A Response to Roy Clouser’s Aristotelian Interpretation of Dooyeweerd

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This article has been published in Philosophia Reformata 75 (2010) 97-116.

Roy Clouser has recently compared the philosophy of Herman Dooyeweerd and Aristotle. He finds their ontology to be “strikingly similar” except that Dooyeweerd has a different “divinity belief” concerning the Origin or Archè of the cosmos (Clouser, 2009, 22 fn17, 23, 28, and 45). This common ontology involves the abstraction of properties and laws from concrete things and events. A property can be referred to using predicate logic, in the form “x is y.” For example, “x is heavy.” Or “x is red.” Abstraction isolates that property or predicate from the thing or event that “exhibits” the property (Clouser 2009, 36). Clouser describes his method:

Like young children learning colors, we first abstract tropes—individual properties. We then distinguish the commonality among many tropes to form a universal, and finally distinguish the even broader commonality exhibited by many universals and levels of them to arrive at an entire aspect (what Dooyeweerd called an aspect’s “meaning kernel”) (Clouser 2009, 30 fn25).

He gives an example of abstraction of properties: we notice particular properties of a thing, like its weight, velocity, or solidity, and we then notice that these properties have certain relations among themselves that we formulate as law-statements (Clouser 2009, 36). Clouser describes such a higher class of properties as a “kind of properties and laws.” And he believes that the idea of modal aspects in Dooyeweerd’s philosophy can be characterized the same way — as kinds of properties and laws.

Clouser is wrong in the following ways:

(1) Aspects are not “kinds of properties and laws”; (2) Dooyeweerd rejected Clouser’s idea of abstraction; (3) Aspects are not universals; (4) We cannot form a concept of an
aspect’s meaning kernel; (5) Clouser’s use of ‘properties’ is related to the substance idea
(6) Clouser’s use of ‘property’ and ‘kind’ is logicistic; (7) Clouser blurs pre-theoretical
and theoretical thought; (8) Clouser’s “divinity beliefs” are different from Dooyeweerd’s
ontical conditions.

(1) **Aspects are not “kinds of properties and laws”**

Clouser relies on conversations with Dooyeweerd during the time that Clouser was
completing his doctoral thesis at the University of Pennsylvania. Clouser claims that in
those conversations, Dooyeweerd agreed that the modal aspects could be defined as “a
basic kind of properties and laws” (Clouser 2009, 29 fn25).

Recollected oral conversations may provide interesting biographical material, but reliance
on such conversations is a most dubious methodology for interpreting the work of a
philosopher. It is a philosopher’s written work that must be regarded as authoritative, and
not remembered conversations that cannot be verified by others. This is especially so in
this case, where later documents show that Dooyeweerd rejected Clouser’s views. These
documents include Clouser’s letters to Dooyeweerd as well as Dooyeweerd’s last article
(Dooyeweerd, 1975).

**Clouser’s letters to Dooyeweerd**

Clouser’s letters to Dooyeweerd are in the Dooyeweerd Archives in Amsterdam.
Dooyeweerd’s responses have not yet been located. Clouser advised me that he sent
Dooyeweerd’s responses, together with copies of his own letters, to the Dooyeweerd
Foundation for copying, but that he does not recall getting them back. I hope that this
article will encourage a search for these letters, since by submitting them to the
Dooyeweerd Foundation, Clouser obviously intended them to be made available to
scholars for research.

Even without Dooyeweerd’s responses, Clouser’s own letters establish that Dooyeweerd
did not agree that the aspects are “kinds of properties and laws.” They also show how
Clouser’s Aristotelianism prevented him from understanding Dooyeweerd.

Clouser met with Dooyeweerd in the summer of 1967 (Clouser, 1968). Even then,
Clouser compared Dooyeweerd with Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, Book VII, c. 17. Clouser
said he did not understand Dooyeweerd’s critique of Aristotle’s view of substance. He interpreted Aristotle as showing that the unity of the aspects of a thing cannot be any of the aspects. He found Dooyeweerd’s views to be “exactly parallel” except that Dooyeweerd had concluded that there must be a transcendent *Archè*.

Clouser’s 1968 conclusion is thus the same as in his 2009 article — the only difference from Aristotle is the “divinity belief” added by Dooyeweerd (Clouser 2009, 21, 22 fn17, 28. 43, 45). Clouser does not appreciate how the very idea that things have properties is linked to the view that things are substances. Dooyeweerd says that Aristotle’s predicate logic, which relies on identifying the properties of a thing, is related to the idea of substance (See discussion of predicate logic below under point 6 below).

Clouser and Dooyeweerd met again in the summer of 1970, when Dooyeweerd visited Gordon College in the U.S. (Clouser June 15, 1970). In February 1971, Clouser was ready to submit his thesis to the University of Pennsylvania, and asked to meet again with Dooyeweerd (Clouser 1971). Clouser identified meaning with properties, which are then set out in concepts. Because of Clouser’s restricted view of meaning, he did not understand Dooyeweerd’s distinction between concepts and Ideas. He asked Dooyeweerd what the terms ‘create,’ ‘cause’ or ‘*Archè*’ could mean, since these terms, insofar as they refer to God’s creative acts, cannot include properties abstracted from our experience. Clouser also asked about the meaning of ‘exist,’ since existence is not a property. These issues show Clouser’s commitment to analytical philosophy’s view of propositional meaning, and to its use of formal logic, where existence cannot be a predicate.

Clouser met with Dooyeweerd in the summer of 1971; he returned from the Netherlands in September 1971 (Clouser Jan 19, 1972).

In March 1972, Clouser submitted his thesis for approval (Clouser Mar 20, 1972). One of his supervisors questioned how Clouser could distinguish one aspect from another. Clouser tried to define an aspect in terms of what he called ‘meta-properties’—“the highest order property of properties and laws.” An aspect is then the “maximal domain of properties and laws qualified by a single metaproperty” (Clouser Apr 5, 1972). Clouser continued to have problems distinguishing the aspects; he felt he would have to already know where the aspectual boundaries lay in order to tell whether he was confronted by a
boundary. So Clouser asked Dooyeweerd whether instead of Dooyeweerd’s list of aspects, it might not be better to just distinguish between the logical aspect and some nonlogical aspects — even if the list of those nonlogical aspects did not agree with Dooyeweerd’s list. Or, Clouser suggested, maybe he should just say there are at least two aspectual distinctions: the logical and the non-logical (Clouser Apr 26, 1972).

Clouser defended his thesis in June, 1972, but the supervisor still objected that there was no reason to accept Dooyeweerd’s list of properties; Clouser’s analysis seemed to be an Aristotelian type of realism (Clouser June 6, 1972). Clouser again asked Dooyeweerd how his list of aspects could be justified (Clouser June 21, 1972). Clouser compared the classification of aspects to the classification of colors. Although he personally believed that the basic colors are red, green and blue, he would not know how to answer someone who claimed that red-orange is a basic color. The issue is how the aspects (seen as properties) can be defended as “ultimate genera of meaning” and not merely arbitrary classifications. Clouser asked why military activities, sporting activities and political activities are not aspects instead of being subdivisions under the social or historical aspects. Or why Dooyeweerd did not class several aspects under “some more encompassing classification” like “natural-scientific” or “social-valuative.” Clouser saw no way of answering these questions. Note how Clouser links the idea of ‘kinds’ of aspects to the idea of classes. We shall see how this gives rise to logicism, and a consequent failure to understand the nature of the aspects.

It is clear from this June 21, 1972 letter that even after defending his thesis, Clouser still did not understand Dooyeweerd. First, Clouser incorrectly refers to aspects in terms of primary and secondary qualities, and says that the making of asceptual distinctions is therefore not unique to Dooyeweerd. But Dooyeweerd rejected the distinction between primary and secondary qualities (Friesen 2009, Thesis 23 and references).

The same letter also refers to Dooyeweerd’s “reservations” about Clouser’s theory of concept formation, which Clouser describes as “abstracting from the given.”

The letter also shows that Dooyeweerd disagreed that there can be causation between the modal aspects. On Clouser’s view, where the aspects are kinds of properties, there would
be no reason why there could not be causation between various kinds. But Dooyeweerd says this is not possible.

Finally, Clouser’s June 21, 1972 letter makes it clear that even at this late date, after Clouser’s defence of his thesis, Dooyeweerd still did not agree that aspects are “kinds of properties and laws.” Clouser refers to Dooyeweerd’s previous letter, where Dooyeweerd had objected to that very formulation. Instead, Dooyeweerd said that the aspects must be seen as modes of experience. Clouser says that he just doesn’t see the crucial meaning of ‘mode’ that avoids his difficulties of aspectual distinctions.

In October, 1972, Clouser sent his thesis to the printer. He had revised it with respect to the issue of antinomy and aspectual boundaries. He found Dooyeweerd’s procedure “difficult to generalize” and so could not tell whether he was applying the criterion correctly. Clouser asked Dooyeweerd to respond to any sections he disagreed with or thought might misrepresent his position (Clouser Oct 24, 1972).

Whatever Clouser may have understood in his conversations with Dooyeweerd, Dooyeweerd did not agree that aspects are kinds of properties and laws, and he did not agree that theory involves abstracting from the given. Perhaps it was a communication problem – Clouser does not know Dutch, and English was not Dooyeweerd’s first or even second language. In any event, three years after Clouser’s last conversation with him, I had my own conversation with Dooyeweerd. I met with him at his home on November 20, 1974. Dooyeweerd emphasized that he did not agree that theory is based on the abstraction of universals; despite criticism by others, he wanted to maintain the Gegenstand-relation. But I don’t need to rely on my conversation, because Dooyeweerd’s considered opinion on the matter is expressed in his last article, which was published the following year.

**Dooyeweerd’s Last Article (1975)**

Although it does not name Clouser, Dooyeweerd’s last article clearly refers to and rejects Clouser’s views relating to abstraction of the aspects from concrete reality. Dooyeweerd wrote the article as a strong critique of D.F.M. Strauss’s doctoral thesis *Begrip en Idee* (Strauss, 1973). Dooyeweerd says
He [D.F.M. Strauss] believes that, in view of the fact that naïve experience is the irreplaceable foundation of all theoretical thought, theoretical thought must proceed from out of [“vertrekken”] the typical structures of totality in which naïve experience understands concrete reality.

But this opinion clearly depends on the thought that I have already fundamentally rejected – that the modal structures are only given to us in their supposed individualization within the individuality-structures of concrete things, events, social relations and so on, and that their universal modal character is only to be discovered by theoretical abstraction from out of these individuality-structures (Dooyeweerd, 1975, 90 - translation here and following JGF).

a) Deduction and abstraction

Clouser tries to evade Dooyeweerd’s criticism by arguing that whereas we cannot deduce the aspects from things, we may abstract the aspects (Clouser 2009, 33 fn29). But this is a misreading of the text. Dooyeweerd not only denies that we may deduce the aspects from things, but he also denies Clouser’s idea that aspects are discovered by abstraction:

There is a serious misunderstanding concerning this cardinal point even by some adherents of the Philosophy of the Law-Idea, insofar as they are of the opinion that the modal structures can be discovered by an ever-continuing abstraction from the concrete experience of reality (Dooyeweerd 1975, 90).

Dooyeweerd repeats this on the same page—he rejects the idea that we can discover the modal structures “by theoretical abstraction from out of these individuality-structures [concrete things, events, social relations and so on].” This corresponds to what Dooyeweerd had already stated in the New Critique:

We cannot obtain true structural concepts of individuality by means of the procedure of gradual abstraction. Nor can we obtain theoretical insight into the modal structures of the law-spheres by gradual abstraction (NC II, 417).

b) Aspects are not functions

Clouser also tries to deflect Dooyeweerd’s criticism by arguing that Dooyeweerd is ambiguous whether aspects can be abstracted from things. He points to Dooyeweerd’s statement that the idea of the individual whole precedes that of its modal functions (Clouser 2009, 33 fn29, citing NC III, 65). But Clouser has mistakenly identified modal aspects with the functions of individuality structures within those aspects (Clouser 2009, 29 fn25). Functions are not the same as aspects (Friesen 2009, Thesis 27 and references).
Dooyeweerd refers to “individual entities, which in their concrete reality function in principle in all modal aspects of human experience of reality” (Dooyeweerd 1975, 90). On the same page, Dooyeweerd says,

It is not the aspects that are individualized within the various structural types of things, events, societal relations, etc., but only the functions of concrete reality within these aspects that are so individualized. The modal structures lie at the foundation of the individuality-structures, and not the other way around (Italics Dooyeweerd’s).

Although they are not isolated from each other, the modal aspects are differentiated before any individuality structures are individuated, and before such individuality structures can function within the aspects. Dooyeweerd says that the aspects have an ontological, and not a merely methodological priority to the individuality structures that function in the aspects.

c) Isolated Aspects

Clouser sets up a straw man when he argues that Dooyeweerd has separated or isolated the aspects from one another (Clouser 2009, 32). Dooyeweerd says that the separation of the modal aspects is merely epistemological, and never ontical:

But in the Gegenstand-relation, these modal aspects are epistemologically (not “ontically”) split apart and set over against each other, with the intention of bringing them into view in their general modality, and thereby making them available for theoretical concepts (Dooyeweerd 1975, 91).

d) Synthesis

Clouser also misunderstands theoretical synthesis. Synthesis is not joining together two separated aspects, but of joining the aspects, which have been intentionally and not ontically distinguished, to the concrete act of thinking of my selfhood as a whole (Dooyeweerd 1975, 93; Friesen, 2009, Theses 89, 90 and references).

e) Alleged Contradictions in Dooyeweerd

Clouser refers with approval to D.F.M. Strauss’s criticisms of Dooyeweerd’s 1975 article, including the issue of whether the logical aspect can investigate itself and other alleged inconsistencies (Strauss, 1984). Strauss repeated the arguments made in his 1973 thesis, which Dooyeweerd had dismissed as mere “sophistry” and “logicism.” In response
to a public challenge by Strauss, I wrote a detailed 71-page analysis of Strauss’s critique of Dooyeweerd (Friesen, 2008a). Strauss’s own reasoning contains logical fallacies. And Strauss is wrong that Dooyeweerd did not at first allow the analytical aspect itself to be a Gegenstand (See WdW II, 395-398, repeated later at NC II, 462-65).

Furthermore, Dooyeweerd’s idea of the Gegenstand-relation, which involves setting one aspect ‘over-against’ [tegenoverstellen] another aspect, is not to be regarded as a logical antithesis. To set one aspect over against the others is to compare it to the other aspects in order to derive its retrocipatory and anticipatory analogies. This is how we understand the modal structure of an aspect. (Clouser improperly identifies aspect and modal structure. The aspect is the meaning-kernel, of which we can form only an Idea, and not a concept; the modal structure is the meaning kernel together with its anticipations and retrocipations). Unfortunately, the idea of “setting over-against” has been obscured in the translation of the New Critique, which refers to this opposition as ‘antithesis,’ which can too easily be misunderstood as a logical antithesis.

(2) Dooyeweerd rejected Clouser’s view of abstraction

a) Abstraction is from the continuity of time

Dooyeweerd certainly speaks of ‘theoretical abstraction,’ but not in Aristotle’s sense of abstracting properties from individual things. Rather, aspects are abstracted from their continuity in time (Friesen 2009, Thesis 88 and references). Clouser denies that this is Dooyeweerd’s view of abstraction; he mistakenly cites NC III, 64 (Clouser 2009, 33 fn29). Although it is true that we do not abstract time itself, we do abstract the aspects from their continuity in time.

That which is abstracted [from, “waarvan”] in anti-thetical theoretical thought appeared to be nothing but the continuity of cosmic time” (NC II, 469; WdW II, 402).

Dooyeweerd describes this abstraction as an ἐποχή [epoché], although not in Husserl’s sense:

I exclusively use this term to signify an abstraction from the temporal continuity in the cosmic coherence of meaning. The original signification is ‘refraining from’ (NC II, 468 fn1).
A “refraining from” the continuity of cosmic time is not the same as Aristotle’s idea of abstraction of properties. At *NC I*, 40, Dooyeweerd says twice on the same page that theoretical abstraction of the modal aspects from cosmic time is necessary. This is in the context of the three transcendental problems of theoretical thought. These three transcendental problems correspond to the three transcendental Ideas. The Idea of cosmic time answers the problem of from what do we abstract. The Idea of the supratemporal selfhood answers the problem of the standpoint from which we make a synthesis. And the Idea of the eternal Origin answers the problem of how the selfhood gives concentric direction to theoretical thought; our self-knowledge is dependent on knowledge of God. The three transcendental problems, and the three transcendental Ideas thus relate to the distinction between cosmic time, the supratemporal *aevum* and God’s Eternity (See Friesen 2009, Theses 36-37 and references).

We might criticize Dooyeweerd for using terms like ‘abstraction’ and ‘*epoché*’ in unfamiliar ways. But it is his meaning we must use in interpreting his work.

b) *Abstraction of functions is not abstraction of the modal aspects*

Clouser’s references, intended to support his view of abstraction of modal aspects, all refer to abstraction of modal *functions*. It may be true that we can abstract a *function* from the individuality structure having such a function. We can abstract the modal functional coherence that exists between the individual functions of things, events, or social relationships “which function within the same modal aspect” (*NC I*, 552). But that is not the same as abstracting an aspect. Aspects are not the same as functions within the aspects.

c) *Immanence philosophy misunderstands systasis*

We abstract the aspects from their continuity in time, or their *systasis*. Immanence philosophy cannot understand this cosmic *systasis* of meaning (*NC II*, 435). The irreducibility and the coherence of the modal aspects cannot be understood apart from the transcendent root of our supratemporal selfhood (Dooyeweerd 1975, 100). Clouser makes no reference at all to the supratemporal selfhood as necessary for understanding the nature of the aspects. He wrongly assumes that those who have an immanence standpoint can also understand the aspects.
(3) Aspects are not universals

Clouser’s Aristotelian method abstracts properties from things and then look for universals, ultimately arriving at metaproperties or aspects. These abstract law statements, derived by observing relations between properties, “apply to all the concrete things and events in which those properties occur” (Clouser 2009, 36).

But Dooyeweerd did not agree that the aspects are universals. In his last article he criticizes Strauss for a similar view that the universal modal character of concrete things, events, and social relations is to be discovered by theoretical abstraction from out of these individuality-structures (Dooyeweerd, 1975, 90). Dooyeweerd says that it is not the aspects that are individualized, but only the functions of individuality structures. Clouser’s Aristotelianism takes the contrary viewpoint—that the aspects are universals that are then individualized (or “exhibited”) in things, and which we can abstract from those things.

In an article co-written with A.P. Bos, Strauss has now recognized that Dooyeweerd does not include universals in the subject-side of reality, although Strauss sees that as a lack which needs to be corrected. The authors acknowledge that this idea of universals on the factual side comes from Aristotle (Bos and Strauss 2007, 115).

Dooyeweerd refers to the Aristotelian view of universals, which was adopted by Duns Scotus (and which Clouser and Strauss also seem to accept):

There is an important epistemological difference between Duns Scotus and Thomas in this view of the universalia. The Scottish scholastic did in fact accept the Aristotelian-Thomistic view that the intellect can only form the universal concepts of being by abstraction from sensory perception. This was in contrast to the Augustinian teaching of illumination, according to which the anima rationalis immediately beholds the Ideas in the divine logos by divine enlightenment, independently of sensory perception. But in opposition to Thomas, Duns Scotus taught that the intellect directs itself immediately to the individual, and that it knows the individual earlier than the universal. (Dooyeweerd 1943-46, 38).

Like Duns Scotus, Clouser begins with individual things, from which we form “tropes” (Clouser 2009, 30 fn25). But Dooyeweerd’s philosophy has no place for universals on the subject-side of reality. Dooyeweerd rejects any view of the subject-object relation as involving the isolation of universals:
Equally confusing is the prevailing identification of objectivity and universally valid law-conformity. This is done by the customary method of contrasting what is merely individual and subjective with what is universally valid and objective. In this way the insight into the modal structure of the subject-object relation is made impossible. In all the modal law-spheres in which this relation [subject-object relation] is to be found it has a subject-side as well as a law-side. On the subject-side neither the subject nor the object can be reduced to universally valid law-conformity. On the law-side the subject-object relation functions in the sense of a rule of this relation which determines the subject- and the object-function only in general.

In the concrete actualized individuality-structure of reality, however subject and object within the same law-sphere are both individual.

[…] A modal object-function, however, has a different individuality from that of a modal subject-function. That is why in general its individuality is indifferent to that of the modal subject. An individual modal object is an object to any subject whatsoever which in the same modal aspect has the same typical relation to it (NC II, 370-73).

Doooyewaerd does not deny universal validity. But universal validity must not be seen in terms of universals. The “universal validity” of judgments depends on the universal supra-subjective validity of the structural laws of human experience (NC I, 160; WdW I, 129). In other words, they apply to everyone. But this supra-subjective validity is not a logical validity. Instead of universal laws, Doooyewaerd prefers to speak of “principles” that we positivize historically (Friesen, 2008b).

To regard law as universal order or rule is an absolutization that is characteristic of rationalistic currents of current philosophy (Doooyewaerd 1940, 196). Doooyewaerd also opposed law-idealism. This misunderstanding even caused him to regret that his philosophy had been called ‘The Philosophy of the Law-Idea’ (Doooyewaerd, 1964, Discussion 14).

(4) We cannot form a concept of an aspect’s meaning kernel

Clouser’s begins by observing properties of individual things and then moves to more universal properties until he arrives at a concept of an aspect. But Doooyewaerd says that we cannot form a concept of an aspect (Friesen, 2009 Theses 16, 17 and references). This is because the nuclear meaning moment is supratemporal, and is only known in its analogical meaning moments, which refer to the supratemporal centers of other aspects. This explains Doooyewaerd's statement in his 1975 article that the mutual irreducibility of
the law-spheres and their unbreakable reciprocal meaning-coherence are “not to be separated from the transcendental idea of the root-unity of the modal aspects in the religious center of human existence” (Dooyeweerd 1975, 100). It also explains Dooyeweerd's statement on the same page that the “meaning-kernels cannot be interpreted in an intra-modal logical sense without canceling their irreducibility.” For if we interpret them in an intra-modal logical sense, we have obtained a concept of the meaning-kernel, something that he says cannot be done.

The meaning kernel of the aspect must be distinguished from the modal structure of an aspect, which includes the kernel’s retrocipations and anticipations. Although we cannot form a concept of the meaning-kernel itself, we may form a concept of the modal structure of the aspect in its restrictive (merely retrocipatory) function. In its expansive function, which refers to the anticipations that are opened up and deepened by our theory, it can only be approximated in a synthetical Idea. There can be no deepening of our knowledge without Ideas:

In the foundational direction of time the concept of a modal aspect may be anterior to the transcendental synthetical Idea of its meaning, but it depends on the latter for its own deepening (NC II, 486).

The opening up or deepening, which is accomplished by the anticipation of our Ideas, brings an eschatological element to our thought – that which is or happens beyond the limits of cosmic time (NC I, 33, II, 337).

Thus, if we want to understand what Dooyeweerd means by ‘modal aspects,’ we also need to understand his distinction between concept and Idea.

Ideas are related to the supratemporal central totality, and concepts are related to the temporal periphery. All Ideas involve anticipations, which point to the supratemporal fulfillment where the meaning of all Ideas coincide (Friesen 2009, Theses 2-3 and references). An Idea “invariably has the function of relating the theoretical diversity of the modal aspects to a central and radical unity and to an Origin” (NC I, 57).

We have an immediate religious experience of how temporal reality is focused concentrically in our human selfhood. Our Ideas give a theoretical approximation of this experience (NC I, 57). We experience the fullness of meaning because our selfhood is
supratemporal. There is a movement of our thought from the supratemporal central root to the temporal periphery, from Idea to concept and back to Idea. Dooyeweerd uses the term ‘encyclopedia’ [enkyklios paideia, or “circle of learning”] to describe this circular movement of theoretical thought. But it is not a vicious circle like logicism, which remains wholly within the temporal (Friesen 2009, Thesis 92 and references).

(5) Clouser’s use of ‘properties’ is related to the substance idea

The word ‘properties’ is rarely used in the New Critique. It is a translation of the word ‘eigenschappen,’ which must not be interpreted as properties in the Aristotelian sense that Clouser wants to give the word.

Sometimes the word ‘properties’ (‘eigenschappen’) is used in reference to an epistemology that Dooyeweerd rejects, as when he objects to the distinction between primary and secondary qualities (NC III, 37-38; WdW III, 4, 18-19, 28). He uses the term when he criticizes the idea of substance (WdW III, 4). Substance is the absolute point of reference for all its accidental properties (NC III, 127). And he uses the term when he discusses the identity of an individuality structure despite its changing “properties,” such as the constant changing of its cells (NC III, 97; WdW II, 61). Dooyeweerd rejects physicalism’s view that every term of science needs to be connected with terms designating sensorily observable properties of things (NC I, 60). And he objects to Aristotle’s use of the term ‘properties’ because of the way it is connected to the metaphysical idea of substance:

What can then be the real meaning of the Aristotelian primary substance? As observed, Aristotle never abandoned the Greek conception of οὐσία [ousia] as a noumenon. This implies that “primary substance” is nothing but the supposed first temporal “Gegenstand” of the theoretical-logical function of thought. Metaphysics is of the opinion that the antithetical “Gegenstand-relation” corresponds to true reality. Thus the “true being” of a natural thing, as the supposed “Gegenstand” of theoretical thought, is hypostatized to a “substance”, as the independent bearer of the changeable and accidental properties of this thing (NC III, 10).

Dooyeweerd objects to B. Bavink’s agreement “with the epistemological conception of the merely subjective character of “secondary qualities” (the objective sensory properties of colour, smell, taste, etc.)” (WdW I, 524: NC I, 560). Does ‘objective sensory properties’ mean that properties are aspects? No, that would confuse the functioning of
things with the aspects within which they function. A colour is not an aspect. Nor is a smell or a taste. They are qualities or properties that are determined by the structure of the individuality structure:

By so doing Wolterecck apparently overlooks that the characteristic properties of these latter kinds of matter are indubitably determined by their physico-chemical structure (NC III 761, italics Dooyeweerd's).

An individuality structure does not coincide with the modal aspects: it functions within the modal aspects, and it is qualified by certain functions within those aspects. The way that it functions may give rise to certain qualities or ‘eigenschappen.’ But that does not mean that these qualities are aspects, or that we can form universals or metaphysical properties from them so as to form a concept of the aspects.

The very few instances where Dooyeweerd speaks of properties in a positive sense are therefore examples of how individuality structures function within the aspects. But properties are not the aspects themselves, nor should these properties be interpreted in Aristotle’s sense. Indeed, Dooyeweerd says that the idea of properties, as used within Aristotelian logic, is related to Aristotle’s view of substance:

So from this it is already clear that we cannot separate Aristotelian logic from Aristotelian metaphysics. And if it is still believed that the study of what is called ‘formal logic’ or ‘epistemology’ [denkleer] is a necessary preparation for theological studies, then this can only be explained by a scholastic encroachment in these studies, one which permeates to the deepest foundations of science. [...] It is completely superficial to want to separate “formal logic” from the whole of the philosophical train of thought in which it is included, and to wish to view it as a neutral “universally valid” teaching of thought with respect to philosophy.

In Aristotelian-Thomistic metaphysics, the first and foundational category of being is that of substance. It determines what a thing is according to its essence [wezen], as an individual independent unity of being, to which all other categorical determinations are ascribed.

The remaining categories do not say what a thing is according to its essence, but merely concern what are called ‘accidentia,’ the properties which are carried by the “substance,” and which can never exist apart from a substance.

If one examines this whole table of categories, then it is immediately clear that they exclude in principle any insight into the modal structures of the distinguished aspects of temporal reality. It is oriented to a theoretical
teaching of judgments, which views time merely as an external accidental determination of the being of “substances,” and it does not acknowledge time as the inner universal cosmic structural ordering of all temporal creatures. […] For as the Philosophy of the Law-Idea has demonstrated, these [modal] structures are not dependent on the things that function in them (Dooyeweerd 1943-46, 89-92, translation JGF).

Dooyeweerd questions Aristotelian logic’s reliance on the idea of substance and properties. He also affirms that the modal structures are not dependent on the things that function in them. There is a difference between the modal structures of the aspects, and the functions of things (or individuality structures) in these modal structures.

(6) Clouser’s logicistic use of ‘property’ and ‘kind’

Clouser had difficulty distinguishing one aspect from another. All that he could justify to his thesis supervisors was the idea that there was a logical aspect and some non-logical aspects. He could not understand how Dooyeweerd’s insistence in referring to aspects as “modes” would solve that problem (Clouser, June 21, 1972). But surely Dooyeweerd was pointing out how Clouser’s problem was caused by his view of aspects as “kinds of properties and laws.”

Clouser assumes that “kinds” and “properties” and “metaproperties” [a more inclusive class of properties] are logical categories or terms that can be applied to all of the modalities in the same way. Dooyeweerd noted this improper use of ‘property’ and ‘class,’ as well as other terms used in formal logic. The following terms, which are used in attempts to set up a purely analytical formal logic, are not purely analytical: the whole and its parts, independence and dependence, necessity and law, property, relative nature, state of affairs, relation, identity, equality, set (collection), contents of classes, number, genus and species, categories of signification, arrangement, aggregate, and even the propositional form “there is” (NC II, 453, 459, my emphasis).

The attempt to portray these as purely logical terms belongs “to the arsenal of the logicistic world of thought.” Such “false formalisms” serve “to eradicate the limits” between the aspects (NC II, 459). So once Clouser began to try to logically define the aspects in terms of ‘kinds’ or ‘genera’ or ‘classes,’ he made it impossible to know the boundaries between the aspects! That is why he had such difficulties in his thesis. By beginning with properties and kinds of properties, and analyzing those properties using
Aristotle’s logic, he ended with a logicistic mode of thinking, which made it impossible to recognize any aspects except the logical and that which is non-logical.

Let us look more closely at the idea of genera and species of meaning, for it is related to Clouser’s use of the idea of different “kinds” or classes of properties. Dooyeweerd does refer to the aspects as “ultimate genera of modal meaning” in the sense that they are irreducible to one another (NC II, 14). But they are not genera in the sense of Aristotle’s classification using genus and species.

For Aristotle, a concept is defined with reference to a broader category or kind of meaning— the “genus proximum,” and then differentiated to show how it is unique. For example, an isosceles triangle is a triangle with two equal sides; in that case, ‘triangle’ is the broader category or kind, and it is differentiated by the particular of having two equal sides. The category ‘triangle’ in turn can be subsumed under the even broader category of ‘spatial figure.’ Clouser works in a similar way, where the property ‘heavy’ is subsumed under the higher metaproperty of ‘physical.’

Dooyeweerd says that the idea of genera and species of meaning can be used neither to delineate individuality structures from each other nor modalities of meaning from each other:

For lack of an internal structural criterion [of the State] [Hermann] Heller again has recourse to the external method of determining the genus proximum and the differentia specifica. In our general theory of the modal law-spheres this method has been found to be insufficient, even to give account of the modal structures of reality (NC III, 393; WdW III, 345).

If we regard the law-spheres themselves in terms of genus proximum and differentia specifica, we have posited some higher genus of which these modalities are particulars. Dooyeweerd rejects Husserl’s idea that number or sensory qualities or spatial forms can be supreme genera of meaning (WdW II, 14-15; NC II, 17-18). Dooyeweerd criticizes the use of genus and species in Aristotle (WdW III, 56), in Kant (WdW II, 350) and Heidegger (WdW II, 19). If we say that they are kinds of being, or kinds of knowledge, then this is an objectionable, scholastic use of genus and species. To try to delineate spheres or regions of research according to genera and species is an essentially scholastic method.
For Clouser, properties and laws are a higher genus, of which the modalities are various species or kinds. And Clouser tries to see these ideas of kinds, properties and laws in a supposed purely logical way. This is especially evident in the attachment to Clouser’s April 5, 1972 letter, where he attempts to provide a formal logical way of describing aspects as metaproperties. Clouser is therefore using the idea of “kind” of properties, or “genus” or metaproperty in order to try to define the modality, starting with the abstraction of properties from things, and then finding metaproperties or larger classes or kinds of properties.

Dooyeweerd rejects this kind of logicism. See his last article, where he objects to Strauss’s logistic use of formal logic (Dooyeweerd 1975, 96-97, 99-100). Instead of beginning with the properties of individual things, Dooyeweerd begins with supratemporal totality. He says that the mutual irreducibility and meaning-coherence of the modal aspects cannot be understood apart from “the transcendental idea of the root-unity of the modal aspects in the religious center of human existence,” which for him is our created supratemporal selfhood (Dooyeweerd 1975, 100).

Dooyeweerd criticizes Aristotle’s predicate logic for being inseparably linked to the idea of substance. He also criticizes Bertrand Russell’s formal logic with its idea of “logical properties” and “classes of relations” (NC III, 24). And he criticizes the use of ‘property’ and ‘genus and species’ and ‘class’ in formal logic. So what would a Christian logic look like? A full answer is beyond the scope of this article, but Dooyeweerd indicates that Plato and Plotinus had a different logic:

Plotinus understood individuality fundamentally differently than Aristotle, not merely as a quantitative individualizing [verenkeling] of the universal form-type, but as the revelation of the infinite wealth of the logos in its perfection of being, as a whole.

This [idea] was undoubtedly in the line of Plato’s conception in the dialogue Sophistes, where Idea was understood not in the least as an abstract universal, but rather as a concrete fullness and totality of the form of being, which [idea] was intended to concentrically include at the same time both the universal and the individual, and which was then was represented as a thinking, living and self-moving being, which in the process of theoria would actively work upon subjective, beholding [schouwende] thought. From [Plato’s] Sophistes, Plotinus derived the categories by which the spiritual cosmos is more precisely defined: being, rest, movement, identity, diversity.
Platonic dialectic is fundamentally different from Aristotelian logic. Aristotelian logic understands genus as an abstract universal framework of the determination of being, which is enriched by the addition of the differentia specifica (specific characteristics) and which receives a final (no longer intelligible, because not specific) addition by being made individual [verenkeling] from “form” in matter. In Plato it is the other way round: the progress of the genus to the species is no addition or enrichment of content, but a transition from the whole of the Idea towards its parts: the particular eidè or form of being in which the parts still preserve the wealth of the whole. And in this second train of thought, the individual must also be enclosed within the supra-sensory whole of the Idea and its specific eidè. It can never be an addition that the eidos, as intelligible form of being, first receives when it is empirically realized in a material (Dooyeweerd, 1943-46, 35).

Perhaps Plotinus is more in line with Dooyeweerd’s thought, since he emphasizes totality and wholeness. But of course Dooyeweerd finds other dualisms in Plato and Plotinus.

We know that Dooyeweerd appreciated Vollenhoven’s attempt to set out a Christian logic (Vollenhoven, 1932; NC II, 464). Dooyeweerd certainly agreed that mathematics and logic were mutually irreducible. But Vollenhoven’s Christian logic did not go far enough.

Dooyeweerd describes his vision of a Christian logic. It is not subjected to different laws. Nor does it consist in “unimportant corrections to traditional logic or modern formal logic.” It “remains bound to the cosmological fundamental principles of sphere-sovereignty and sphere universality.” And it must be “under the control of the Christian cosmonomic Idea.” This means that

A truly universal formal logic ought to be oriented to the philosophic basic Idea of the Origin, the meaning-totality, and the universal cosmic meaning-coherence, when it sets out to investigate the logical relations as such (NC II, 465).

And here it becomes clear that Vollenhoven’s view of Christian logic is not sufficient for Dooyeweerd, since Vollenhoven did not agree with the idea of supratemporal meaning-totality (Friesen 2005b, 111).

**(7) Clouser blurs pre-theoretical and theoretical thought**

Clouser says that in pre-theoretical experience, we know the object with its properties, whereas in theoretical experience, we focus only on its properties (Clouser 2009, 43). Elsewhere, Clouser has described theory as an intensification of the abstraction in pre-
theoretical experience. We intensify the focus of our attention to such a degree that we isolate a property from something, and focus on the property itself; Clouser calls this “high abstraction” (Clouser 1991, 54). Clouser says the same thing here: in abstraction “we can intensify the focus of our attention and actually isolate properties from the car, thinking of them apart from it or any other concrete thing that could possess them” (Clouser 2009, 36). But this is not Dooyeweerd’s view. We do not have any knowledge of aspects in pre-theoretical experience that is intensified in theoretical experience. In pre-theoretical experience, we do not even have an implicit knowledge of the aspects. It is only in theoretical thought that the aspects are first distinguished (Dooyeweerd 1975, 91). 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.

Clouser’s formulation makes the further error of supposing that in theory, we are still investigating the same ontical reality or object, but that in theory we focus only on its properties. For Dooyeweerd, the Gegenstand of theoretical thought is not the same as the object of pre-theoretical experience. The Gegenstand is purely intentional, and not ontical. (Dooyeweerd’s use of intentionality here must not be understood in Husserl’s sense, but only as a contrast to ontical reality; See Friesen 2009, Thesis 88 and references).

By making theory only a difference in intensity from pre-theoretical experience, and by failing to emphasize the purely intentional nature of the theoretical Gegenstand, Clouser blurs the distinction between pre-theoretical and theoretical experience – something that Dooyeweerd also found in Strauss: “a continual confusion between the “ontical” and the epistemological states of affairs.” This kind of confusion belongs to “the most current presuppositions in modern epistemologies” which have “darkened” our insight (Dooyeweerd 1975, 91 and 97).

(8) Clouser’s “divinity beliefs” are different from Dooyeweerd’s ontical conditions

a) Ideas do not regulate concepts

If Clouser’s Aristotelian view of Dooyeweerd were correct, there would be no need for a specifically Christian view of theory. We could continue to use Aristotle’s ideas of
theoretical abstraction of properties. We would only need a different theology of the Origin. In Clouser’s view, such “divinity beliefs” regulate or control our theories (pp. 21-23, 28, 43, 45-46). But Dooyeweerd specifically rejects this Kantian interpretation of Ideas. The transcendental Ideas of coherence, Totality and Origin (Archè) must have more than the merely regulative sense given to them by Kant (NC I, 89). And in 1964, Dooyeweerd said that ‘limiting concept’ [Grenzbegriff] must not be understood in a Kantian sense:

But okay, I have therefore not been afraid to use the term ‘grensbegrip.’ Kant also used the term ‘Grenzbegriff.’ The Idea was a Grenzbegriff. And yet if you look at it, it [Idea] as I use it is totally non-Kantian in its purport and in its content (Dooyeweerd 1964, Discussion 6).

In that Discussion, Dooyeweerd used theology as an example of how Ideas, unlike concepts, refer to “The things that transcend time” [2 Cor. 4:18]:

We can form concepts of things, of events, of relations, relationships, which play themselves out and present themselves in the temporal horizon of our experience. That is, within the zone of time. Of that we can form really adequate concepts. But when it concerns things that transcend time, well then man cannot form any adequate concepts, and then in fact he forms boundary concepts [grensbegrippen]. He continues to use concepts, but they are allegorical concepts, which cling to the analogical structure.

Faith is concentrically directed in man’s heart towards the divine message [boodschap], to the divine revelation. And in that concentric direction, these boundary concepts also obtain truth, true significance. It is not for nothing that God speaks by means of this analogy. They are true because it is God’s Word. It is not mere metaphor, it is truth, provided that we see in the concentric direction. In God all these things are present in their original fullness, whereas in the temporal order of man’s experience they are found in the divergent direction of the modalities, which we can distinguish from each other in the temporal order. And we say, “Yes, but justice is not love in its temporal relation, and justice is not power.” True, but in God they are the same, since in the fulfillment, in the fullness of their original existence all of this is one and the same. God’s justice is His love and is God’s omnipotence, etc. Thus that is the meaning of the boundary concepts. That is what I intended, and I thought that there was indeed some truth hidden in that idea, and that it does indeed correspond with what the Bible teaches us.

Ideas refer to the supratemporal totality where all aspects coincide. Although analogical, Ideas are nevertheless true, “provided that we see in the concentric direction.” Ideas can have that concentric direction because they come from out of the concentric center – they
come “from out of the central religious sphere.” Our central religious experience – the immediate experience of our supratemporal selfhood – has “concrete immediacy,” and we give an account of it theoretically (NC I, 57). On that same page, Dooyeweerd says that religion is the impulse to seek our true or pretended Origin, which our selfhood finds focused concentrically in itself. It is only by moving from this central experience towards the temporal periphery and then back to the supratemporal center that we get a theoretical approximation of that to which our Ideas refer. This is Dooyeweerd’s circular [encyclopedic] view of theory. Theory gives an account – only an approximation – of our immediate supratemporal religious experience. That is what gives Dooyeweerd’s philosophy its transcendental character.

Dooyeweerd’s critique of theoretical thought goes much deeper than merely adding divinity beliefs in order to regulate theory. He questions the very assumptions that Clouser finds so “obvious” (Clouser 2009, 25). Dooyeweerd’s philosophy does not fit into Aristotelianism, or into modernism or empiricism. Dooyeweerd sometimes uses the term ‘empirical,’ but not in the sense of empiricism’s reliance on our sensory perception. And I am not aware of any reference where Dooyeweerd calls his philosophy “transcendental empirical” as Clouser claims (Clouser 2009, 24), although that term was used by other reformational writers, notably by Dooyeweerd’s successor in legal jurisprudence, H.J. van Eikema Hommes, and also by D.F.M. Strauss.

b) Misinterpretation of ‘presuppositions’

In his emphasis on a “divinity beliefs,” Clouser also misunderstands Dooyeweerd’s meaning of “presuppositions.” There is a difference between our subjective beliefs (vooronderstellingen) and the ontical conditions (vóór-onderstellingen) that provide the basis for all temporal reality, including our beliefs (Friesen 2009, Thesis 2 and references). Clouser only refers to our subjective beliefs, and not to these ontical conditions.

c) Misinterpretation of ‘religious neutrality’

Clouser improperly interprets ‘religious’ as a reference to religious belief (Clouser 2009, 23 fn20). But for Dooyeweerd, ‘religious’ always involves the ontical state of the supratemporal. Dooyeweerd’s rejection of the idea of “religious neutrality” is therefore
not just a rejection of unbelief in God. It is a rejection of any philosophy that denies the supratemporal selfhood, and that views temporal reality as being neutral with respect to the ontical position of our supratemporal heart (Friesen, 2009, Thesis 93 and references).

d) **Ground-motives point to motivations of our supratemporal heart**

In restricting ‘religious neutrality’ to matters of subjective belief, Clouser also confuses the temporal aspect of faith with the central religious motivation of our heart. Dooyeweerd says that the improper identification of faith with religion has caused great damage for our religious self-reflection (*WdW* II, 227, *NC* II, 298). In self-reflection, we examine our supratemporal selfhood and its relation to our temporal body, to others, and to God. For Dooyeweerd, regeneration is not just a matter of changing our temporal beliefs, but a reorientation of the direction of our supratemporal heart. In 1905, the synod of the Gereformeerde church objected to a similar view of regeneration by Kuyper (Stellingwerff, 1987, 32).

Religious Ground-Motives are a theoretical approximation of these fundamental motivations of our supratemporal heart – our fundamental orientation either towards or away from God. The Christian Ground-Motive is that of creation, fall and redemption. But this Ground-Motive must be understood in relation to the supratemporal religious root. If it is not, then our philosophy is merely ‘immanence philosophy’ within Dooyeweerd’s meaning of the term. To avoid immanence philosophy, it is not sufficient to have Clouser’s divinity belief in God as Creator. The Christian Ground-Motive also demands the acknowledgement of the immediate religious experience of our supratemporal heart (Friesen 2009, Theses 43 to 45, 93 and references).

**Conclusion**

Clouser has not interpreted Dooyeweerd correctly. Dooyeweerd did not agree that aspects are “kinds of properties and laws”; he did not share Clouser’s idea of abstraction; he rejected Clouser’s idea that aspects are universals; he did not agree that we can have a concept of an aspect’s meaning kernel; Dooyeweerd says that the use of the term ‘properties’ is related to the substance idea; he rejects Clouser’s use of ‘property’ and ‘kind’ as logicism; he does not agree that theory is only a different focus or intensification of pre-theoretical experience; and finally, Clouser’s “divinity beliefs” are
not the same as Dooyeweerd’s idea of presuppositions in the sense of ontical conditions, nor are they to be viewed as merely regulative as Clouser suggests.

Dooyeweerd regarded his philosophy as a second Copernican revolution in philosophy – in contrast to Kant’s supposed revolution, which was merely in the temporal periphery, Dooyeweerd’s philosophy was radical, in the central root. A rejection of religious neutrality means that all of temporal reality is relativized in relation to our supratemporal selfhood as religious root (WdW I, v-vii; inadequately translated in NC).

Dooyeweerd presented his philosophy as a “New Critique” of theoretical thought, and not merely a reiteration of previous ideas of theory, whether of Aristotle, Kant, or modernism. He even anticipated many of postmodernism’s ideas of historicism and constructivism. We have only barely begun to explore the amazing depth of Dooyeweerd’s critique of theoretical thought, his dynamic view of individuality structures, and his rich, imaginative vision that was to take the place of the logicism and antinomies of immanence philosophy. Clouser is of course entitled to maintain his belief in Aristotle’s view of theory. But Dooyeweerd’s philosophy provides a real alternative to Clouser’s modified Aristotelianism.

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