Response to Gerrit Glas and Henk Geertsema

by

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I am grateful for the responses by Gerrit Glas\(^1\) and Henk Geertsema\(^2\) to my “95 Theses on Herman Dooyeweerd.”\(^3\) Both Glas and Geertsema have expressed appreciation for how the “95 Theses” have disclosed parts of Dooyeweerd’s philosophy that they find problematic. Indeed, much of what Glas and Geertsema say is directed not to the “95 Theses” but to their rejection of Dooyeweerd’s ideas. I would have preferred to see more attention directed to the sources I have cited and to what Dooyeweerd has actually said. Too often it is simply assumed that Dooyeweerd could not possibly have held a certain idea. But while interpretations may differ, a valid interpretation must take into account the words of the text.

The following ideas can all be found in the sources cited, and yet Glas denies that they are Dooyeweerd’s: (1) supratemporality as an intermediate state [‘tusschentoestand’] (2) our simultaneous [‘tegelijk’] existence as both supratemporal and temporal beings; (3) the completed supratemporal creation in the undifferentiated root as prior to its temporal unfolding or becoming. Unfolding means that the root is expressed and revealed in time, just as God expresses and reveals his eternity in creation. Our expression as temporal body ceases at death, but that does not necessarily imply, as Glas supposes, that our undifferentiated state does not include that which was temporally expressed (4) the temporal world as lower than the supratemporal: Dooyeweerd says we “descend” to the

\(^1\) Gerrit Glas, “Is Dooyeweerd a panentheist? –Comments on Friesen’s ’95 Theses on Herman Dooyeweerd’,” *Philosophia Reformata* 74 (2009) 129-141.

\(^2\) Henk G. Geertsema, “Comments on Friesen’s 95 Theses on Herman Dooyeweerd,” *Philosophia Reformata* 74 (2009), 115-128.

\(^3\) J. Glenn Friesen, “95 Theses on Herman Dooyeweerd,” *Philosophia Reformata* 74 (2009) 78-104, online at [http://www.members.shaw.ca/hermandooyeweerd/95Theses.html]
temporal horizons of our experience. Dooyeweerd also refers to the fall as an ‘af-val,’ and a falling into time; (5) the idea that temporal reality depends for its existence on man (*NC* II, 53: “no existence apart from man”). Geertsema (p. 124) acknowledges this last idea as being related to man as “the lord of the creation.” Dooyeweerd also says it is as viewed from “the supratemporal creaturely root of the earthly world.”

Glas rejects panentheism because for him (as for Vollenhoven), the idea of law as boundary expresses discontinuity between God and creation. But Dooyeweerd warns against the wrong interpretation of 'law as boundary.' He says that the idea must not to be interpreted in the sense of separation [*scheiding*] between God and world, for that is a deistic view, and cannot be reconciled with the view of created reality as meaning. Nor can this interpretation of ‘law as boundary’ as separation be reconciled with the self-revelation of God in creation, God’s presence in the world, or with the incarnation. Dooyeweerd says that the central religious driving force of thought is the great mystery of God and man becoming one [*der God-menselijke eenwording*]. When Christ was placed under the law, this did not mean the ceremonial law, but the law in its cosmic-religious sense—that is, both in its cosmic meaning diversity as well as in its religious root-unity [Thesis 61, and ‘Critische vragen’ 113]. Glas does not address these references. Nor does he refer to the pantheism/panentheism controversy regarding A.H. de Hartog’s use of the words “uit, door en tot God” [See Thesis 52, footnote 151], a controversy of which Dooyeweerd was certainly aware. And yet Dooyeweerd uses the same words that de Hartog used, and which led to this controversy. It is also important to note that for Dooyeweerd, the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* does not mean that there is something alongside of God out of which He created:

> But it is well known that the words *ex nihilo* have turned out to be not entirely harmless in Augustine's theological exposition of the doctrine of creation, since they foster the idea that nothingness would be a second origin of creaturely being bringing about a metaphysical defect in the latter.⁴

Creation can only be out of God Himself. That does not imply pantheism.

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With respect to Glas’s footnote 5, Dooyeweerd specifically denies that we are implicitly aware of modal difference. See Dooyeweerd’s last article (1975).  

The aspects are modes of consciousness. But I also acknowledge that these modes of consciousness correspond in a relation of identity to the modes in which individuality structures function. It is this identity that gives rise to the law-Idea [Thesis 20]. The law-Idea is the relation between these two, and it is a religious law of concentration towards supratemporal unity.

I make no reference to Franz von Baader in the “95 Theses.” Glas nevertheless wants to discuss him. Contrary to what Glas says, Kuyper refers more than once to Baader. He says that there is no better counterweight than Baader to the ravings of modernism. He praises Baader’s opposition to dualism and to spiritualistic idealism. He praises Baader’s idea of the reformation of the special sciences. And Kuyper refers positively to Baader’s opposition to the idea of the autonomy of thought. How can Glas just dismiss the fact that this central idea of reformational philosophy finds its source in Baader? And Glas does not refer to Lieuwe Mietus’s recent doctoral thesis on J.H. Gunning, Jr., who introduced Kuyper to Baader’s ideas. In a more recent book, Mietus details some of Kuyper’s interest in Baader. Mietus refers at p. 69 to a discussion that Kuyper had with Ph. S. van Ronkel in 1871 in Zutphen. Kuyper urged Van Ronkel to read Baader, and asked whether


he thought Baader could help revive intellectual studies. Kuyper said, “Lees hem [Baader] opnieuw, gij moet het doen” [“Read Baader again, you must do it!”]. Van Ronkel spent half a year reading Baader, and concluded that although there were sparks of genius in him, he missed the “quietly burning fire of the hearth” in his work. I find that an interesting remark, since in the 1920's there was a revival of interest in Baader, contained in the Herdflamme [Hearth flame] series of books published by Othmar Spann. Spann obviously did find this quietly burning hearth fire in Baader's work. Van Ronkel did not make a definitive judgment about Baader, but he spoke out against Gunning's "ethical theology."

Glas says that I make Dooyeweerd read Kuyper against Kuyper. But Dooyeweerd did read Kuyper against Kuyper—in his 1939 article, he distinguishes Kuyper's scholastic side from his reformational side. Kuyper's reformational side can be split again—into that side appreciated by both Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd (such as claiming every inch of creation for God) and the side that Vollenhoven rejected but Dooyeweerd enthusiastically accepted (such as the idea of the heart as the undivided point in our consciousness that transcends time).

Geertsema criticizes my methodology. He says that I wrongly assume that Dooyeweerd’s work is a unity. But Dooyeweerd himself emphasizes the unity of his work. In his 1971 response to Cornelius Van Til [see footnote 4 above] and again in his 1974 interview with Verbrugge, Dooyeweerd expresses his strong disagreement with critics who seek to divide his work. Geertsema points to a revision by Dooyeweerd regarding retrocipation (NC II, 376). But even after that revision, Dooyeweerd still says “the possibility of objectification in the modal aspect of feeling is primarily bound to the retrocipatory structure of modal aspects” (NC II, 373, Dooyeweerd’s italics). It is this “primarily” that


11 Herman Dooyeweerd: Interview by Magnus Verbrugge on September 23, 1974, translation online at [http://www.members.shaw.ca/aevum/1974Interview.html].
the “95 Theses” address. The exceptions cited by Geertsema relate to issues of perception (which involves opening up a restrictive sensory image) and to the objective qualification of works of art (also a much misunderstood issue, since it involves *enkapsis*). I have dealt with both of these issues in my article on imagination [endnote 94]. Both perception and *enkapsis* in works of art involve anticipations, so these do not change Dooyeweerd’s general rule regarding objectification and retrocipation. Even in his last article (1975, see footnote 5 above), Dooyeweerd affirms at p. 92 that in the naïve attitude, our concept formation still “rests inertly upon our sensory representation.”

In any event, Dooyeweerd’s acknowledged revision to retrocipation does not entitle us to assume other changes in Dooyeweerd’s philosophy that he did not acknowledge. In particular, it does not warrant the supposition that Dooyeweerd changed his view of supratemporality, or that he is at all ambiguous on this point. Geertsema here relies on Dooyeweerd’s response to Van Peursen. Geertsema says that Dooyeweerd describes what he means by ‘supratemporal’ as “only a central direction of consciousness which transcends cosmic time.” But Dooyeweerd was not substituting the idea of direction for a state of consciousness. The point of his discussion with Van Peursen was the nature of our supratemporal state, and whether it is static or dynamic. Dooyeweerd was reacting to Van Peursen's objection that the temporal/supratemporal distinction is dualistic, and that ‘supratemporal’ refers to a static state. The full quotation reads,

…perhaps the word ‘supratemporal,’ by which I never intended to refer to a static state, but only to a central direction of consciousness that transcends time, could better be replaced by another term [my translation]12

Dooyeweerd’s point is that our supratemporal state is not static, but a state in which we choose direction either towards or away from God. Dooyeweerd did *not* adopt Vollenhoven’s idea of direction as a movement from out of the temporal towards the eternal. Dooyeweerd’s idea is of a direction of consciousness from the *center* of our existence *that already transcends time*. This interpretation is confirmed by the rest of the article. The center of our existence transcends time, although we are simultaneously

[tegelijk] enclosed within time (p. 103). The true root-unity of our existence transcends the diversity of cosmic time (p. 103). Everything temporal is concentrated in this root-unity. Created reality finds its creaturely relation in the religious root-unity of man's existence (p. 117). The direction of our supratemporal heart is either toward God’s eternity or else it moves in the apostate direction by absolutizing temporal reality. Even the apostate direction, which seeks the eternal within time, depends on our state of supratemporal or aevum consciousness, a state that transcends the boundary of time (See also ‘Tijdsprobleem,’ endnote 36). So in both cases of heart direction (or religious Ground-motives), our heart itself is already supratemporal, in the state between temporal reality and eternity. And despite Van Peursen’s misunderstanding that it refers to a static state, Dooyeweerd continued to use the term ‘supratemporal’ (e.g. his 1964 Lecture and Discussion,\(^\text{13}\) and In the Twilight of Western Thought\(^\text{14}\)). Contrary to what Geertsema says, there is therefore no ‘ambiguity’ in Dooyeweerd’s use of the term ‘supratemporal.’

A few other points should be mentioned. Geertsema is correct (p. 124) that to understand the anticipatory direction of time, we have to start with the aspect of faith refers beyond time to the supratemporal root and the Origin. But Geertsema (p. 116) fails to appreciate how all our ideas (as opposed to our concepts) depend on such anticipations, which seek to approximate totality, albeit from different modal viewpoints.

Furthermore, Geertsema has misunderstood the relation of anticipations to the transcendental and foundational directions. See Geertsema’s footnote 9; I urge Geertsema to look again at how Dooyeweerd defines the foundational and transcendental directions (Thesis 84 and references). Geertsema describes the two directions at p. 119, but what he calls the transcendental direction is actually the foundational direction. The foundational direction builds on earlier modes to later modes until it reaches the aspect of faith, which


\(^{14}\) Herman Dooyeweerd: In the Twilight of Western Thought (Craig Press, 1968; originally published 1960, but revised in this edition; the later Mellen edition does not incorporate these revisions).
refers beyond time in its anticipations. It is true that we cannot realize these anticipations except from the transcendental direction. The description of the foundational direction already assumes the opening up accomplished by the transcendental direction. But the transcendental direction begins with God as Origin, moves to the transcendent selfhood as concentration point and totality and then beginning with faith in reverse order through the mode of temporal diversity. It is “under the guidance of the Idea of the totality of meaning” that philosophical thought is turned in a truly transcendental direction. The transcendental direction “starts from the second terminal aspect of our cosmos”[faith] (NC II, 53-54). Geertsema incorrectly refers to the heart or selfhood as ‘transcendental’ (Geertsema footnote 6). The selfhood is transcendent (it transcends time). ‘Transcendental’ is the movement of theoretical thought from our transcendent selfhood, through faith to the rest of temporal diversity. I believe that when the transcendental direction is understood this way, we will resolve the “ambiguities” referred to by Geertsema.

Third, Geertsema thinks that my view of things leads to an analysis ad infinitum. But that is not so, because ultimately, our analysis can refer to an individuality structure that is not yet a thing. This is because things are enkaptically composed of at least two individuality structures. A single individuality structure is not a thing.

From Geertsema’s comments (pp. 117-118), it is clear that he does not understand Dooyeweerd’s idea of enkapsis. For Dooyeweerd, a thing is composed of one individuality structure nested within another structure, which in turn is often nested in other structures (rather like a Russian doll, with smaller dolls contained in larger dolls). When this is seen, the problems raised by Geertsema disappear. For example, let us look at Dooyeweerd’s example of the sculpture by Praxiteles, since Geertsema uses this example. The sculpture is aesthetically qualified, because the most encompassing individuality structure is the work of the artist’s productive imagination, which has been realized in the marble. But this aesthetically qualified individuality structure encompasses other structures. The immediately encompassed individuality structure is not the physical marble, but the historically formed marble. Dooyeweerd refers to “semi-finished” materials like planks or marble, which are culturally formed, and thus qualified by the historical aspect. The next individuality structure nested within the historically
formed marble individuality structure that is encompassed, or nested further within the historically formed marble is the individuality structure of ‘natural’ marble, which is physically qualified. But natural marble, as a thing, is also composed of other individuality structures. An atom is still a thing [WdW III, 72 ‘mikro-ding’]. It is unclear whether Dooyeweerd regards electrons, protons, neutrons, deuterons and mesons as things or as individuality structures enkaptically intertwined into the atomic structure [NC III, 100-101].

Dooyeweerd says that we culturally form the world when we transform what is given in nature:

Everything that is given in nature has a potential object-function in the cultural aspect. But it cannot become a cultural thing proper without undergoing a transformation realized by human cultural activity according to a free project (NC II, 378; added to WdW)

This cultural forming is not just the opening up of the anticipations in an existing structure. It is the creation of a new individuality structure that is then enkaptically interwoven with the first structure. Dooyeweerd refers to the new structure as a ‘cultural thing’ (NC III, 109; Cf. WdW III, 77), or an ‘objective spiritual thing’ (1946 Encyclopedia). These cultural things involve an enkaptic interlacement of the physically qualified thing (like a no longer living tree) with a historically founded intentional object, like a chair, which has a specific cultural use:

This state of affairs re-emphasizes the fact that the inner structures of the materials remain clearly distinct from the internal structure of the chair as an individual whole (NC III, 133; Cf. WdW III, 103).

There may be intervening individuality structures, such as semi-formed technical products. For instance, a tree may first be technically formed into planks. “The tree, as an individual thing, must be destroyed; in order to make planks of its trunk” (NC III, 129). In the case of the sculpture by Praxiteles, the marble is hewn from its natural state (itself a cultural product). If there is no work of art then the marble is still a cultural object:

As an object of human moulding, the marble is fully a dunamei on, i.e. a material that can assume every possible cultural form, and can just as well be made into a thing entirely lacking the inner structure of a work of fine art. (NC III, 119).
The marble is also (historically) formed by the artist in free formative control (NC III, 120-121). But the most encompassing structure is the aesthetically qualified work of art—the “fantasy form” that is “depicted and realized in the marble material” (NC III, 119). Whether the work of art is successful or not depends on how well the natural material is integrated into the aesthetic individuality structure:

To the degree that the marble strikes us as a resistive natural material, not completely controlled by the artistic technique, the work of art is a failure, or at least lacking in perfection (NC III, 125).

With respect to Dooyeweerd’s idea of supratemporality, Geertsema acknowledges (p. 122) the centrality of this idea for Dooyeweerd, and that supratemporality is more than just a direction of consciousness that transcends time. For Dooyeweerd, the aevum includes not only our supratemporal selfhood, but also the angelic realm. Geertsema thinks he has refuted this when he says at p. 121 “If the supratemporal sphere is a concentration point, a radically religious unity of earthly reality, how could it encompass the angelic world at the same time?” But the selfhood, as the concentration point of ‘earthly’ (temporal) reality, is only part of the aevum. The angelic world is also a created eternity (See Thesis 55). God and the angels are not included in the cosmic temporal order (NC I, 144). This is because cosmic time is the limit to our ‘earthly’ temporal cosmos (NC II, 3). The angelic world is not earthly or temporal. And it is distinct from the selfhood, which is the concentration point of earthly reality. Geertsema seems to adopt Vollenhoven’s view that the cosmos includes all created reality, and that therefore angels are within cosmic reality. But that was not Dooyeweerd’s view. For him, the cosmos is only temporal. But there are created realms beyond the temporal cosmos.

A final error that I would point out is that Geertsema refers (p. 126) to the “given” nature of the Gegenstand. But the page cited by him, NC II, 472, says the opposite: empirical reality is not given in analytical dis-stasis). 463). The Gegenstand is not given. It is intentional, not ontical [Dooyeweerd’s last article, endnote 14].

I appreciate (1) Geertsema’s acknowledgement of the centrality of the idea of supratemporality for understanding Dooyeweerd, even if Geertsema himself rejects the idea; (2) Geertsema’s acknowledgement that enstasis is something only humans can
engage in, and that it is an entering into temporal reality by our supratemporal selfhood or I-ness; *enstasis* is thus different from the temporal *systasis* into which our selfhood enters (3) the acknowledgement by both Glas and Geertsema that for Dooyeweerd, modes are not properties of things (a misunderstanding that is only too common in reformational thought).¹⁵

There are many ways that Dooyeweerd’s philosophy can and should be applied in the special sciences, and this was indeed one of his goals. But we cannot apply Dooyeweerd’s philosophy until we have understood it. When we do apply it, even our theoretical work will be a religious act, concentrically directed to the supratemporal and to the eternal. In other words, even our theoretical thought cannot be separated from our religious self-reflection.

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