

REPLY TO J. GLENN FRIESEN

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Introduction

Although Friesen's recent article on "Clouser's Aristotelian Interpretation of Dooyeweerd" (in this journal, volume 75(2010), 97-116) directs its criticisms mainly to me, I will not be at pains in what follows to reply to all of them. What I will concentrate upon instead is the correct understanding of Dooyeweerd. It is far more important that readers of this journal get Dooyeweerd straight than that they get me straight, and Friesen has proposed a number of misconstruals of fundamental concepts and ideas in Dooyeweerd's philosophy. Therefore, in part one I will try to clear up only a few of the more glaring misrepresentations of my position in order to clear the way for considering the more serious misunderstandings of Dooyeweerd in part two. Part three will focus on Friesen's pantheism.

1. *Friesen's criticisms of me*

Let me begin, then, by stating that I am not now, and never have been, a card-carrying Aristotelian. It's not even true that I once said Dooyeweerd's ontology and Aristotle's are "strikingly similar," despite the fact that Friesen put quote marks around those two words in his second sentence as though he were quoting me. What I said was that the philosophies of both men are "strikingly parallel ... in that they both raise many of the same questions and both regard identifying the divine as the linchpin of their theories" (Clouser 2009, 22). As you can see, that remark doesn't come within miles of suggesting that their ontologies are similar in *content*. But, then, neither is it the case that two ontologies somehow must be similar in content, as Friesen goes on to say, if they both begin by abstracting properties from the concrete things of pre-theoretical experience. Everyone abstracts from pre-theoretical data every day, and the fact that we do so is not a theory; it is not an explanatory guess we invent, but an action we can all be aware of performing. Moreover, no theory whatever can avoid beginning with such abstractions, which is why none ever has done. But merely starting with that activity doesn't all by itself force any theory of reality developed subsequently to be the same as any other, which is the reason Friesen gives for calling me an Aristotelian.

All theories also depend upon abstracting *kinds* of properties as well as individual properties. So, for example, we can not only abstract weight, shape, and color from concrete things but we can also recognize weight as a physical

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property, shape as a spatial property, and color as a sensory property. These over-arching kinds should not, however, be confused with logical classes as Friesen does, and then falsely attributes that mistake to me. A kind is not the same as a class. Everything that is a member of a class is so necessarily, because it is defined by that class (the definition of a class is the linguistic statement of the contents of the concept of that class). But instances of a kind are not defined by that kind, and so are not instantiations of it by definition. For example, the lamp on my desk has physical weight, but simply recognizing it as a (partly) physical thing doesn't define what it is to be a lamp. So the lamp's being an instance of something that belongs to the kind "physical" cannot be the same as its being a member of any class. The same holds if we shift from an individual lamp to speaking of the class of all lamps. Lamps cannot be a subclass under the wider class "physical" any more than "heavy" can be a subclass under "physical" — as Friesen explicitly says (on page 109 of the said article).

Besides, the aspectual qualifiers all by themselves cannot pick out a class because they're adjectives not nouns, though we can conjoin them with nouns to form class terms. So while "physical" is not a class "physical things" is, and a lamp is indeed a member of the class "physical things." But although that would be a correct classification (since a lamp has physical properties *inter alia*), on Dooyeweerd's theory of aspects it would be completely worthless. On Dooyeweerd's theory every created entity has properties of every aspectual kind, so that any class term formed by using an aspectual qualifier would have every entity in creation as its members. But in that case such classes ("quantitative things," "spatial things," "physical things," etc.) would all be worthless because none would distinguish any particular set of things from any other. Since they would all refer to every concrete entity whatever, they would fail to pick out and classify anything. Notice that if we try the same ploy with kinds of properties rather than concrete entities, a similar failure occurs. Regarded as a class, an aspectual qualifier plus the term "property" would be true of all its members and would distinguish them from properties of other kinds. But it still couldn't define any of its members and so would also fail to be a class. For example, "weight" is a physical property and so is "density" but simply classifying them as "physical" won't even distinguish them from one another let alone define either of them. So it makes no difference to my point whether aspectual qualifiers are used of concrete things or abstracted properties: in either case they connote kinds rather than denote classes.

By the way, this topic and its surrounding issues are important for Dooyeweerd's theory since his theory of modal aspects is committed to the reality (but not reification) of natural kinds precisely because aspects are natural kinds *in excelsis*. In this respect his theory is completely opposed to nominalism. But in order to defend it against nominalism it is crucial not to confuse a kind with a class.

It is also not true that simply recognizing the fact that things, events, states of affairs, etc., have properties, commits anyone to any particular ontology — let alone to a substance theory as Friesen alleges (page 108). Once again: no

one can fail to notice that things have properties or fail to deal with kinds of them in constructing any theory of science or philosophy. Dooyeweerd, too, spoke of properties, and Friesen's quote of Dooyeweerd to show this is not so (page 106-107) doesn't say what he tells his readers it says. What Dooyeweerd objects to in the quote is the way a substance theory elevates one or two kinds of properties to the status of substance, and correspondingly demotes the remaining kinds to being "accidental properties." Merely acknowledging that things have properties does not require anyone to take such a view of them, and I do not hold a substance ontology as anyone who has read *The Myth of Religious Neutrality* knows:

... it is self-performatively incoherent to abstract a kind of properties, regard its resulting isolation as real independence, and thus proclaim it to be the essential identity of things rather than just an aspect of them. (Clouser 2005, 249)

[Dooyeweerd's] theory gives us a way to account for the natures of things without needing the idea that things have a "substance." The direction of thought away from this concept took its impetus from the biblical idea that nothing in creation exists independently ... there is nothing in creatures that causes them what they are. It is God who causes them to be what they are. (Clouser 2005, 262)

Thus there is no reason whatever for anyone to think that I hold either an Aristotelian view of properties or a substance ontology, and I call your attention to the fact that no reference to my work is offered by Friesen to show that I do. The allegation is not only false but utterly unsubstantiated.

Equally false is the accusation that I regard an aspect as a *genus*. I have already explained why aspects are not to be regarded as classes at all, so they are neither *genera* nor *species*. In fact, I never did think that, so I know it's not in the letter which Friesen says shows it is my view (but does not quote). Furthermore, according to Dooyeweerd, logically distinguishing aspects is essential to the ontology he developed, so the mere fact that I also use logic does not entitle Friesen to project onto me any meta-logical view he wishes. He does this explicitly when he says that by using "a formal logical way of describing aspects as meta-properties" I am "therefore using the idea of a "kind" of properties, or "*genus*," or meta-property in order to *define* the modality..." (page 109) But merely calling the meaning nuclei of aspects "meta-properties" does not make distinguishing them equivalent to defining an aspect. It is not the case that if someone uses "meta-property" instead of "meaning kernel" he must automatically be attempting to define an entire aspect, whereas if he uses "meaning kernel" or "meaning nucleus" he is not.

With respect to this charge, too, Friesen offers no citation to show that I have used a "formal logical way of describing aspects" (page 109), and since I have no idea what that is supposed to mean I will not attempt a reply to it. What is clear, however, is that immediately following that allegation he enmeshes himself in a gross confusion between distinguishing and defining. No one has to have a definition of a thing in order to distinguish it from other things; distinguishing is a pre-condition for defining but not equivalent to it. We can distinguish a tree from a gila monster, e.g., even if we don't know a

definition for either. The aspectual meta-properties surely do differentiate aspects, but it doesn't follow that they therefore *define* them, and I never suggested that they do. Entire aspects could only be defined if we had concepts of them which we do not. Neither does it follow from the fact that I distinguished the meaning nuclei of the aspects (as did Dooyeweerd), that I hold an Aristotelian view of logic. Such a charge is directly analogous to claiming that if someone adds a list of numbers in order to balance his checkbook he must be a Pythagorean. (Just for the record: I do not use Aristotelian logic in my work, but modern symbolic logic which I both interpret and employ in a non-reductionist way.)

It is also false that I do now or ever did hold that we can have a concept of aspectual qualifiers such as "quantitative," "spatial," "physical," etc. Rather, I explained them as limiting ideas that cannot be concepts (Clouser 2005, 225-227). So this accusation is not only unsubstantiated because no quote is given to show it is my position, but is also contradicted by what I've explicitly said. Furthermore, it is also utterly without foundation to say that the ideas which qualify aspects are ones I attempt to see in "a purely logical way" (Friesen 2010, 109). How could anyone deal with the ideas central to many different aspects, but do so by seeing them all as of one aspect only? Once again, there is no reference given to my work to show I hold such a blatant self-contradiction. These allegations are not only unsupported, but completely ignore what I have repeatedly written.

Friesen further alleges that I have confused the epistemological (mental) separation of aspects by abstraction with their real, ontical separation (page 101-102). Once again, he gives no reference for where I'm supposed to have done that and, once again, I'm certain I never did. This time, however, my certainty stems from the fact that what he accuses me of literally makes no sense. *Of course* what is at stake in the transcendental critique is the *mental* isolation of aspects. It couldn't be anything else! What on earth could possibly be meant by their *ontical* isolation? Has anyone ever thought he could sit down with, say, a rock and peel off one of its aspects? For sure there are thinkers who have mentally abstracted an aspect and then proposed the hypothesis that its mental distinctness *be regarded as corresponding* to its real, ontical independence. In fact, it's a major point of Dooyeweerd's critique to attack exactly that practice, and I proposed a new argument in support of him on that point in my 2009 article in this journal. But that's not the same as *really* stripping an object of every property it possesses in any one particular aspect! Who has ever supposed he could even make sense of such a suggestion? And just where am I supposed to have done that?

Yet other unsubstantiated allegations are offered in this section of the article (page 104-105) which is so rife with confusions that I don't want to take the space to unravel them all. But one which I cannot let him get away with is the claim (page 108) that I have tried to portray aspects in "purely logical terms." This is similar to the charge mentioned earlier to the effect that I was trying to *define* aspects in a purely logical way, though it is now eased to say I merely "portray" them "in purely logical terms." This allegation is also unsupported by

any reference to any text I have written for a very simple reason: I have never written any such thing. And the reason I haven't is, once again, that it literally makes no sense. How could different aspects be described in terms drawn from only one of them? How could anyone "portray," say, the spatial, physical, or biotic aspects with terms drawn only from logic when confining oneself to purely logical terms would even forbid the use of the terms "spatial," "physical," and "biotic"? Finally, please notice that the citation Friesen offers from Dooyeweerd (page 109) as though it supports his allegation, has nothing to do with my work as nothing I have ever advocated or assumed the type of logicism which Dooyeweerd rejects in that quote. By appealing to these remarks of Dooyeweerd, Friesen shows that he doesn't understand the difference between using logic and assuming logicism.¹ By contrast, Dooyeweerd himself never confused the two, but insisted on the use of logic: "no judgment can be a-logical." (Dooyeweerd 1955-1958, I, 153)

There are other equally gratuitous and false allegations I will not go into for the sake of brevity,² but will instead close this section with some general remarks about Friesen's use of the letters between Dooyeweerd and me.

First, those letters were all written against the background of extensive personal conversations. In the summer of 1967, I had about a dozen meetings with Dooyeweerd at his home of roughly 2½ to 3 hours each. I then completed a draft of my dissertation on him, and returned to the Netherlands from the end of August through most of September of 1971 to go over the draft with him. During that latter period I saw him at his home twice a week so that we had about nine more sessions of 2½ to 3 hours each. The letters were all in reference to those sessions, and cannot be understood correctly apart from them. In many of them I bring up the objections of a member of my PhD committee, Paul Fitzgerald, who was an atheist and the least in sympathy with the dissertation among the committee members. So when my letters raised objections to Dooyeweerd's position of the form "How then would we explain X?" or "Why can't a theory just as plausibly maintain X as what you propose?" or "How can we show this list of aspects to be the correct one?" Dooyeweerd understood them to be coming from Fitzgerald. All Fitzgerald's criticisms were from a nominalist point of view, so the task for me was to intensify a Dooyeweerdian critique of nominalism. Dooyeweerd understood all that. When we reconvened in 1971 he said: "Mr. Fitzgerald has really been giving you a hard time."

Second, what I wrote in those letters is really irrelevant to the issues now before us and to my published understanding of Dooyeweerd. I've just explained that the views I was expressing in them were most often not my own. But what if they were? Suppose they were *all* mine. Suppose that prior to our conferences of 1971 I was totally confused about the WdW. So what? Why should

¹ The reference Friesen gives is *NC* 3, 24. But what Dooyeweerd objects to there is the way Russell wanted to "replace both the concept of a thing and that of substance" with "a logical structure of relations." Just where am I supposed to have done *that*?

² For example, I'm supposed to have confused the function of a concrete thing within an aspect with the aspect itself (page 101). I have no idea what the grounds for this charge are since the reference given to show it (Clouser 2009, 29, fn. 25) is non-existent.

anyone now care what I thought in 1971? Why attribute those views to me now, after Dooyeweerd's approval of my dissertation and after the publication of *The Myth of Religious Neutrality*? And why, in pretending to represent my present views to his readers, does Friesen confine himself almost exclusively to letters from over 40 years ago but not make a single reference to my dissertation or the new edition of my book, and to only one of the numerous articles I have written on Dooyeweerd's philosophy?³

Lastly, there is the matter of Dooyeweerd's approval of my dissertation alluded to in the previous paragraph. That was one of the conditions under which I was permitted to write a dissertation on him at the University of Pennsylvania. My advisor, James Ross, told me he'd approve such a dissertation on two conditions. One was that I go to Amsterdam and work on it with Dooyeweerd; the other was that Dooyeweerd write him a letter saying that I had correctly represented his views. Ross put this in his own inimitable way: "Nobody here is going to read all that stuff and examine you on whether you got him right. If he writes to me and says you got him right, then we'll examine you on whether you think he *is* right." At the close of our last session together in 1971, as Dooyeweerd saw me to the door, he said: "I've written the letter to Prof. Ross that he required." And after I returned to Philadelphia, Ross told me he'd received Dooyeweerd's letter. So no matter how anyone now decides to understand the letters between me and Dooyeweerd, my dissertation was approved by Dooyeweerd as correctly representing him. And that includes my representation of his views of abstraction, the definition of "aspect," and of the religious control of theories.

2. Friesen's misunderstandings of Dooyeweerd

I turn now to the more important substantive misunderstandings of Dooyeweerd evidenced in Friesen's article, and will deal first with the definition of an "aspect."

In the time between the summer of 1967 and my return to Amsterdam in 1971, Ross pressed me for a more precise definition of an "aspect." After thinking about that for a while, the definition that occurred to me was: "a basic kind of properties and laws." Excited to think I might have contributed a small clarification to the WdW, I proposed that definition to Dooyeweerd in a letter. In his reply Dooyeweerd rejected the definition. I was puzzled. The more I

³ In addition to the 2009 article in this journal, there are also the following: 1) 'A New Philosophical Guide to the Sciences: Ontology without Reduction', *The Global Spiral*, July 2009; 2) 'A Brief Sketch of the Philosophy of Herman Dooyeweerd', *Axiomathes*, July 2009, 1-28; 3) 'A Blueprint for a Non-Reductionist Theory of Reality', *Transdisciplinarity in Science and Religion*, ed. E. Weislogel, (Bucharest: Curtea Vecce Pub. Co., 2008), 27-58; 4) 'Prospects for Theistic Science', *Science and Faith in Christian Perspective*, vol. 58, no.1, March 2006, 2-27; 5) 'On the General Relation of Religion, Metaphysics, and Science', *Facets of Faith and Science*, ed. J vander Meer (Lanham: University Press of America, 1996), 57-80; 6) 'A Sketch of Dooyeweerd's Philosophy of Science', *Ibid*, 81-98; 7) 'The Uniqueness of Dooyeweerd's Program for Philosophy and Science: Whence the Difference?', *Christian Philosophy at the Close of the Twentieth Century*, ed. S. Griffioen & B. M. Balk (Netherlands: Kampen, Kok, 1995), 113-125.

thought about it, the more the definition made sense, and Ross thought so too. So it was the first thing I brought up in conversation when we reconvened in August of 1971. The conversation went this way:

- D: “No I cannot agree that an aspect is a kind of properties.”
 RC: “Oh, I agree that would not be adequate. What I was proposing was “a basic kind of properties *and laws*.”
 D., after a long pause: “Alright, *kind*.”
 RC: “Yes, *kind*.”
 D: “Alright then. But why do you think you need to say that?”
 RC: “Because my advisor is pressing me for a definition.”

In the rest of our discussions that month, this continued to be the definition we used and assumed in all our conversations and it was, as I said, included it in the dissertation which Dooyeweerd then approved in writing to James Ross. So I can say without reservation that Dooyeweerd did indeed endorse that definition.

But this can't be surprising. Dooyeweerd himself often spoke of aspects not only as spheres of law, but as including “qualities,” “characteristics,” “features”, or “properties”, using those terms interchangeably. Here is a small sampling:

1. Speaking of a concrete thing he says: “We know of the logical features that distinguish it from other things. We are also conscious of its cultural properties, its name, its value in social life, its economic and aesthetic qualities, and so on.” (Dooyeweerd 2004, 2, 83.)
2. “The objective logical features and the objective beauty of the rose, its cultural properties, economic scarcity and worth, its possibility of becoming the object of property rights — all these things are regarded in pre-theoretical experience as belonging to the full reality of the rose, even though the aspects that contain these objective qualities require the application of normative standards.” (Dooyeweerd 2004, 2, 96)
3. “The properties of physical space are determined by matter as moving mass.” (Dooyeweerd 2002, 1, 107)
4. “This moment corresponds to the sensory space of awareness in which one observes colors, sounds, hardness, or softness, and other properties that are perceived by the senses. (Dooyeweerd 2002, 1, 46)
5. “To think of their existence apart from humankind, one would need to eliminate all the logical, cultural, aesthetic, and other properties that relate them to humankind.” (Dooyeweerd 2003, 30)

These alone are sufficient to show that Dooyeweerd thought of aspects as distinct kinds of properties and laws long before I proposed that formulation. (Notice, too, that if Friesen were correct in his claim that regarding aspects as kinds which include properties requires a substance ontology, it would follow that Dooyeweerd himself must have had just such an ontology — which is absurd.)

The second issue has to do with whether Dooyeweerd's view is that aspects are known by abstraction from the concrete things of pre-theoretical

experience. Friesen's denial of this is nothing less than astonishing. He first quotes my 2009 article in this journal in order to disagree with it for describing abstraction this way:

...we can intensify the focus of our attention and actually isolate properties... thinking of them apart from... any... concrete thing that could possess them. (Clouser, 2009, 36)

Then he adds: "But this is not Dooyeweerd's view." (Friesen 2010, 111) and goes on to deny explicitly that aspects are abstracted from concrete things *at all*. The reason this is astonishing is because Dooyeweerd so clearly says exactly what Friesen denies. First, as to whether there are degrees of abstraction, Dooyeweerd (1955-1958, II, 469) says:

In the primary analytical [epoche'] the Gegenstand may be conceived in a larger or lesser degree of abstraction... "

As to whether the focussing of attention is involved, we find on page 471:

...the deepened analytic function can make the pre-logical law spheres into its Gegenstand... This concentration originates from the actual direction of theoretical attention which cannot be explained in a purely modal analytical way...

And as to whether aspects are abstracted from concrete things Dooyeweerd (2003,45) says:

A child... may learn to count by moving the red and white beads of an abacus. Such a child begins to learn numerical relationships by means of the beads, but soon sets the abacus aside in order to focus on the numerical relationships themselves. This process requires a theoretical abstraction... To carry out such theoretical analysis, [the child] must subtract something from the full, given, reality... In everyday experience reality does not present itself in those aspects that thought chooses to abstract from it, but in...the *individual totalities*, such as things, events, acts, and societal relationships...

These are sufficient to show that Dooyeweerd did in fact think there are degrees of abstraction, that the focussing of attention is part of the act of abstraction, and that aspects are abstracted from individual concrete things and events.

Secondly, the denial of this point is puzzling because I already showed (Clouser 2009, 33n) that the reference in Dooyeweerd which Friesen offers to show that aspects are not abstracted from concrete things does not say that. Rather than denying that entire aspects are abstracted, it only denies that an aspect's *structure* — its laws, anticipations, and retrocipations — can be discovered by "an ever-continuing abstraction from the concrete experience of reality." What this tells us is that although entire aspects *are* abstracted from the concrete data of pre-theoretical experience, the internal structural arrangement of their constituents cannot be reached by continuing the same process of thought. For Dooyeweerd, then, the "structure" of an aspect does not include its qualifying meta-property and so is not the same as an entire aspect. Dooyeweerd (1947, 46) says this explicitly:

What is a structure? It is an architectonic plan according to which a diversity of “moments” is united in a totality. And that is only possible so long as the different “moments” do not occupy the same place in the totality but are rather knit together by a directive and central “moment”...which cannot be logically defined because by it an aspect maintains its individuality with regard to all the other aspects of reality...We call this directive moment the “nuclear moment.”

Friesen had mistaken “modal structure” for an entire aspect in an earlier work (Friesen 2005, 9), which is what had led me to point out this confusion. So it is significant that he has here simply repeated the same mistake with nothing more to support it than the same misunderstood citation from Dooyeweerd. There is no reply to the distinction between an entire aspect and its structure, nor any explanation offered for all the references I gave in which Dooyeweerd says that aspects are, indeed, abstracted from the concrete things of pre-theoretical experience. As I put it then:

We have already seen that Dooyeweerd’s formulation of the most basic problem of philosophy is phrased in just the way Friesen denies: “The first transcendental basic problem...is... what do we abstract... from the structures of empirical reality as those structures are given in naïve experience?” (NC, 1, 41) Dooyeweerd’s answer on the pages that follow is “aspects.” Elsewhere he makes the same point as clearly as possible. He offers as an example of a concrete event the act of buying cigars, and says: “Each aspect of the concrete transaction which took place in the cigar shop is abstracted from concrete temporal reality.” (Dooyeweerd 2002, 15) And again, he says: “Wherever... we abstract in our thinking a Gegenstand out of concrete reality, we are not dealing with naïve but with the theoretical attitude of thought.” (2002, 28). Dooyeweerd (2004, 2, 251) repeats this same point: “When one abstracts quantity, spatial extension, and the other modal characteristics... from the full reality of the tree there is nothing left of it. It is entirely enclosed within the temporal horizon of reality which only tolerates individual totalities with the diversity of aspects.” and “...a modal function [is] abstracted from the typical structures of individuality.” (NC, 1, 554). See also NC, 1: 552-553; 2: 84-85, 371, 418, 431-433, 460, 468-469, 470-471, 556, 561; 3: 26, 29, 64-65, 145, 264.” (Clouser 2009, 33)

Notice that we now have seen over 20 references cited in the last two pages in which Dooyeweerd explicitly states that aspects are abstracted from the individual concrete data of pre-theoretical experience, and they are not the only places where he says it. So it’s a point he could not have made clearer. It appears not only in all his major works, but was already in place in the early formulations of his philosophy: “In the theoretical... attitude of thought logical analysis is directed *first of all* upon the... aspects themselves, which are pried asunder into... discontinuity... and abstracted from their given, continuous, systematic coherence.” (Dooyeweerd 1941, 5,6)

Rather than correct his error, however, Friesen has now compounded it. He actually claims that Dooyeweerd *couldn’t* have held that we abstract aspects from naïve experience because “In pre-theoretical experience we do not even have an implicit knowledge of the aspects...Thus, it is totally incorrect to say that in pre-theoretical thought we have knowledge of a thing with its properties, and that in theory we focus on just the properties in order to arrive at the aspects.” (Friesen 2010, 111)

Part of this is confused and part is flatly false. It is confused in that it reports me as saying that we distinguish the properties of a thing “in theory” when what I said was that we do so “in abstraction.” On my view, abstraction does not always result in a theory nor do all theories employ abstraction; we may or may not focus on properties “in order to arrive at aspects.” The purposes of abstraction can vary (Clouser 2009, 25n). The part that’s flat-out false is the misrepresentation of Dooyeweerd as to whether we have an implicit awareness of aspects in pre-theoretical thought. I have already quoted Dooyeweerd at length about aspects being abstracted from concrete data, so once again I’ll let him speak for himself. In *Christian Philosophy and the Meaning of History* (1996) Dooyeweerd says:

All these aspects are *implicitly* experienced in relation to things and events as integral entities, and not *explicitly* as they would be in consequence of distinguishing them theoretically.” (9) “Naïve experience leaves the structures of empirical experience intact. Though it does not understand these aspects explicitly in a conceptual way, it does have an implicit awareness of them. (10)

Lastly, I will treat what is perhaps the most important point of all, namely, Dooyeweerd’s view of religious belief and of the religious control of theory making. Here, too, Friesen both misses what is crucial in Dooyeweerd and attributes to me views I don’t hold.

It should be clear to any reader of the *New Critique* that Dooyeweerd characterizes a belief in anything as the Origin of all else as a “religious” belief. It is for this reason he often speaks of the Origin as “divine” or as “Absolute.” No doubt he was influenced in this terminology by Calvin’s remark about God: “That from which all other things derive their origin must necessarily be self-existent and eternal.” (*Inst.* I, v, 7) Some belief or other about the nature of the Origin of all else cannot be avoided by philosophy, according to Dooyeweerd (1955-1958, 1, 11):

Thus, a two-fold pre-supposition of philosophical thought is discovered at the outset. In the first place, [it] pre-supposes an *Archimedean point* for the thinker ... Secondly, it presupposes a choice of position... in the face of the [Origin] which *transcends all meaning* and in which our ego comes to rest in the process of philosophical thought.

The presupposition concerning the divine Origin is what I have termed a “divinity belief.” I prefer that term to “religious belief” for the simple reason that there are many more beliefs in any religion than just its divinity belief. Beliefs about holy days, sacraments, meditation, and rites are also religious beliefs but are not what Dooyeweerd sees as controlling theory making.

But Friesen misses all this. In his haste to accuse me of misunderstanding Dooyeweerd, he says that I’m wrong to think that Dooyeweerd was concerned with subjective presuppositions rather than the “ontical conditions that provide the basis for all temporal reality...” (page 113). But as you can see, belief is exactly what Dooyeweerd is concerned with in the section quoted above. Moreover, Friesen goes on to say I am also wrong to understand Dooyeweerd as using “religious” only in connection with what is believed to be divine, and in thinking that the neutrality he denies to theories is only neutrality with respect

to divinity beliefs. On the contrary, Friesen insists, Dooyeweerd's idea of "religious" and "religious neutrality" always includes "the ontical position of the supra-temporal heart." (page 113)

I am not surprised that Friesen gives no reference to back up that last claim because it is a straightforward mistake. The human heart is, on Dooyeweerd's view, what believes and what makes theories. It is *religious* because of the position it takes with respect to the divine Origin, but that doesn't make *religion* about the heart itself and its ontic status. As Dooyeweerd (1955-1958, 1, 20) says concerning the heart's choice of Origin in an ontology: "And it is a *religious* act, just because it contains a choice in *the concentration point* of our existence in the face of the Origin of meaning." So it is, indeed, being about the divine Origin — real or pretended — that renders religious both the orientation of the heart and any acts of belief or choice arising from that orientation. This is a point I have repeatedly explained, so Friesen is also in error when he attributes to me the opinion that "religious belief" refers only to temporal acts of faith (page 113).⁴ I have always made it clear (Clouser 2005, 283) that I was using the term not merely for concrete acts of belief but also with the recognition that such beliefs arise from the orientation of the heart. As I put it in the 2009 article:

It should be emphasized that Dooyeweerd was careful to distinguish any concrete act of divinity belief from the disposition of the heart which is its basis. The heart's disposition he called its "ground-motive" (*NC*, 2, 304). It is the ground-motive of the heart that both gives rise to specific acts of belief and drives ontologies.

Nevertheless, it is worth noting that Dooyeweerd himself often spoke of religious "belief" as controlling theory making:

The view that it is possible to find a *hold on reality which is neutral with respect to belief* will prove to be a fundamental error. (Dooyeweerd 1955-1958, II, 305)

What is perhaps the most troubling mistake of all, however, is Friesen's denial of the view that Dooyeweerd expresses in this last quote. It is the view I described by saying that for Dooyeweerd theory making is always regulated by some divinity belief or other. Friesen jumps to the accusation that because Kant used the term "regulation," I must be using it in a Kantian sense when I describe Dooyeweerd's agenda — a clear *non sequitur*. But to miss the claim that one or another divinity belief always controls theory making is to miss the very heart of Dooyeweerd's philosophy and the central point of his critique of thought. Anyone missing that point is guaranteed to misunderstand what is going on in the *New Critique* and his other major works, for it means missing the nature of the very *project* he is engaged in. Consider how clearly Friesen confirms this misunderstanding when he says on page 112:

Dooyeweerd's critique of theoretical thought goes much deeper than merely adding divinity beliefs in order to regulate theory.

⁴ Friesen then closes page 113 by confusing Dooyeweerd's idea of religious ground-motive with his notion of ground-idea, and mistaking ground-motives as theoretical.

This gets Dooyeweerd's project wrong in two ways at once. First, Dooyeweerd doesn't merely "add" divinity beliefs to theories but makes the case that one or another cannot be avoided by any theorists — no matter how much they may wish to. And second, Dooyeweerd then demonstrates the sense in which it is unavoidable that every theoretical concept must be interpreted differently relative to the divinity belief it presupposes, and I have explained how this is true of pre-theoretical as well as theoretical concepts (Clouser 2005, 79 ff and 2009, 44-45). So there can be no excuse for confusing this with regulation in the Kantian sense. It is not the regulation of human *behavior* by beliefs which cannot be known to be true, as it was for Kant. It is rather a *religious* regulation in which belief in God (or a false God-surrogate) pervasively controls the formation of all ideas and concepts. Moreover, when it is belief in God that controls concept-formation, it is a belief that is known to be true. For Dooyeweerd, the revealed ideas of God and the human heart, along with the idea of sphere sovereignty inferred from revelation, must regulate the formation of every concept and idea for Christian philosophy by requiring only non-reductionist concepts and ideas of everything.

3. *The role of panentheism in Friesen's misconstrual of Dooyeweerd*

Of course, the unacknowledged five hundred pound gorilla in the room through this exchange so far has been Friesen's panentheist agenda. It is his prior commitment to that view, and his determination to bend Dooyeweerd's thought to support it, that has resulted in his repeated denials that Dooyeweerd says X in the face of numerous places where Dooyeweerd says X. It is also painfully evident in his egregious misreadings of what Dooyeweerd does say. For example, in a posting on Thinknet from December 17, 2003 Friesen cited the footnote in II, 53 of the *New Critique* to show that Dooyeweerd agreed with his (Friesen's) claim that each human heart has existed from eternity in God. The note says: "This is what in Genesis 1 is called the "earth" in contradistinction to the "Heavens," viz. the temporal world concentrated in man." Friesen says this means the heavens are concentrated in the human heart rather than the "earth", and then apparently draws the *non sequitur* inference that if the heavens are in the heart the heart is in the heavens. But in fact that's an impossible reading of the footnote *on Friesen's own view*. For he insists everywhere that the heavens, like the human heart, are supra-temporal, while the footnote says that what is concentrated in man is "temporal." Thus the antecedent subject of "concentrated in man" has to be the word "earth."

A similar misreading is used to support the idea that for Dooyeweerd "synthesis" does not refer to synthesizing abstracted aspects with one another. "No," says Friesen, "the abstracted aspects are synthesized with the human heart."⁵ In support of this he quotes Dooyeweerd as saying: "The dis-stasis of theoretical thought is to be followed by a synthesis with our selfhood operating in an integral way." Instead of reading this naturally, so that "with" means "by

⁵ Thinknet posting to Danie Strauss, April 2003.

means of,” Friesen wants to take the human self as the direct object of “with” rather than as the subject performing the synthesis. It is hard not to see this, too, as a product of the agenda of making Dooyeweerd into a panentheist.

It was in reply to his insistence on such a panentheized version of Christianity, that I wrote this reply to Friesen in a Thinknet posting of September 28, 2003:

...if... Dooyeweerd did hold that all creatures are part of God, that human hearts have all been created from eternity, and that the rest of the earthly creation depends for existence on humans, then I do disagree with him... and I do so on biblical grounds...it seems to me that the most basic issue in all this is panentheism vs. *creation ex nihilo*. If one takes the panentheist position, there would be little or no problem with ascribing utterly a-temporal reality to the human heart. It would also render plausible [your] interpretation of the fall that takes it to be the entrance of the heart into time, rather than the rebellion of a finite, temporal creature against God [motivated by] the wish to become divine... your view sounds very much like some Hindu views and like my old prof. [Paul] Tillich, but not at all like Genesis.”

In the light of this background, I see panentheism to be the hidden motive driving both Friesen’s misreadings of Dooyeweerd and of myself. Therefore I will close with a brief statement of my objections to panentheism.

My first point is an historical one: as far as we know, *creation ex nihilo* was the common Jewish understanding of creation prior to Christ. It is alluded to in the Dead Sea scrolls (IQS 3:15) and is stated explicitly in II Maccabees 7: 28. It is also repeated in the first century Christian work, *The Shepherd of Hermas*, so it was not a come-lately second century theory cooked up by Christian church fathers just to counter gnosticism.

Secondly, the main difference between panentheism and straightforward pantheism is this: pantheism says that only the divine exists so that the finite and temporal things we experience are illusory, while panentheists insist on the reality of finite beings. On their view, creatures are real precisely because God made them out of himself in the sense that his divine being is also the being of creatures. So although God is eternal and infinite, he has, on this view, extended himself into finite, temporal bits of his own being. Most panentheists have, like straightforward pantheists, admitted that this requires suspending the law of non-contradiction. It means affirming that creatures are both infinite and finite, eternal and temporal, and that there are many creatures although there is only one divine being. On this view, therefore, creatures both do and do not possess those characteristics in the same sense at the same time (Tillich used to call this the “coincidence of opposites” and cite Nicholas of Cusa). I’ve not heard this admission repeated by Friesen, but if he doesn’t agree with it I’d be fascinated to hear how he tries to get around it, for any view that is self-contradictory is irredeemably false.

Finally, I think that biblical teaching stands opposed to panentheism in at least four ways.

1. Panentheism makes God evil. If we are evil and we are bits of the divine being, then the divine being is evil too. A panentheist may wish to remind us on this point that God is also not evil (since the law of non-contradiction is

suspended whenever it suits his purpose), but that won't defeat my point. It will be just as true that God is evil as that he's not, and that is totally opposed to the biblical view. From the perspective of bible writers, God is opposed to sin, has sent Christ to defeat sin, and will ultimately abolish it.

2. As I pointed out earlier, Genesis represents the fall into sin as motivated by the desire to be divine. So what Genesis condemns as the root of sin, pantheism recommends as the truth. Moreover, there is not the slightest hint in scripture that humans pre-existed their earthly origin, but quite the reverse: they are told they were taken from "the dust of the ground." The suggestion that they would have lived forever had they obeyed God is conditioned upon their continued standing in right relation to God, not upon their being naturally immortal.

3. One of the central promises of both the covenant with Moses and the covenant with Jesus is the resurrection of the dead. This is incompatible with pantheism in several ways. The first is that bible writers construe the resurrection to be the ultimate destiny of each human self, as opposed to its being a non-temporal, disembodied existence in a non-temporal realm. The resurrection is bodily and earthly; it is the central event in the restoration of the earth to its original sinless state. Moreover, Rev. 21 represents this restoration as the merging of the heavenly realm with the earthly in a way that is incompatible with the pantheist idea: earth is not replaced by heaven, but heaven descends to earth.

Yet another way the doctrine of the resurrection is incompatible with pantheism is that it is a convenantal *promise*. If we were all bits of the divine being it would make no sense to promise us everlasting life, as we would be naturally immortal. In that case making such a promise would be as nonsensical as my promising my children to be older than they are or to be related to them.

4. Finally, there is the language of both Testaments concerning the dependency of everything other than God on God. Were pantheism the view of the bible writers we would expect to see that dependency expressed in the language of *emanation*. We would expect to find that creatures "proceeded," or "issued forth" from God, or — even more clearly — that they are *projections of* God. But what we find instead is the language of humans being in the "image" of God. This is deadly for pantheism precisely because *while an image must share properties with what it reflects, it does not share the being of what it reflects*. We no more share the being of God than our mirror image shares our being.

So I conclude that pantheism is not the biblical idea of creation. I also conclude that there is no plausible indication that it was Dooyeweerd's view. Therefore I further conclude that Friesen's understanding of Dooyeweerd is, as is his understanding of Christianity, deeply flawed.

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