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# **THE LEGACY OF HERMAN DOOYEWEERD:**

**Reflections on critical  
philosophy in the Christian  
tradition**

# **THE LEGACY OF HERMAN DOOYEWEERD:**

**C.T. McIntire, *editor***



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We wish to thank our colleagues and coworkers on staff as well as the junior members, supporters, and friends of the Institute for Christian Studies, Toronto, for helping to make possible the work that went into these essays. To a large extent these essays are the by-product of our discussions over the years in the Institute's second-year Interdisciplinary Seminar, always a lively experience for both senior and junior members.

We wish to note with thanks the work done on this volume by the production and editorial staff, especially Robert VanderVennen, Kathy Vanderkloet, and Ruth Bruinsma. We thank also the outside readers whose reports offered critical comments which have led to what we hope they will think is an improvement of the text. After the book had gone to the publisher, the essays were presented to a 50th Anniversary Symposium on Herman Dooyeweerd at the Institute in Toronto. We thank the respondents whose valuable criticisms enabled us to catch some of the most glaring faults before the book was published. The editor is particularly grateful to Hendrik Hart who at the end became the "whip" and made the book finally happen.

In a spirit of hope, we wish to dedicate this volume to the junior members of the Institute for Christian Studies, members of the next generation in the community of scholars.

The Authors

## Note

When giving quotations from Herman Dooyeweerd's writings in which italicized words are used extensively, virtually all italics have been dropped.

The following abbreviations are used regularly in the text, notes, and bibliography:

<i>Tw</i>	<i>In the Twilight of Western Thought</i>
<i>NC</i>	<i>A New Critique of Theoretical Thought</i>
<i>Phil. Ref.</i>	<i>Philosophia reformata</i>
<i>Roots</i>	<i>Roots of Western Culture: Pagan, Secular, and Christian Options</i>
<i>WdW</i>	<i>De wijsbegeerte der wetsidee</i>

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# Introduction

C. T. McIntire

HERMAN DOOYEWEERD (1894-1977), legal theorist and philosopher, is one of that small number of thinkers so far in the twentieth century who produced a comprehensive theory capable of inspiring thought in virtually any field of learning. The year 1985 marks the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of the first edition of his great work *De wijsbegeerte der wetsidee* (The philosophy of the law-idea) (1935). The work appeared some years later in the United States in a revised and definitive four-volume edition in English with the title *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* (1953-58).

Like some other thinkers of his day, Dooyeweerd wrote prolifically with encyclopedic versatility and constructed a large-scale, integrated system of thought. He can be compared in this way to the philosophers Jacques Maritain and Bernard Lonergan, the theologian Paul Tillich, the historian Arnold Toynbee, and the social theorists Talcott Parsons and Pitirim Sorokin, all of whom were his contemporaries. Like the theologian-philosopher William Temple, he felt the need for "some general system of thought or map of the intellectual world."

In his own country of the Netherlands, he was a leader among philosophers of all schools of thought. G. E. Langemeijer, professor of law at the University of Leiden, has compared him for originality among Dutch philosophers with Bernard Spinoza, that seventeenth-century thinker from Amsterdam. Dooyeweerd was president of the Society of the Philosophy of Law for many years, a member of the Royal Society of Arts and Sciences of the Netherlands from 1948 until his death, editor of the journal *Philosophia reformata* from 1936 to his death, and twice rector of the Free University of Amsterdam. The year 1985 also marks the fiftieth anniversary of the Vereniging voor

Calvinistische Wijsbegeerte (Society for Calvinist Philosophy) which he helped form with his life-long colleague D. H. T. Vollenhoven (1892-1978).

Although Dooyeweerd enjoyed some influence in Europe outside the Netherlands, he has not been widely known in North America. It is one of the aims of this book of essays to offer an interpretation of Dooyeweerd's philosophy that may help to make it more accessible and interesting to a broader North American audience. Each of us who writes in this volume acknowledges having learned considerably from Dooyeweerd's thought. We wish to explain as best we can what we have found helpful and insightful.

There is a second aim, however. Each of us is also a critic of Dooyeweerd's thought, and we wish to indicate what we have found to be problematic and not compelling. We may be sure that Dooyeweerd would have liked it this way, for he was thoroughly self-critical and understood the scholarly task always to be reforming. Each of us has learned from many other sources in the world of scholarship and the world at large, and we bring some of what we have learned to this discussion. We have come to believe that even by means of criticizing what we consider less helpful, or unhelpful, in Dooyeweerd's thought we may gain understanding and perhaps make some contribution to the ongoing community of scholars.

Dooyeweerd was not formally trained as a philosopher but as a legal scholar. He completed and published his doctoral dissertation at the Free University of Amsterdam in 1917 on *De ministerraad in het Nederlandsche staatsrecht* (The cabinet in Dutch constitutional law). For the next five years he worked as a civil servant, first in the city government of Leiden and then in the national Department of Labor. Between 1922 and 1926 he served as researcher and assistant director of the Abraham Kuyper Institute in The Hague, the nation's capital. The Kuyper Institute was the national policy research center for the Christian political party known as the Anti-revolutionaire Partij. It was during these years that he began to work out his thought in the full context of daily politics and political policy formation. At the same time he turned increasingly toward philosophical concerns.

In 1926 he became a professor of law at the Free University of Amsterdam, a position he held until his retirement in 1965. He taught philosophy of law, the history of Dutch law, and encyclopedia of law mainly to first- and second-year undergraduates, and occasionally he supervised doctoral students. In this setting and together with Vollenhoven, a professor of philosophy at the Free University, he con-



*Herman Dooyeweerd circa 1935*

structed his comprehensive view of philosophy and other scholarly fields. Altogether Dooyeweerd published some 200 books and articles, chief of which was his *New Critique of Theoretical Thought*. Though the great bulk of his scholarship pertained to the fields of law and political theory, his writings covered many other fields as well—ontology, epistemology, social philosophy, philosophy of history, philosophy of science, aesthetics, philosophy of religion, and some theology.

Several of Dooyeweerd's major themes and proposals are the subject matter of this volume of essays. James H. Olthuis examines his views of religion and faith which were identifying features of his philosophy. For Dooyeweerd, religion constitutes the underlying and ultimate motivation of every human activity, including theoretical thought. By religion he did not refer only to what we usually call religion—the well-known world and primal religions—but also to those modern secular religions by which secularly oriented people relate to what they take to be ultimate. Dooyeweerd treated faith as one distinguishable way people express religion. Olthuis suggests that Dooyeweerd's views, because of latent dualism, construe religion to be more otherworldly than he intended.

Calvin G. Seerveld discusses another identifying feature of Dooyeweerd's thought, the theory of modal aspects. It is often this feature people recall first when thinking of Dooyeweerd. Seerveld shows how modal theory was Dooyeweerd's way of explaining the distinctiveness and yet the interconnectedness of everything there is. This has noteworthy implications for aesthetics and is a strong antidote to reductionism of any kind in scholarly thinking. Seerveld identifies weaknesses in Dooyeweerd's idea of aesthetics as concerned with harmony and beauty.

My own essay explores Dooyeweerd's complicated and extraordinary philosophy of history, the invisible dynamic of his system. His theory proposes a comprehensive explanation of how history proceeds and how historical study functions. The theory is not without its appealing elements, but most of it requires second thoughts. Here we meet Dooyeweerd's ideas of time, the historical aspect, and the opening process of history and detect tendencies pointing away from Dooyeweerd's modal explanation of history to a transmodal view.

Paul Marshall takes us to Dooyeweerd's home field, so to speak—political theory and jurisprudence—and introduces his theory of rights. Since much of political theory and even politics centers on

rights, Dooyeweerd's theory becomes very pertinent to contemporary discussion. We learn about sphere sovereignty, the law-subject relation, and the subject-object relation in Dooyeweerd's system.

Hendrik Hart looks at Dooyeweerd's theory of theory and explains his views concerning the difference between theoretical thought and everyday thought. Hart notes that Dooyeweerd hints at a distinction between knowing and thinking which, if pursued further, might yield some attractive results.

The first essay by Albert M. Wolters sets the context for the other essays by identifying two major worlds of influence upon Dooyeweerd. Neo-Calvinism as taught by Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920), the great Christian leader during the previous generation in the Netherlands, provided Dooyeweerd with his religious worldview while the German philosophy of Dooyeweerd's day, especially the schools of neo-Kantianism and phenomenology, gave him a philosophical context in which to debate and construct his own concepts. It is not altogether a simple matter to understand how these two worlds come together in the form of a Christian philosophy.

Dooyeweerd called his work Christian philosophy and meant something more than that he was a Christian engaged in philosophizing. His own Christian commitment was deep and charismatically compelling for others who came to know him or his work. He presented a dynamic vision of all of life as the opportunity to love God and to love our neighbors as ourselves. He understood the world to be God's creation and, as such, intrinsically expressive of meaning. He believed that the evil that people everywhere experience and commit against other people may be overcome through human outworkings of the redemption—the re-creation—of all things in Jesus Christ. He sought to translate this radical vision into philosophical terms, and he intended that his major themes and proposals should be examined in the light of that attempt. His entire work was an empirical effort to understand the character of our world by means of the insights of the Christian religion. He wished to produce, thereby, a philosophy in which Christian insights were not an addition but an integral and identifying characteristic of the thought. His product is not "theology" in the sense of being about God; it is a philosophy, an examination of our world as reality in order to understand its general structure, processes, and character. Whatever we may finally think of his project or of his success in fulfilling it, we can surely do no less than to give his undertaking a hearing, so to speak, and hold ourselves open to experiencing the spiritual and the academic power of his endeavor.

There is no substitute for reading Dooyeweerd's writings, of course. Most of them are in Dutch, however, and almost everyone who reads *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* cries out for more readable English. This four-volume work appeared in a new printing in 1983. A number of introductions to Dooyeweerd's thought exist and are worth reading. Dooyeweerd's own introduction to his thought is *In the Twilight of Western Thought* (1960). His *Roots of Western Culture* (1979) is very readable and can serve as an introduction as well. L. Kalsbeek's *Contours of a Christian Philosophy: An Introduction to Herman Dooyeweerd's Thought* (1975) is excellent. Professor H. J. van Eikema Hommes has written a more technical introduction in Dutch, *Inleiding tot de wijsbegeerte van Herman Dooyeweerd* (Introduction to the philosophy of Herman Dooyeweerd) (1982), which is not yet translated into English. The bibliography gives the details about these books and suggests still further reading.

This volume of essays is intended as a piece of group scholarship. The essays come from our discussions together over the years as senior members at the Institute for Christian Studies, Toronto. They are meant to be read in sequence and reflect our considerable agreement in understanding Dooyeweerd. Nevertheless, a close reader will detect notable differences among us in both interpretation and criticism. We have tried to avoid unnecessary repetition, but since Dooyeweerd's thought hangs together in one system, we have permitted ourselves to crisscross his main concepts more than once throughout the book in order to say what we think might help in defining his views in each essay. We have tried to write as plainly as reference to Dooyeweerd's technical language will permit and to write for both scholars and interested nonscholars whether they know about Dooyeweerd already or not and whether they be Christian or not. We hope the glossary of terms and the index will help; we urge our readers to refer to these often.

We have not attempted to make the volume a complete look at Dooyeweerd's thought. The essays treat prime features and examples of his thought. We might easily have added essays on other important themes, such as his treatments of theology, industry and economics, psychology, the natural sciences, the structure of individual things, and so on. But we think these six essays may be enough to fulfill our general task—to indicate how important matters in Dooyeweerd's thought may be explained, criticized, and used as the basis for some further work. We are exploring the legacy of Herman Dooyeweerd as a critical philosophy in the Christian tradition.

We wish you good reading, if not always easy reading, both in this volume and in Dooyeweerd's writings.

Epiphany 1985



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# Glossary

Albert M. Wolters

THIS GLOSSARY OF HERMAN DOOYEWEERD'S terms is an adapted version of the one published in L. Kalsbeek, *Contours of a Christian Philosophy* (Toronto: Wedge, 1975). It does not give exhaustive technical definitions but hints and pointers for a better understanding. Entries marked with an asterisk are those terms which are used by Dooyeweerd in a way which is unusual in English-speaking philosophical contexts and are, therefore, a potential source of misunderstanding. CAPITALS refer to other entries.

\***ANALOGY** Collective name for a RETROCIPATION or an ANTICIPATION.

\***ANTICIPATION** An ANALOGY within one MODALITY referring to a later modality. An example is "efficiency," a meaning-moment which is found within the historical modality, but which points forward to the later economic modality. Contrast with RETROCIPATION.

\***ANTITHESIS** Used by Dooyeweerd (following Abraham Kuyper) in a specifically religious sense to refer to the fundamental spiritual opposition between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness. See Galatians 5:17. Since this is an opposition between regimes, not realms, it runs through every department of human life and culture, including philosophy and the academic enterprise as a whole, and through the heart of every believer as he or she struggles to live a life of undivided allegiance to God.

**ASPECT** A synonym for MODALITY.

**COSMONOMIC IDEA** Dooyeweerd's own English rendering of the Dutch term *wetsidee*. Occasional equivalents are "transcendental ground idea" or "transcendental basic idea."

**FOUNDING FUNCTION** The earliest of the two modalities which characterize certain types of structural wholes. The other is called the GUIDING FUNCTION. For example, the founding function of the family is the biotic modality.

\***GEGENSTAND** A German word for "object," used by Dooyeweerd as a technical term for a modality when abstracted from the coherence of time and opposed to the analytical function in the theoretical attitude of

thought, thereby establishing the *Gegenstand* relation. *Gegenstand* is therefore the technically precise word for the object of SCIENCE, while "object" itself is reserved for the objects of NAIVE EXPERIENCE.

**GROUND MOTIVE** The Dutch term *grondmotief*, used by Dooyeweerd in the sense of fundamental motivation, driving force. He distinguishes four basic ground motives in the history of Western civilization: (1) form and matter, which dominated pagan Greek philosophy; (2) nature and grace, which underlay medieval Christian synthesis thought; (3) nature and freedom, which has shaped the philosophies of modern times; and (4) creation, fall, and redemption, which lies at the root of a radical and integrally scriptural philosophy.

**GUIDING FUNCTION** The highest subject function of a structural whole (e.g., stone, animal, business enterprise, or state). Except in the case of humans, this function is also said to QUALIFY the structural whole. It is called the *guiding* function because it "guides" or "leads" its earlier functions. For example, the guiding function of a plant is the biotic. The physical function of a plant (as studied, e.g., by biochemistry) is different from physical functioning elsewhere because of its being "guided" by the biotic. Also called "leading function."

**\*HEART** The concentration point of human existence; the supratemporal focus of all human temporal functions; the religious root unity of humans. Dooyeweerd says that it was his rediscovery of the biblical concept of the heart as the central religious depth dimension of human multifaceted life which enabled him to wrestle free from neo-Kantianism and phenomenology. The Scriptures speak of this focal point also as "soul," "spirit," and "inner man." Philosophical equivalents are Ego, I, I-ness, and Selfhood. It is the heart in this sense which survives death, and it is by the religious redirection of the heart in regeneration that all human temporal functions are renewed.

**INDIVIDUALITY STRUCTURE** The general name for the characteristic lawful order of concrete things, as given by virtue of creation. There is an individuality structure for the state, for marriage, for works of art, for mosquitoes, for sodium chloride, and so forth. It must be distinguished from modal structure. A theoretical analysis of the latter is the indispensable precondition for an analysis of individuality structure. See MODALITY.

**IRREDUCIBILITY (IRREDUCIBLE)** Incapability of theoretical reduction. This is the negative way of referring to the *unique distinctiveness* of things which we find everywhere in creation and which theoretical thought must respect. Insofar as everything has its own peculiar created nature and character, it cannot be understood in terms of categories foreign to itself.

**\*LAW** The notion of creational law is central to Dooyeweerd's philosophy. Everything in creation is subject to God's law for it, and accordingly law is the boundary between God and creation. Scriptural synonyms for law are "ordinance," "decree," "commandment," "word," and so on. Dooye-

weerd stresses that law is not in opposition to but the condition for true freedom. See also NORM and LAW SIDE.

**LAW SIDE** The created cosmos, for Dooyeweerd, has two correlative "sides": a law side and a SUBJECT SIDE. The former is simply the aggregate of God's laws or ordinances for creation; the latter is the totality of created reality which is subject to those laws. It is important to note that the law side is unaffected by sin and is always universally valid.

**\*MEANING** Dooyeweerd uses the word "meaning" in an unusual sense. By it he means the referential, in-self-sufficient character of created reality in that it points beyond itself to God as Origin. Dooyeweerd stresses that reality *is* meaning in this sense and that, therefore, it does not *have* meaning. "Meaning" is the Christian alternative to the metaphysical substance of immanence philosophy. "Meaning" becomes almost a synonym for "reality." Note the many compounds formed from it: meaning-nucleus, meaning-side, meaning-moment, meaning-fullness.

**MODALITY** One of the fourteen or fifteen fundamental ways of being distinguished by Dooyeweerd. As *modes* of being, they are sharply distinguished from the concrete *things* to which they belong. [For the identification of the modes, see Calvin G. Seerveld's essay in this volume, notes 35, 60, and 77.]

**\*NAIVE EXPERIENCE** Human experience insofar as it is not "theoretical" in Dooyeweerd's precise sense. "Naive" does not mean unsophisticated. Sometimes called "ordinary" or "everyday" experience. Dooyeweerd is at pains to emphasize that theory is embedded in this everyday experience and must not violate it.

**NORM (NORMATIVE)** Postpsychical laws, that is, modal laws for the analytical through pistical law-spheres. These laws are norms because they need to be positivized (see POSITIVIZE) and can be violated, in distinction from the "natural laws" of the preanalytical spheres which are obeyed involuntarily (e.g., in a digestive process).

**\*OBJECT** Something qualified by an object function and thus correlated to a subject function. A work of art, for instance, is qualified by its correlation to the human subjective function of aesthetic appreciation. Similarly, the elements of a sacrament are pistical objects.

**OPENING PROCESS** The process by which latent modal anticipations are "opened" or actualized. The modal meaning is then said to be "deepened." It is this process which makes possible the cultural development (differentiation) of society from a primitive ("closed," undifferentiated) stage. For example, by the opening or disclosure of the ethical anticipation in the juridical, the modal meaning of justice is deepened and society can move from the principle of "an eye for an eye" to the consideration of extenuating circumstances in the administration of justice.

**\*PHILOSOPHY** In Dooyeweerd's precise systematic terminology, philosophy is the encyclopedic science, that is, its proper task is the theoretical investigation of the overall systematic integration of the various scientific disciplines and their fields of inquiry. Dooyeweerd also uses the term in a

more inclusive sense, especially when he points out that all philosophy is rooted in a pretheoretical religious commitment and that some philosophical conception, in turn, lies at the root of all special scientific scholarship.

**POSITIVIZE** A word coined to translate the Dutch word *positiveren*, which means to make positive in the sense of being actually valid in a given time or place. For example, positive law is the legislation which is in force in a given country at a particular time; it is contrasted with the *principles* of justice which lawmakers must positivize as legislation. In a general sense, it refers to the responsible implementation of all normative principles in human life as embodied, for example, in state legislation, economic policy, ethical guidelines, and so on.

**QUALIFY** The GUIDING FUNCTION of a thing is said to *qualify* it in the sense of characterizing it. In this sense a plant is said to be qualified by the biotic and a state by the juridical.

**\*RELIGION (RELIGIOUS)** For Dooyeweerd, religion is not an area or sphere of life but the whole of it. It is service of God (or a substitute no-god) in every domain of human endeavor. As such, it is to be sharply distinguished from religious *faith*, which is but one of the many acts and attitudes of human existence. Religion is an affair of the HEART and so directs all human functions.

**\*RETROCIPATION** A feature in one modality which refers to, is reminiscent of, an earlier one, yet retaining the modal qualification of the aspect in which it is found. The "extention" of a concept, for example, is a kind of logical space: it is a strictly logical affair, and yet it harks back to the spatial modality in its original sense. See ANTICIPATION.

**\*SCIENCE** Two things are to be noted about Dooyeweerd's use of the term "science." In the first place, as a translation of the Dutch word *wetenschap* (analogous to the German word *Wissenschaft*), it embraces all scholarly study—not only the natural sciences but also the social sciences and the humanities, including theology and philosophy. In the second place, science is always, strictly speaking, a matter of modal abstraction, that is, of analytically lifting an aspect out of the temporal coherence in which it is found and examining it in the *Gegenstand* relation. As such, it must be distinguished from NAIVE EXPERIENCE. In the first sense, therefore, "science" has a wider application in Dooyeweerd than is usual in English-speaking countries, but in the second sense it has a more restricted, technical meaning.

**SPHERE SOVEREIGNTY** A translation of Kuyper's phrase *soevereiniteit in eigen kring*, by which he meant that the various distinct spheres of human authority (such as family, church, school, and business enterprise) each have their own responsibility and decision-making power which may not be usurped by those in authority in another sphere, for example, the state. Dooyeweerd retains this usage but also extends it to mean the IRREDUCIBILITY of the modal aspects. This is the ontological principle on which the sociological principle is based since each of the

societal “spheres” mentioned is qualified by a different irreducible modality.

**\*SUBJECT** Used in two senses by Dooyeweerd: (1) as distinguished from LAW (subject<sup>a</sup>); (2) as distinguished from OBJECT (subject<sup>b</sup>). The latter sense is roughly equivalent to common usage; the former is unusual and confusing. Since *all* things are “subject” to LAW, objects are also subjects in the first sense.

**SUBJECT SIDE** The correlate of LAW SIDE. Since sin is disobedience to the LAW, we find sin only on the subject side of the cosmos. Another feature of the subject side is that it is only here that *individuality* is found.

**\*SYNTHESIS** The combination, in a single philosophical conception, of characteristic themes from both pagan philosophy and biblical religion. It is this feature of the Christian intellectual tradition present since patristic times, with which Dooyeweerd wants to make a radical break.

**\*TIME** In Dooyeweerd, a general ontological principle of intermodal continuity, with far wider application than our common notion of time, which is equated by him with the physical manifestation of this general cosmic time. It is, therefore, not coordinate with space. All created things, except the human HEART, are in time.

# Select Bibliography

## Works by and about Herman Dooyeweerd

### I. Works by Herman Dooyeweerd

A nearly complete bibliography of Dooyeweerd's writings through 1977 is published in Hendrik J. van Eikema Hommes, *Inleiding tot de wijsbegeerte van Herman Dooyeweerd* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1982), 126-48. What follows, arranged in chronological order, includes all his books plus a few important articles or series of articles.

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