the mechanical. If we consider that this standpoint proceeds from the assumption that all qualitative differences are ultimately explicable by motions, then we may well define the mechanistic conception as the conviction that all physical processes could be *reduced completely to the motions* (the italics are the author's – DFMS) of unchangeable, similar mass-points or mass-elements (1973:53).

To this he adds that the “irreversibility of natural processes” confronted the “mechanistic conception of nature” with “insurmountable problems” (Planck, 1973:55). Einstein explicitly explains the difference between physical irreversibility and kinematic (mechanical) reversibility:

On the basis of the kinetic theory of gases Boltzman had discovered that, aside from a constant factor, entropy is equivalent to the logarithm of the ‘probability’ of the state under consideration. Through this insight he recognized the nature of courses of events which, in the sense of thermodynamics, are ‘irreversible.’ Seen from the molecular-mechanical point of view, however, all courses of events are reversible (Einstein, 1959:43).

From the perspective of the history of philosophy it is important to note that notwithstanding his psychologicistic view of time – as a sensory form



of intuition – Immanuel Kant already displayed a remarkable understanding of the first three modes of time. His significant remark reads: “The three modes of time are endurance, succession and simultaneity” (Kant, 1787-B: 219).<sup>6</sup> One can also make an appeal to the history of time measurement, aptly captured in the following explanation of Stafleu:

This is most clearly shown by an analysis of the historical development of time measurement. Initially, time measurement was simply done by counting (days, months, years, etc.) Later on, time was measured by the relative position of the sun or the stars in the sky, with or without the help of instruments like the sundial. In still more advanced cultures, time was measured by utilizing the regular motion of more or less complicated clockworks. Finally, in recent developments time is measured via irreversible processes, for example, in atomic clocks (1980:16).

Another historically significant perspective is found in the fact that the traditional conceptions of *eternity*, namely that of eternity as an *endless duration of time* versus eternity as *timelessness* (sometimes connected with the *present* – the *nunc aeternum* of Kierkegaard reaching back to Parmenides, B Fragment 8:3-6 and the Ennaeds III/ 7 of Plotinus), are crucially dependent respectively upon the numerical time order of succession (making possible our most primitive awareness of infinity in the sense of the successive infinite) and the spatial time order of at once (underlying the idea of the at once infinite). Traditionally these two forms of infinity were designated as the potential and the actual infinite (see Strauss, 2002 for a more detailed analysis of these two meanings of the infinite).

Since Vollenhoven did not provide us with any written considerations regarding the just mentioned issues the only road to an understanding of his eventual position is found in the encompassing article of Toll on time and change in the thought of Vollenhoven. In connection with the shortcomings in the thought of Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd the author will return to this view for he still has to briefly highlight the two further differences between Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd mentioned above.

### **The position of God’s law**

Vollenhoven prefers to distinguish between God, law and cosmos while Dooyeweerd draws a distinction between the law side and factual side or

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<sup>6</sup> “Die drei modi der Zeit sind Beharrlichkeit, Folge und zugleichsein.” Leibniz juxtaposes time – as “an order of successions,” with space – as “an order of coexistences” (Leibniz, 1965:199).

reality. Strangely enough this difference did not cause them to speak differently of modal aspects – for both advances the ideas that human beings are supposed to give positive form to God-given norms/ principles by *positivizing* them and both therefore acknowledged distinct modal principles within all the normative aspects.

From God's perspective one can certainly say that God's law is His command calling into existence creaturely reality subject to these commands. But when this perspective is further explored by arguing that God's law as law-for-life comes from God and therefore does not belong to created reality as a "side" of it the situation is made fairly complex. A crucial element of this problem will only be discussed below in connection with the difference between conceptual knowledge and concept-transcending knowledge.

A first reaction may be to point out that both the law and what is subject to it come from God, for if it is true that there is an unbreakable coherence between law and what is subject to it, then both came into being with the creation of the universe. Yet this argument may be extended by means of exercising immanent criticism on the distinction between law as God's command for existence and created reality embracing functions and individual things.

The basic problem could be stated in the following way. The modal functions of reality are part of created reality and therefore, according to this argument, they are different from God's law. The implication should be that modal functions do not make any sense in the "law" for the latter is distinct from created reality in its subjection to God's law. Yet within the context of God's law also Vollenhoven cannot dispense with the *diversity of modal functions* simply because *distinct modal laws* are required for each one of the modal functions. One therefore has to be able to account for arithmetical laws, physical laws, analytical principles (norms), and so on – something explicitly done by Vollenhoven. But then the modal diversity of aspects is reflected within God's *law* – contradicting the initial view that modal functions belong to creation and must be distinguished from the "law." When Vollenhoven speaks of the "validity of the law for the analytical" (Vollenhoven, 1948:26) it is clear that this law did not have any meaning before the creation of what God has subjected to this law. In other words, the strict correlation of law and whatever is subject to it concurrently came into existence at creation.

### **The dimensions of reality**

Vollenhoven distinguishes between the *modal determination* (zus/ zoo; such and such), the *individual determination* (dit/ dat; this and that) and

(after the fall) the *good-evil determination* (see Toll, 1995:111).<sup>7</sup> The equivalent in Dooyeweerd's thought is found in the dimension of modal aspects, individuality-structures and the central religious dimension.

An important difference in respect of the modal aspects is that Vollenhoven refers to them as *aspects of things*<sup>8</sup> while Dooyeweerd regards them to have an ontic *a priori* nature in a universal functional sense conditioning the existence of every kind of entity there may be in reality. What Dooyeweerd calls the *structural a priori* (cf. Dooyeweerd, 1997-II:548) also embraces the modal aspects. He calls them "the *modal a priori* conditions of all individuality of meaning": "But within the cosmic coherence the modal aspects (according to their structure) are the *a priori* conditions of all experience of individual reality" (Dooyeweerd, 1997-II:553).

When Vollenhoven says that a "determination is a trait that pertains to all of created reality"<sup>9</sup> it matches with what Dooyeweerd says of the modal aspects as the "*a priori* conditions of all experience." Notwithstanding the obvious differences in formulation, the issue *intended* by both philosophers is the same – the author prefers to designate it as the reality of *modal universality*. *Modal* aspects determine reality in a *universal* (functional) way – no single (individual) entity is excluded from the universal scope of every modality.

By acknowledging that the modal functions constitute a *determination pertaining to all of reality* Vollenhoven in fact transcends his view that aspects are merely *aspects of things*, for his view of determinations point in the direction of a *distinct* dimension of determination with its own *universality* ("all of"). In the light of these considerations what appears to

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7 Tol explains that in terms of Vollenhoven's ripened conception one may distinguish the three "determinations" he has in mind by calling them "*ontic, ontological and genetic*" (Tol, 1995:106-107). A "determination is a trait that pertains to all of created reality" (Tol, 1995:106). The 'ontic' trait represents an acknowledgment of individual things, the 'ontological' trait reflects the "modal-functional trait" for each individual thing "also functions in various ways" while the 'genetic' trait brings to expression the encompassing process of becoming (genesis) (Tol, 1995:106-107). Perhaps a better choice would have been to call the second determination the "functional determination" because, strictly speaking, the intension is to capture the *ontic* nature of these modes and not to identify them with the kind of *human reflection* entailed in the word 'ontological'. The term *ontological* designates a *theory* (-logy) of what is *ontic* and should therefore not be employed in this context.

8 Cf. Vollenhoven, 1933:31, 33.

9 Also compare Vollenhoven's remark that *spatiality*, for example, is "a property of *all things* (the italics are the author's – DFMS)" (Vollenhoven, 2005:25).

be a difference rather seems to represent a deeper agreement – both in fact defend the reality of modal universality!

We shall explore this issue further below by relating it to the problem of *type laws*.

#### 4. Shortcomings

The ‘shortcomings’ intended here will be restricted to the following issues:

- the way in which both Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd employ the idea of *validity*;
- their lack of properly understanding of the “modal seat” of key terms employed by them;
- the difference between a conceptual use and a concept-transcending use of modal terms; and
- a closer analysis of the problem of universality and individuality.

#### Validity

Both Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd speak of *universal validity*. Vollenhoven qualifies the mode of being of the *law* by using the term ‘gelding’, *validity* (Vollenhoven, 1948: 27). In his publication on logic this view underlies his conception that although the law for the analytical is limited in a modal sense it nonetheless has “universal validity” (Vollenhoven, 1948:26).<sup>10</sup> Also Dooyeweerd often characterizes the way in which the law of God applies to creaturely subjects by using the expression “universal validity” (cf. Dooyeweerd, 1997-II:151 ff.). In connection with the nature of judgments and truth we also hear him speaking of “universal validity” (cf. Dooyeweerd, 1997-I:160; 1997-II:573).

Within the post-psychic aspects God’s law has a normative character, leaving open (as an effect of the fall into sin) next to obedience also disobedience (a violation of the norm concerned). Since both Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd employ the idea of giving a positive shape or form to (universal) principles, this idea of *positivization* presupposes a starting-point not-yet-positivized. Every (modal) principle is indeed the universal and constant starting-point of every human act of positivization. Once a principle has been positivized it attains *validity* for only then it takes *effect*

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10 “Als een der vele wetten voor het functioneel heft ook de wet voor het analytische modaal beperkte –, maar tevens universele gelding.”

by being *in force*. The *validity* of every (normative) principle is therefore dependent upon *human intervention*. But the moment it has been positivized its unrestricted universality is *specified* in the sense that it took on a shape fitting the unique historical circumstances in which it was positivized. Anyone attempting to elevate any positivization to the level of the underlying universal principle ends up in some or other form of *casuistry* particularly well-known to us in the attempt to interpret instances of obedience (positivizations) in the Old or New Testament as Scriptural principles with a timeless universal validity.

Insofar as principles are *universal* in an unspecified sense they are not yet positivized, not yet made valid, and insofar as principles have been positivized they obtain a validity in which the initial (pre-positive) *universality* is *specified* in the sense of being adapted to the unique historical circumstances in which it has been positivized. Consequently the entire idea of *universal validity* is untenable in connection with the nature of normative principles: the unspecified universality of principles precludes any validity and whenever such principles are made valid (positivized) this validity out-rules the initial unspecified universality. In their universality pre-positive principles are not yet *valid* and once they were *made* valid they have lost their pre-positive universality.

At this point the author has to further explore the problematic use of the term ‘validity’ by paying attention to a closely related problem, namely the lack of an understanding of the “modal seat” of key terms employed by Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd.

### **The modal seat of terms**

Neither Vollenhoven nor Dooyeweerd subjected their use of the term ‘validity’ to a systematic philosophical analysis. The remarkable fact is that this term was almost second nature within the neo-Kantian schools of philosophy at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – for instance within the Baden School of neo-Kantianism with its distinction between the *validity* of (ideal) values and the *being* of natural reality. Even at the close of the 20<sup>th</sup> century this term lost nothing of its actuality, for it appears in a substantive work of Habermas (see Habermas, 1998) as well as in a significant study of Derrida (see Derrida, 2002).

In our explanation above one formulation entails what we have in mind in this connection. Just recall the following sentence: “Once a principle has been positivized it attains *validity* for only then it takes *effect* by being *in force*.” The three italicized words are all three echoing the core meaning of the *physical aspect* of reality. To be *valid* means to be *in force* and to have an *effect*.

Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven do not disagree about the core meaning of this aspect – both of them observe its core meaning in what the author prefers to designate as *energy-operation*.<sup>11</sup> Dooyeweerd holds that “[P]hysics, in all its subdivisions, is always concerned with functions of *energy* (potential or actual) and energy implies causes and effects” (Dooyeweerd, 1997-II:99).<sup>12</sup>

Clearly discourse about the meaning of (God’s) law cannot side-step the use of terms derived from the physical aspect. But neither Dooyeweerd nor Vollenhoven in actual fact characterized (God’s) law merely by using terms having their seat in one aspect only. For example, both defend the idea of a “law-sphere.” In terms of Dooyeweerd’s systematic approach to the (elementary and compound) basic concepts of the various academic disciplines the term “law” surely cannot be accounted for merely by using one modal term. Intuitively Dooyeweerd frequently explains that God’s law *determines* and *delimits* whatever is subject to it.

The term ‘determines’ is equivalent to the way in which Vollenhoven uses to term ‘bepaaldheid’ – which the author prefers to translate as ‘determination’ – and the term ‘sphere’ (used in the phrase “law-sphere” / “wetskring”) is derived from the meaning of spatial aspect, just like the notion of *delimitation*. In other words, Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd talk of the law by exploring more than one modal point of entry.<sup>13</sup> The author sees no essential difference in meaning between Vollenhoven’s idea of a *determination* and Dooyeweerd’s idea of *determination*. It seems as if we tend to stumble over minor differences in language use, and in doing that we miss out on the convergence of systematic import underneath the apparent terminological differences.

Suppose we want to explore the implication of this practice further first of all by restricting ourselves to natural laws (the so-called “laws of nature”). We may then consider the option to view the law-concept as a *complex* or *compound* basic concept of the natural sciences, differing from their

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11 In 1968 Vollenhoven says that he has no objection against the order of succession of the mechanical as the lower and the energetical as the higher” [“Ik heb geen bezwaar tegen de volgorde van het mechanische als het lagere en het energetische als het hogere.”] (Vollenhoven, 1968:3).

12 Stafleu weighs terms like “energetisch” and “werkingswijze” and then concludes that if the term “werkingswijze” (mode of operation) is qualified by the term “energetical” Dooyeweerd’s designation of the meaning-nucleus of the physical aspect is also acceptable to the physicist (Stafleu, 1966:129). *Energy operation* therefore seems to be a succinct rendering of the core meaning of the physical.

13 In his lectures and discussion classes (‘werk-colleges’) Van Riessen always emphasized the view that the modal aspects are to be seen as “toegangspoorten” (points of entry) to reality.

elementary (or: analogical) basic concepts. The concept of *physical space* is an example of an *elementary basic concept* of physics.<sup>14</sup> In the case of a *physical law* the point of entry of all the aspects foundational to the physical aspect ought to be incorporated.

First of all every (physical) law is *distinct* from any other (physical and non-physical) law – it is therefore constituted as a *unity* (a distinct law) with its own *uniqueness*. Everyone of the italicized words is derived from the modal meaning of number, they have their “modal seat” within the quantitative mode.<sup>15</sup> In the second place every (modal physical) law has a *universal scope* – it applies to *whatever, wherever*. This pertains to what earlier has been called the *modal universality* of an aspect. But this unique universality does not merely hold every now and then – it obtains *always*, i.e. *constantly*. This awareness derives from the core meaning of the kinematic aspect, above designated as uniform flow (motion) and best captured by the term *constancy*. Finally, what has been used intuitively thus far, namely the notion that a physical law ‘holds’, that it ‘obtains’, actually evinces the contribution of the physical aspect itself, also observed in the view that a (modal) physical law is *valid, is in force*.

Brought together in a single formulation one can say that a (modal) physical law is a *unique, universal and constant determination* of any and all kinds of physical entities and processes. It unites the distinct contribution of each one of the first four modal aspects.<sup>16</sup>

The crucial significance of acknowledging the modal seat of specific terms will shed a new light on the problem of universality and individuality, but before the author discusses this issue he may consider some consequences for Vollenhoven’s ideas concerning time and change.

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14 It is *analogical* because mathematical space is both continuous and infinitely divisible while physical space is neither continuous (being bound to the quantum-structure of energy) nor infinitely divisible (see Hilbert, 1925:164). The similarity between physical space and mathematical space is that both are *extended*, the difference is given in what we have just mentioned. It is *in* the moment of similarity (namely in *being extended*) that we discern the difference, justifying the conclusion that physical space differs from mathematical space. In general an analogy is always marked by the fact in the moment of similarity the difference is shown (and vice versa).

15 The reason why the idea of *uniqueness* also has its modal seat within the arithmetical aspect will be explained below.

16 Running the risk of being redundant the modal connection of each term is once more stated: *unique* – numerical point of entry; *universal* – spatial point of entry; *constant* – kinematic point of entry; and *determination* – the physical point of entry. The chief point to be observed is that the contribution of each modal perspective is not only indispensable but also irreplaceable.

## Time and change in Vollenhoven

The basic statement of Vollenhoven in this regard reads as follows: “Time implies change affecting and brought about by creatures” (see Tol, 1995:99). In spite of the fact that Vollenhoven believes that “[T]ime is also present in the functions” (Tol, 1995:112) his original affirmation of diverse modal ways in which time expresses itself in all the aspects of reality does not recur and nothing substantial is said beyond the fairly isolated statement that *time implies change*. When *change* is interpreted in three senses, namely as *civil*, *human* and *natural* (see Tol, 1995:103), the foundational role of physical change as such is not taken into account or discussed.

What is remarkable is that nowhere in Tol’s article the *modal seat* of the term *change* is investigated. Once this question is asked it is not difficult to answer, because the term *change* is indeed derived from the physical meaning of energy-operation – whenever energy operates it causes (or: effectuates) *changes*. But by virtue of the inter-modal coherence between the physical aspect and those aspects foundational to it the *meaning* of change can only be understood on the basis of these interconnections.

The first modal presupposition of *change* is found in the kinematic aspect, for *change* can only be detected on the basis of *constancy* – an insight that ought to be accredited to Plato<sup>17</sup> and further explored by Galileo (in the formulation of his law of inertia) and Einstein (in his special theory of relativity that postulated the constancy of the speed of light in a vacuum).<sup>18</sup> Of course the meaning of movement in turn presupposes the spatial aspect (its *path*) and space finally presupposes the meaning of number (in the case of movement surfacing as *speed* – as the numerical measure of motion – and in the case of the physical aspect as *causal succession*).<sup>19</sup> It

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17 Unfortunately distorted by his metaphysical postulation of supra-sensory ideal static forms in order to ensure the possibility to know things in the world of change/becoming.

18 Neither Dooyeweerd nor Vollenhoven explicitly explored the insight that (physical) change presupposes kinematic constancy – and that the first law of thermodynamics should not be designated as the law of energy-conservation but rather as that of *energy-constancy* (the kinematic retrocipation on the law side of the physical aspect). They also did not realize that the term constancy actually designates the meaning-nucleus of the kinematic aspect.

19 Note that the physical relation of *cause and effect* presupposes the numerical meaning of succession but ought to be distinguished from it (as already realized by Kant). Although the day succeeds the night and the night the day, neither day or night could be seen as the *cause* of the other. The succession of cause and effect – in the sense that the cause precedes the effect – analogically reflects the foundational meaning of number, but whereas the arithmetical time order is *reversible* the physical time order is *irreversible*.



is therefore not surprising that in the course of his explanation Tol had to use numerical, spatial, kinematic and physical terms in his explanation of “time and change.”

When Tol says that “time evidences the obtainment of an upholding condition that is ontically relevant” (Tol, 1995:111) the interconnected meaning of the kinematic and physical aspects is apparent.<sup>20</sup> The term “obtainment” and “condition” reflects a derivation from the modal domain of the physical aspect because it echoes the idea that something *holds*, that it *determines* what happens by *conditioning* it.

A more integral approach may add to the statement that time implies *change* statements such as *time implies constancy*, *time implies simultaneity* and *time implies succession*.

### **Conceptual knowledge and concept-transcending knowledge**

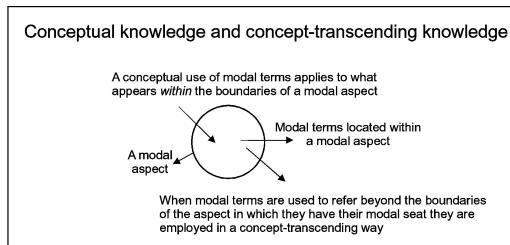
The two most important features of a concept is that it unites a multiplicity of traits or hall-marks into the unity of a concept and that whatever is conceived only takes place on the basis of universality in the sense that the features constituting a concept are universal. The immediate implication is that concepts are ‘blind’ to what is individual. This caused the rationalistic legacy since Plato and Aristotle to identify *conceptual knowledge* with *knowledge* as such and thus denies that we have *knowledge* of things in their individuality. Alternatively one can account for the kind of knowledge we have of things and events in their individuality by calling it *concept-transcending knowledge*. However, within the present context another way of explaining the difference between *conceptual knowledge* and *concept-transcending knowledge* will help us to move beyond the shortcomings present in the thought of both Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven.

In the ‘Festschrift’ for Van Riessen (see Strauss, 1981:159-173) a new account of the distinction between concept and idea is explored in terms of the insight that *modal terms* may be used in two distinct (though not separable) ways:

- either to describe states of affairs displaying themselves within the limits (modal boundaries) of a specific aspect, or
- such terms may be used to designate realities transcending the limits of the aspect within which the descriptive term has its original modal seat.

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20 Compare also Vollenhoven’s remark that God’s law is ‘blijvend’ = *enduring*, clearly echoing the core kinematic meaning of *constancy* (see Vollenhoven, 2005:15).



The first option provides us with a conceptual use of modal terms, whereas the second one underlies an *idea-use* or a *concept-transcending use* of such terms. For example, modal concepts are always formulated in relation to universal features of the different modal aspects (e.g. the concept *natural number*, *set*, *dimension*, *cause and effect*, and so on). Suppose we are thinking of a normal *chair*. If we look at the way in which this chair functions within the universal numerical mode of reality, we may say that it has *four* legs. Our concept of all chairs in this category must include the numerical feature of having a certain number of legs.

In addition to this *conceptual use* of numerical terms, we may reverse our approach and try to say something about the entire concrete existence of this chair, still merely by using numerical terms. In this case we may say that this chair is *unique*, that in its *individuality* it is *distinct* from every other chair. The individuality, uniqueness or distinctness of this chair surely is not at all restricted to its function within the numerical aspect. On the contrary, when we speak of this concrete chair we are contemplating the *total existence* of this particular chair, displaying its individuality in all its facets. But at the same time we must uphold that our *idea* of its individuality cannot be formed without the foundational (constitutive) aid provided by the primitive meaning of number – only on the basis of our numerical intuition of a multiplicity of distinct entities are we able to speak about the *distinctness*, *uniqueness* and *individuality* of any chair. This *idea* of its uniqueness and individuality is nothing but a referring and concept-transcending way in which the point of entry of the arithmetical aspect is employed.

A concept-transcending use of the modal meaning of the spatial aspect (with its inherent meaning of *continuity*, i.e. *connectedness*, implying the original spatial whole-parts relation), likewise entitles us to form the *idea* of the typical *totality character* (*wholeness*) of this chair, which refers to the *trans-modal* meaning of being an individual entity. Surely, this usage is distinct from the conceptual endeavour in which we may try to measure the spatial size of this chair (in three dimensions), for in the latter case we are not using spatial terms in order to refer to the encompassing concrete reality of the

chair (that transcends the limits of the spatial aspect as such) but only to assess the concrete function of the chair within the (boundaries of the) spatial aspect.

The modal meaning of uniform flow (continuation, persistence, constancy), revealing the irreducible core meaning of the kinematic aspect (as we have noted earlier), serves as point of entry to our *idea* of the *identity* of this chair and must be distinguished from the *concept* of the *relative movement* of the chair.

It was already pointed out that the original physical meaning of *change* is synonymous with the modal meaning of energy-operation that causes certain effects (compare the cause-effect relation, causality, and the above-mentioned fact that when energy operates *changes* occur). A concept-transcending usage of the meaning of *change* provides the counterpart of the idea concerning the *identity* of the chair – it is ever-*changing*. Once again this *idea* should be distinguished from the typical, universally comprehensible, function it has in the physical modality (for instance when we observe the *strength* of this chair or that it has a certain physical *mass*).

If we extend these idea-usages of the meaning of the mentioned aspects to approach reality in its totality, we may say (partly following Van Riessen, 1970:183) that *everything is unique*,<sup>21</sup> *everything coheres with everything else*,<sup>22</sup> *everything remains identical to itself*,<sup>23</sup> and *everything changes*. Ideas or concept-transcending statements like these do not *exclude*, but *imply* and *presuppose* each other.

Repeatedly Vollenhoven accounts for the difference (uniqueness) and coherence (connection) underlying his systematic distinctions (cf. Vollenhoven, 2005:51 ff.) without realizing that this entire approach is implicitly based upon a concept-transcending use of numerical and spatial terms.

### Implications for the idea of God's law

Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd did not realize that modal terms could be employed both in a conceptual way and in a concept-transcending manner. According to Vollenhoven God is *sovereign* and God's law is *valid* for creatures (Vollenhoven, 1967:12, 14; Vollenhoven, 2005:14, 16).<sup>24</sup> In his

21 Compare the meaning of the principle of *sphere-soverignty*.

22 Compare the meaning of the principle of *sphere-universality*.

23 From the beginning of his philosophical career Dooyeweerd spoke of *constant* structures without ever contemplating the fact that the term *constancy* finds its original modal seat in the kinematic aspect. Also Vollenhoven did not relate the term constancy to the core meaning of the kinematic mode.

24 The sections quoted here from Vollenhoven 1967 are identical to the corresponding sections in Vollenhoven, 2005 – the 2005 *page* references will be added to the 1967 references.

discussion of *technè* Vollenhoven uses the word ‘bewerking’ (cultivation) in the context of (although in a broader sense than) the historical subject-object relation (Vollenhoven, 1967:135; 2005:139). However, the core meaning of the cultural-historical mode is indeed given in *control* or *formative power*. And “having power” is equivalent to the notion of *sovereignty* – from which we can see that affirming the *sovereignty* of God merely employs a modal historical term in a concept-transcending way.<sup>25</sup>

Likewise the idea of the *validity* of God’s law (its *being in force*) derives from a concept-transcending use of the meaning of the physical aspect. When Vollenhoven accounts for the boundary (*grens*) between God and creation he immediately provides a qualification: “With ‘boundary’ one does not think of spatiality: for spatiality itself belongs to what has been created.” Once again this idea of (the law as) boundary between God and what has been created is bound to a concept-transcending use of *spatial* terms. When Vollenhoven says that the law always stands above that for which it holds (is valid – 1967:14), then the same proviso is implied – one cannot speak of law in spatial terms because the latter belongs to what has been created and God’s law is elevated *above* creation. But in this negation of spatiality an idea-use of the spatial term ‘above’ is present – showing that the negation of spatiality is accomplished by employing the meaning of space!

### **Remark:**

Van der Walt, in his Biblically shaped ontology, entangles himself in the same vicious circle. His claim is that one cannot speak of God in spatial terms. Why not? Because “God is elevated above space” (Van der Walt, 1976:128)! But once again the phrase “elevated above” reveals its modal seat in the spatial aspect, entailing that it is only through the *use* of spatial terms that he can accomplish his goal, namely to argue that God transcends space. As soon as one distinguishes between conceptual knowledge and concept-transcending knowledge the vicious circle of a negative theology disappears, for then it is no longer necessary to deny what is actually employed in an idea-manner.

As soon as the nature of concept-transcending knowledge is acknowledged the apparent opposition between Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd

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25 The Bible uses many other “modal terms” in its revelation of God – such as that God is *life*, God is *love*, God is *just*, and so on. Why single out just *one* of them?

regarding the ‘place’ of God’s law is relativized. Vollenhoven’s emphasis on the validity, for that matter, is in its own way present in Dooyeweerd’s idea of universal validity and in his view that God’s law *determines* whatever is subject to it. From the perspective of the nature of concept-transcending knowledge the choice between the terms *above* (Vollenhoven in his concept-transcending use of a spatial term) and *side* (Dooyeweerd in a similar concept-transcending use of another spatial term) is insignificant.

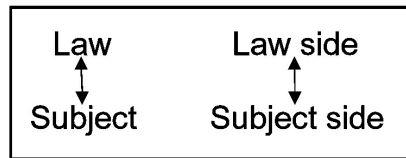
Vollenhoven consistently pays attention to what he calls *diversity* (*verscheidenheid*) and *connection* (*verband*) (see Vollenhoven, 2005:19 ff.). The conceptual use of the notion of unity and multiplicity (or: the *one* and the *many*) is focused on the numerical aspect. When this numerical state of affairs is explored in service of a concept-transcending mode of speech we normally encounter references to *unity* and *diversity*. Similarly the spatial meaning of continuity, that is equivalent (synonymous) to connectedness and coherence (see Strauss, 2002), underlies the concept-transcending use of the (original) spatial term *coherence*. In other words, Vollenhoven consistently explores a mode of explanation in which the core meaning of number and space is employed in a concept-transcending manner.

This insight in fact supports an understanding of Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd that highlights an underlying *convergence* or even *agreement* in their thought. Apparently they differ seriously, because Vollenhoven views God’s law as intermediate between God and creation and characterizes it in terms of ‘validity’. Yet he says God’s law is ‘above’ creation. But Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd share the idea of “subjection” (Tol introduces the term “subjectivity” – Tol, 1995:102) – an idea that cannot be divorced from the basic spatial intuition of ‘above’ and ‘below’! Understanding what it means to be *subjected* cannot side-step an idea of *distinctness* and *delimitation* as well as the *effect* of what holds (is valid) for whatever is subjected to God’s law. The Dutch equivalent for “being subjected to,” namely “onderworpenheid,”<sup>26</sup> more explicitly reveals the energetic connotation of *subjection*. When the assumed *difference* between Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven is mentioned with reference to the validity of God’s law (intermediate between God and creation – Vollenhoven) and the idea of the *law side* of creation (Dooyeweerd), then we are arguing at cross purposes by comparing apples with pears.

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26 Vollenhoven, for example, mentions the “onderworpen zijn aan dezelfde wet” (Vollenhoven, 2005:34). [“subjected to the same law.”]

In terms of their concept-transcending modes of speech both Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd, in respect of their idea-usage of *physical* terms, believe that God’s law has an *effect* on what is *subjected* to it – God’s law is *valid*, it *holds* in the sense of *determining* creatures (Dooyeweerd: *bepaal*; Vollenhoven: *bepaaldheid* – *determine* and *determination*). From the perspective of an idea-usage of spatial terms there is also a fundamental agreement, first of all in terms of the idea of ‘above’ and ‘below’ (being *subjected*). The basic *shared* distinction is that between “law and subject” and on top of it Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd also share similar (almost identical) modes of speech exploring physical terms and spatial terms in a concept-transcending way. Given this convergence adding or leaving out the suffix ‘side’ (see the sketch below) does not seem decisive to the author – the *effect* of what is actually shared *out-weighs* the diverging emphases present in saying God’s law is *above* creation or constitutes the law *side* of creation.<sup>27</sup> Throughout their respective philosophical systematic philosophies Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd maintain the basic (shared) distinction between *law* and *subject* (entailing, amongst others, an idea-usage of spatial terms). Recalling Vollenhoven’s “negative theological” remarks concerning his use of the term *boundary* at the exclusion of any connotation of spatiality (instead of recognizing in his use of the term *grens* a concept-transcending employment of a spatial term), we may here add that his distinction between God and creation is entirely dependent upon an idea-usage of spatial terms, for he holds that there is nothing “divine that stands *under* the law or anything created that stands *above* the law” (the italics are the author’s – DFMS; they once more highlight Vollenhoven’s concept-transcending use of spatial terms).



### Universality and individuality

Natural and societal entities as well as events are *concrete* in the sense that they evince both a universal and an individual trait, expressed in language by the alternative use of the articles ‘a’ and ‘the’ – for example when it is

27 The argument that the law comes from God does not disqualify creation (in the sense of what is subject to law – a la Vollenhoven) because whatever is subjected to law also comes from God.

said that *this* atom is *an* atom. The dimension of the concrete exceeds the boundaries of any and all modal functions, it is distinct from the modal aspects even though the only access we have to it is through the gateway of the modal aspects that serve as modes of explanation in this regard. The reality of the concrete existence of natural and social entities exceeds our conceptual grasp – consequently it can only be approximated by employing modal terms in a concept-transcending way.

Concept-formation always involves the universal order for and the universal orderliness of things. From this it follows, as we saw, that the individual side of entities exceeds the possibilities of conceptual knowledge.

We may call the restriction of *rationality* or *knowledge* merely to conceptual knowledge *rationalistic*. Rationalism considers universality as the only source of knowledge. Irrationalism, by contrast, pursues the opposite by solely acknowledging the contingent uniqueness (the individual side) of things or events. But we have seen that what is unique and individual transcends the limits of concept-formation. Therefore we may define *irrationalism* as that approach to human knowledge that leaves no room for genuine conceptual knowledge.

Although it is tempting to define this divergent appraisal of the relationship between the universal and the individual in terms of the opposition between universalism and individualism, the author prefers to reserve the latter opposition to indicate alternative *basic denominators* for the cosmic diversity of aspects and entities.

Vollenhoven uses these terms universalism and individualism to indicate an overestimation of individuality and universality, respectively. Dooyeweerd, on the other hand, uses the correlation of law side and individual factual side to characterize the difference between rationalism and irrationalism. He denies universality at the factual side of reality and consistently identifies the orderliness of entities, their lawfulness or law-conformity, with the law side of reality. When it is realized that law-conformity is a feature of factual reality<sup>28</sup> then it is no longer possible to deny the universal side of factual reality. In the atom-ness of an atom this (individual) atom in a (universal) way shows that it is subject to the universal (law) conditions for *being an atom* (where *being an atom*

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28 Vollenhoven explicitly rejects the identification of law and law-conformity: “Wet is dus niet regelmaat enzovoorts; regelmatig en onregelmatig zijn processen aan de wet onderworpen” (Vollenhoven, 2005:16). [“The law is therefore not regularity, etc.; processes subjected to the law are regular and irregular.”]

represents the universal side of an atom). But then a more appropriate understanding of rationalism is to define it as an absolutization of *conceptual knowledge*. Likewise, irrationalism should then be seen as an absolutization of *concept-transcending knowledge*. Of course rationalism then cannot any longer be defined as an absolutization of the *law side* of reality, as Dooyeweerd did, because universality is also present at the *factual side* of reality. Furthermore, it is then also insufficient to define irrationalism as an absolutization of the factual side of reality. In other words whereas *rationalism* leaves no room for true concept-transcending knowledge,<sup>29</sup> irrationalism leaves no room for genuine conceptual knowledge.

## 5. The “quasi-monism” present in Vollenhoven’s and Dooyeweerd’s distinction between God and creation

It is remarkable that Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd prefer to come up with fairly succinct (and “singular”) characterizations of God (law) and creation. Dooyeweerd distinguishes between the *being* of God and the *meaning* of creation, while Vollenhoven, as we have noted above, distinguishes between the *sovereignty* of God, the *validity* of the law and the *subjectedness* (Tol: *subjectivity*) of creation (subject to multiple *determinations*).

Let us commence by looking at the term *being* (keeping in mind that Vollenhoven at a stage also distinguished between a threefold *being* – the *being* of God, of the law and of creation). Neither Dooyeweerd nor Vollenhoven adheres to a static (metaphysical) notion of *being*. Their views are rather in harmony with the Biblical idea of God’s everlasting faithfulness to creation. Ex. 3:14 immediately comes to mind – *I am who I am*. God continues to be what he revealed Himself to be. This mode of speech explores the core meaning of kinematic constancy in a concept-transcending way, focused on the idea of, as it is phrased in Dutch, “het zich zijn en zich blijven” (continued being). Our idea of identity is also based upon a concept-transcending use of our basic kinematic intuition – identity is what continues to be amidst all changes (alongside the idea-statements everything is unique and everything coheres and as mentioned earlier we also have the idea-statement that everything remains *identical* to itself).

The idea of *being* in this sense says nothing more than that God continues to be what He is – a mode of speech fully dependent upon an idea-use of the kinematic meaning of constancy. As such it is on a par with other

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29 That Dooyeweerd’s denial of universality at the factual side of reality actually follows from his indebtedness to an element of *nominalism* will be briefly argued below.



Biblical usages of modal terms in a concept-transcending way, such as the idea that God is *omnipresent* (spatial), that God is *omnipotent* (or: sovereign – cultural-historical), that God is *just* (jural), and so on.

The fact that Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd give preference to a singular characterization causes the author to discern within their thought in this regard a “quasi-monistic” inclination. The effect is that it seems as if they differ fundamentally. Nonetheless the author is sure that none of them will deny any of the other mentioned Biblical instances of concept-transcending ways of speaking of God. Dooyeweerd will (and does!) therefore also affirm God’s *sovereignty* while Vollenhoven certainly will not deny God’s steadfastness (‘being’). Speaking of the sovereignty of God or of God’s being therefore turns out to be *complementary* concept-transcending modes of speech – modes that do not stand in conflict with each other at all.

Once the nature of concept-transcending knowledge is recognized, it must be clear that any attempt to promote a *single* mode of concept-transcending knowledge should be avoided, for it may reveal an indebtedness to some or other one-sided legacy. For example, the 19<sup>th</sup> century by and large was in the grip of the one-sided distorting over-accentuation of the (in itself legitimate) idea-use of terms derived from the biotic mode of reality. Particularly the terms *organ* and *organic* played a key role in this tradition (which in theological circles at least dates back to the vitalism of Aristotle). Initially Dooyeweerd works within this legacy and during this phase frequently referred to the *organic coherence* present between the diverse aspects and entities within reality. Yet somewhere during the late twenties of the previous century he experienced his own “linguistic turn” and then started to give preference to the term *zin* (*meaning*) – without fully abdicating from the term *organic*, for the latter seldom but still appeared alongside *zin* in his subsequent thinking. He also did not realize that the way in which he employed the term *zin* merely explored an idea-usage of a term derived from the sign-mode of reality (designated by Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd as the lingual mode).

The crucial point is that each and every modal aspect opens up the possibility to use terms derived from it in a concept-transcending way. An *inclusive* or *integral* philosophical approach should therefore neither shy away from any one nor should any of these concept-transcending modes of speech acquire a *privileged* position in our philosophical reflection (to the *exclusion* of others).

## 6. The impact of nominalism on Dooyeweerd’s thought

Nominalism acknowledges universality only within the subjective human mind (either as universal concepts or as universal words), for outside the human mind strictly *individual* things exist. Plato was confronted by God’s

law (as *order for*) but elevated it into his static realm of ideal forms. Aristotle realized that *universality* plays a key role in human understanding, although in his *Categories* he starts with the strictly individual primary substance (*protē ousian*). However, in its *individuality* it precludes conceptual knowledge – something Aristotle did not want to sacrifice. As a consequence he introduced the *secondary substance*, which is supposed to be the *universal substantial form* of an entity. This secondary substance is designated as the *to ti ên einai* (*De Anima*, 412 b 16 & *Metaph.* 1035 b 32). According to Aristotle a concept is always focused upon what is general or universal.<sup>30</sup> In this way he wants to safe-guard the universality of theoretical knowledge.

The legacy of Plato and Aristotle is present in the threefold view of universals of the realistic metaphysics of medieval scholasticism: (i) *universalia ante rem* (Plato's ideas in God's mind), (ii) *universalia in re* (what Aristotle called the universal substantial form) and (iii) *universalia post rem* (universal concepts within the human mind). Truth is given in the congruence of thought and being (*adquatio intellectus et rei*). Since Ockham modern nominalism rejected any form of universality outside the human mind and therefore eliminated the universality of God's *law for* and the universal side of entities (their orderliness or law-conformity).

Hobbes affirms the nominalistic conception of truth when he states that truth does not inhere in things, but is a feature of names and their comparison in statements.<sup>31</sup> Add to this Hobbes's conviction that demonstrative science is only possible with regard to those things which, in their generation, are dependent upon human discretion (*arbitrio*),<sup>32</sup> then it becomes clear that already here we are confronted with a conception of the *creative power* of human *thought* and *language* anticipating both Kant's extreme position and Richard Rorty's more recent point of view.

Modern nominalism thus stripped reality both of its order determination and its orderliness – degrading factual reality into a non-structured chaos. This is where Kant started, for according to him the material of experience

30 The Greek of this claim reads:  $\square\circ \text{ ε}\mu\text{= } \bullet\circ\ast\gamma\circ\delta\ast \mu\epsilon\text{r}\ast\ast\text{= } \diamond\circ\delta\ast \&\text{ε}\text{ε}\square\circ\ast\bullet\circ\delta$  1035 b 34-1036 a 1). Compare also *Metaph.* 1036 a 8:  $\&\text{ε}\text{ε}\square\circ\ast\bullet\circ\delta \bullet\circ\ast\gamma\circ\delta$ .

31 Cassirer formulates this as follows (1971:56): "Die Wahrheit haftet nicht an den *Sachen*, sondern an den Namen und an der Vergleichung der Namen, die wir im Satze vollziehen: *veritas in dicto, non in re consistit*" (cf. *De Corpore*, Part I, Chapter 3, Par.7 & 8). "Truth does not inhere in the things, but belongs to the names and their comparison, as it occurs in statements."

32 "Earum tantum rerum scientia per demonstrationem illam a priore hominibus est, quaram generatio dependet ab ipsorum huminum arbitrio" (*De Homine*, Chapter X, par.4 – quoted by Cassirer, 1971:57).

(sense impressions) is *unordered* and *chaotic*. The lack of determination created by denying the order for and orderliness of reality now catered for a pseudo law-giver. The natural order is (formally) made possible through the categories as *forms of thought*. Thus seen the concepts of understanding in Kant's conception function as the *formal law-giver* of nature. They are not derived from experience (*a posteriori*) but are (*a priori*) lying at the basis of experience: "*Categories are concepts, which prescribe laws a priori to phenomena, and thus to nature as the totality of all phenomena*" (Kant, 1787:163).<sup>33</sup>

At this point we may ask if nominalism is rationalistic or irrationalistic? In respect of the typical structure of entities, nominalism does not accept any conditioning order (universal structures for), or any orderliness (universal structuredness) of such entities. Every entity is strictly individual. Therefore we may say that nominalism has an irrationalistic view of entities because the latter is understood apart from their (universal) orderliness (law-conformity) and any conditioning order.<sup>34</sup>

Adjacent to this irrationalistic side of nominalism there is also a *rationalistic* side, because *universals* are fully acknowledged within the human mind, at least as general words in the case of Berkeley's and Brentano's extreme nominalism. This restriction of knowledge to universals is typical of *rationalism* in the sense defined by us. Therefore nominalism is rationalistic and irrationalistic at the same time – *rationalistic* in terms of the universals (concepts and words) in one's mind, and *irrationalistic* in terms of the strict individuality of entities.<sup>35</sup>

The remarkable after-effect of nominalism in Dooyeweerd's thought is given in the denial of the universal side of factual reality. Vollenhoven is not a victim of this legacy, but he did not develop a theory of *type-laws* and of *modal specificity* (owing to the influence of nominalism erroneously designated by Dooyeweerd as *modal individuality* – see the remarks below about *type laws*).

33 In his *Prolegomena* Kant says: "der Verstand schöpft seine Gesetze (a priori) nicht aus der Natur, sondern schreibt sie dieser vor" ("understanding creates its laws (a priori) not from nature, but prescribes them to nature" (Kant, 1783:320; § 36).

34 This characteristic applies to both *moderate nominalism*, viz. *conceptualism* (Ockham, Locke, Leibniz, and others) and to *extreme nominalism* that rejects all general and abstract ideas and accepts general names only (Berkeley, Brentano and others).

35 Nominalism's appraisal of the supposedly non-universal nature of concrete entities is of course internally antinomic, for these entities display at least one *universal* feature, namely *being individual!*

Of course Dooyeweerd did not adhere in any way to the nominalistic rejection of God's universal law for what is subjected to it. It is also incorrect to say that Dooyeweerd *denied* the reality of law-conformity (*wetmatigheid*), for he consistently speaks of the orderliness of reality. Only insofar as he did not realize that *law-conformity* is a feature of whatever is subjected to God's *law for* can one discern the influence of nominalism in his thought. Nominalism caused him to "misplace/displace" the orderliness of reality (its law-conformity) and it resulted in his identification of law and law-conformity.

Nonetheless these qualifications should not close our eyes for the fact that Dooyeweerd's lack of appreciating the universal side of concrete entities functioning at the factual side of reality truly continues a core element of the irrationalistic side of nominalism, given in the view that concretely existing entities ("outside the human mind") are purely individual. This explains why he continues to identify the concreteness of entities with their *individuality*, expressed in his frequently used saying that things function in a *concretely individual way* within the universal modal aspects (Stafleu followed him in this regard).

### **Individuality and typicality**

Vollenhoven introduces his idea of the (irreducible) *this* and *that* determination in such a way that it does not merely pertain to entities (such as the human being, an animal, a plant and physical material) but also to what may be designated as modal *subjects* (such as mathematical figures and numbers) (see Vollenhoven, 2005:27 ff., 37).

Dooyeweerd in turn proceeds from his analysis of the modal aspects of reality to what he calls *structures of individuality* or *individuality-structures*. He discusses "the problem of individuality within the modal cadre of the law-spheres" as a *transitional* theme (cf. 1997-II:414 ff.). The key-idea in his discussion is that the modal meaning must be "individualized" (1997-II:423 ff.). Although the examples of "modal individuality" given by him are sound, his theoretical account of this state of affairs is problematic.

If it is true that universality and individuality are irreducible to each other (closely connected with the irreducibility of the numerical and spatial points of entry co-conditioning the way in which we speak of universality and individuality), then it is in principle impossible to speak of an *individualization* of the modal meaning of any aspect – for the latter is strictly *universal*.

Stafleu, in following Dooyeweerd, distinguishes between *typical laws* (type laws) and *modal laws*. The former apply to a limited class of subjects only, whereas the latter have a universal scope. To this he adds the following explanation: “Our first distinction (law and subject) is frequently identified with the distinction of universals and individuals. However, this identification is inadequate and too crude, since the distinction of typical and modal laws also implies a universal-individual duality” (Stafleu, 1980:6).

The “two-sided” nature of entities, displaying both an individual and a universal side, implies that the *concreteness* of any entity in a ‘two-sided’ way comes to expression within the “universal cadre” of the modal aspects. As such, every entity functions in a *concrete individual* and in a *concrete universal* way within the modal aspects. Dooyeweerd correctly stressed the fact that “not a single law-sphere may be considered as the exclusive origin of individuality” (1997-II:418). However, keeping in mind that the term *concretely* encompasses both the individual and the universal sides of an entity, we cannot any longer maintain the notion of *modal individuality* as it is used by Dooyeweerd. Viewed from the angle of the modal aspects one therefore encounters various forms of individuality *and* orderliness within each modality. The typical structure of an entity merely *specifies* (but never *individualizes*) the universal modal structure of an aspect. It is therefore preferable to speak in this context of *modal specificity* in stead of *modal individuality*. Thermodynamics, for example,<sup>36</sup> is a general and fundamental physical discipline, abstracting completely both from the individuality and the specificity of physical entities. It therefore uses modal function concepts such as volume, entropy, specific heat, etc. without reference to any entitary specification. In statistical physics this abstraction can no longer be maintained, since here one has to account for the relation between the physical micro-structures constituting macro-systems, and thermodynamics. This implies that the typical totality-character of physical entities should be recognized. Therefore, specific heat is dealt with differently in statistical physics according to the physical state of physical entities (compare the solid state with the gaseous state). In thermodynamics, however, the expression *specific heat* is used in a purely modal-functional sense, without any specification as regards the nature of a solid state, fluid state or gaseous state.

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36 This example is discussed by Stafleu (see Stafleu, 1966:133 ff.). He here explains how thermodynamics abstracts from the *typical structure* of physical entities.

The fact that modal laws – such as those of quantum physics – hold for all possible “objects” is also clearly seen by the physicist Von Weizsäcker: “Quantum theory, formulated sufficiently abstract, is a universal theory for all *Gegenstandsklassen* (classes of objects)” (Von Weizsäcker, 1993:128). When he, on the next page, explains that one cannot deduce the kinds of entities of experience from the universal scope of quantum theory, he has in mind what we are calling type laws.

Instead of identifying the modal/typical distinction with that between universality and individuality, we should, therefore, use the distinction between *unspecified* universality and *specified* universality. The latter form of universality is restricted to a particular class of subjects whereas the former applies without any specification or qualification to all possible subjects. It is for this very reason that the former type of universality is an essential feature of the modal aspects – after all, every entity functions in principle in every modal aspect.

### **The modal seat of the terms individuality and universality**

We have seen that without our intuition of the nuclear meaning of number we will not be able to understand the *distinctness* or *individuality* of any entity. As such this notion represents therefore an idea-use or concept-transcending use of the modal meaning of number pointing beyond the limits of this aspect in its reference to the (many-sided) *uniqueness* of entities. The term universality, on the other hand, is only accessible on the basis of our understanding of the irreducible meaning of the spatial mode, because it refers to the spatial notion of *location* – whatever is considered to be universal is supposed to apply *everywhere*, i.e. *universally*. Its use is determined by the spatial time-order of simultaneity (at once).

However, it seems that we here use the term universality in a conceptual sense, at least if we stick to the original modal meaning of space (continuous extension). When we approach the meaning of ‘every’ – in the sense of “all places” – from the perspective of the arithmetical mode, it is impossible to side-step the *deepened numerical meaning of infinity*, given in the idea of an infinity of instances present at once (the “at once infinite” in distinction from the primitive numerical meaning of infinity: the “successive infinite”).<sup>37</sup> In this case we are using the number-idea of the “at once infinite” (traditionally known as the “actual infinite”).

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37 A more detailed discussion of the nature of the infinite is found in *Chapter Two* of a work on the philosophical foundations of the natural sciences (see Strauss, 2004:17-51).

The irreducibility of individuality and universality is therefore ultimately *co-conditioned* by the irreducibility of the aspects of number and space, because these two modes fundamentally mediate our reflection on the generality and particularity of entities. Of course this does not mean that the ontic irreducibility of individuality is ignored or that individuality can be explained fully in modal terms. The idea of an individual entity *precedes* any theoretical account of it (see Dooyeweerd, 1997-III:65).

## 7. Concluding remarks

Contrary to a long-standing tendency to portray the relationship between Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd in fairly diverging terms the present discussion advanced an alternative view, one in which it is argued that these two thinkers in fact are much closer to each other. Unfortunately they did not see through some of the implications of their shared philosophical legacy that could have helped them to realize why there is actually an astonishing convergence to be observed in their philosophical work. Particularly on the basis of the distinction between *conceptual knowledge* and *concept-transcending knowledge* it was possible to highlight this perspective.

What Dooyeweerd has explored with great effect in his wide-reaching confrontation with the philosophical problems of diverse academic disciplines – particularly through his insight into the nature of elementary and compound basic concepts – is latent in Vollenhoven's thought. The nominalistic influence in Dooyeweerd's thought did cause him to 'remove' universality from the factual side of reality and to identify it with God's law as order for, but nonetheless his idea of individuality-structures makes possible an understanding of type laws that leave the mentioned nominalistic indebtedness behind us. However, the implication is that the term "individuality-structure" cannot be maintained since it is burdened by the nominalistic prejudice that stripped factual reality of its universal side. The idea of a type law and the accompanying idea of modal specificity (versus modal individuality) are indeed meaningful improvements taking us beyond the nominalistic legacy.

Although Vollenhoven did not explicitly explore the idea of the modal universality of modal aspects, many of his formulations implicitly support it. His sensitivity for the concurrent presence of universality and individuality safe-guarded him from the nominalistic fallacy but it did not help him sufficiently to account for the difference between modal subjectivity and entities subject to their type laws.

The “quasi-monistic” tendency present in the thought of both Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd, evinced in the apparent preference to come up with “singular” characterizations of God (‘sovereignty’ versus ‘being’), God’s law (‘validity’ versus ‘determining and delimiting’) and created reality (‘subjectivity’ *a la* Toll versus ‘meaning’ – representing Dooyeweerd’s own “linguistic turn”), loses its apparent divisive effect as soon as one realizes to what an extent it rests on a typical category mistake. The moment the modal domains from which these terms are derived are identified it also at once become clear that concept-transcending modes of speech calling upon different modal aspects are not mutually exclusive but actually complementary. This is particularly evident in the apparent difference of opinion regarding the distinction between temporal and supra-temporal, because Dooyeweerd’s frank acknowledgment that the distinction between creational diversity and the central religious dimension could best be phrased differently, actually relativized both the difference of opinion and the distinction itself. For why else would he remark in 1964 that he can tear the hear from his head that he ever used this expression?!

For that reason this article makes a plea for an understanding of the philosophy of the founders of our Reformational philosophical tradition accentuating what they share, and in doing that reduce the differences between them to their true, relatively insignificant proportions when compared with what they share – up to the deepest core of their joint dependence upon the life-giving Spirit of God that passed on to future generations of scholars a dynamic philosophical perspective in service of a fruitful and constructive on-going development of the ideal of Christian scholarship.

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