Reply to Roy Clouser

by

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1. Clouser asks why I am discussing his views of 40 years ago. But Clouser himself made those views relevant by his claims regarding discussions with Dooyeweerd at that time. It appears that Clouser still does not have copies of his own letters to Dooyeweerd; it would have been helpful if Clouser had requested these copies from me before writing his response.

2. In 2009, Clouser stated at p. 22 fn17: “In fact, Dooyeweerd’s ontology is strikingly parallel to Aristotle’s…” I mistakenly quoted this as “strikingly similar.” But it is clear that Clouser intends to show similarity in their theories of reality, except for their different divinity beliefs. He says that Dooyeweerd’s theory of reality surpasses Aristotle not in being more detailed but in his belief in God as Origin. Already in his 1968 letter to Dooyeweerd, Clouser says that Dooyeweerd’s views are “exactly parallel” to Aristotle’s view of substance except that Dooyeweerd had concluded that there must be a transcendent Archè. In that letter, Clouser discusses Aristotle’s Metaphysics, Book VII, c. 17, which Dooyeweerd refers to at NC III, 12. In that chapter, Aristotle contrasts questions that predicate something of something else (example “why a man is musical”) from questions that predicate something of itself (“why man is man”). The second type of question does not predicate a property but refers to essence, and essence is given by the form of a thing. Form gives an identity that is more than the sum of the parts of a composite object. Clouser writes to Dooyeweerd:

If we don’t restrict ourselves to just form and matter, isn’t this argument [Aristotle’s] greatly like your own? Doesn’t it parallel the line of argument of the New Critique in which things and events may be explained from the standpoint of many aspects by the special sciences but the things are more than the sum of their aspects? Doesn’t this argument also proceed to show that no modality or combination of them can be construed as guaranteeing the intercoherence of all the aspects? And isn’t the conclusion that the intercoherence is brought about by a transcendent God not to be identified with any modal aspect? This seems to me exactly parallel with Aristotle’s argument with the exception that you are willing to draw the conclusion to the transcendence standpoint, whereas Aristotle was
not. But why do you say his argument doesn’t really prove anything? In other words, doesn’t this argument of Aristotle’s show that the unity of the aspects of a thing cannot be any of the aspects, and shouldn’t his conclusion have been that of a transcendent *Arche*? Isn’t his fault that he was not consistent with this argument rather than that the argument itself is faulty?

Clouser uses ‘parallel’ in the sense of similarity, as is shown by his phrase “greatly like your own.” Clouser fails to see how Dooyeweerd’s idea of *enkapsis* is different from that of a whole and its parts, and how a thing is an *enkaptic* interlacement of at least two individuality structures. He also incorrectly assumes that Dooyeweerd’s idea of modal aspects corresponds to Aristotle’s idea of non-essential predicates or properties. This mistake is the basis for Clouser’s Aristotelian view that we know aspects by abstraction of properties from things.

3. Clouser says (Clouser 2011, 220 fn2) that my reference to “Clouser 2009, 29 fn 25” is “non-existent.” I can assure readers that the footnote does exist; it is Clouser’s own footnote, where he refers to aspects in terms of functions. Dooyeweerd distinguished aspects from functions of individuality structures within the ontically prior aspects (See Theses 21, 27 and references in my “95 Theses on Herman Dooyeweerd” (*Philosophia Reformata* (2009) 78-104). A careful reading of my critique will also locate the other references that Clouser claims are not there.

4. Clouser wants a citation to show that he has used a formal logical way of describing aspects (Clouser 2011, 218). Clouser attempted to give “a rigorous formulation of the conditions under which ignoring an aspectual distinction will lead to an antinomy.” He attached the following to a letter dated April 5, 1972 to Dooyeweerd (a date after their meetings):

I. A metaproperty is a highest order property of properties and laws.
II. An aspect is the maximal domain of properties and laws qualified by a single metaproperty.
III. An alleged aspectual distinction between two domains of properties and laws A and A’ will be upheld provided that:
   1. There is no causal law in A which is derivable from A’ and vice versa;
   2. There is no causal law which is a higher order law to both a causal law in A and a causal law in a’ [sic];
   3. That nothing will count as a higher order law in (2) which is simply the conjunction or disjunction of causal laws or their denials which already occur in A or A’; and
   4. That A and A’ each contain at least one law relating a least two properties, while every attribute mentioned in such a law belonging to one of the domains is itself a member of the domain.
IV. A law L is a higher order law to a law L’ just in case:
   1. Any property mentioned in L’ is a species or determinant of some property mentioned in L; or
2. \( L' \) is derivable from \( L \) by virtue of meaning relations or formal deduction.

V. An attribute is a property in its original aspectual qualification not counting its meaning connections to other aspects.

Clouser thus uses formal logic to attempt to distinguish aspects. Clouser does not respond to Dooyeweerd’s criticism of formal or symbolic logic. Clouser’s idea of a metaproperty as a “highest order property” depends on set theory and classes of properties. Note, too, Clouser’s reference to properties being a species of a property in a higher order law. The correlate of ‘species’ is ‘genus,’ and Clouser’s views are open to Dooyeweerd’s critique of using that Aristotelian way of classification to distinguish the aspects. Clouser’s ideas of properties, domains, highest orders and meta-properties are entirely foreign to Dooyeweerd’s thought. Clouser gives no reference for his statement “according to Dooyeweerd, logically distinguishing aspects is essential to the ontology he developed” (Clouser 2011, 218). Dooyeweerd in fact rejects that view; he says that it is logicistic to attempt to distinguish aspects by the logical mode; this leads to antinomies and to cancelling the irreducibility of the meaning-kernels (Dooyeweerd 1975, 100).

5. Clouser now wants to rely on a letter he believes Dooyeweerd sent to his supervisor, a letter that he never saw and of which he never had a copy. But we cannot argue from what we do not know. If there was such a letter, it cannot be used to disregard Dooyeweerd’s later views on these issues. What we do know is that as of June 21, 1972, after these meetings with Dooyeweerd, and after Clouser’s defence of his thesis, Dooyeweerd still did not agree that aspects are “kinds of properties and laws.” Clouser’s committee was requiring revisions to his thesis. Clouser says that the making of aspectual distinctions is not unique to Dooyeweerd’s philosophy, and that his thesis supervisor was still challenging why Clouser’s list of aspects is uniquely correct. Clouser writes to Dooyeweerd:

> And though I find your list of aspects very appealing, I do not see any way to answer this critical question. The situation seems to me analogous to questioning our color classifications. […] And this seems to me the same issue at stake in showing that the aspects are ultimate genera of meaning not subsumable under any wider classification that is not arbitrary.

If all this sounds objectionable on the grounds that I am talking of aspects as kinds of properties and laws rather than as modes of experience (as you suggested in your last letter), then I’m afraid I don’t see the crucial meaning of “mode” which avoids the difficulties I just mentioned. For the substitution of “mode” for “property-kind” seems to me to leave all the difficulties with generating any uniquely correct list of them intact.

On the other hand, if the whole matter is supposed to rest with the principle of excluded antinomy, then I must say that the same things still trouble me about it that I mentioned before: (1) how can we ever be sure as to whether what we have on our hands is a genuine antinomy or a logical contradiction? Antinomy-finding seems suspiciously like the sort of thing someone could appear to succeed with at
any point if he were only clever enough. Besides, you appear to use antinomy in
more than the strict sense of a conflict of laws. [...] 

The entire letter is important, but this excerpt is enough to show that even at this late
date, Dooyeweerd objected to Clouser’s reference to aspects as “kinds of properties and
laws” rather than “modes of experience.” Clouser cannot refer to earlier conversations to
support his views. Note, too that that Clouser sees “kinds of laws and properties” in terms
of “ultimate genera of meaning not subsumable under any wider classification that is not
arbitrary.” ‘Genera’ is of course the plural of ‘genus.’ Contrary to what he now says,
Clouser did use that Aristotelian method of classification of properties, and it resulted in
him not being able to distinguish the aspects. Clouser is attempting to logically classify
the aspects, something that Dooyeweerd says is logicism, which results in cancelling the
irreducibility of the aspects. And that is why Clouser is having such difficulty in
distinguishing the aspects.

6. We also know that on February 9, 1971 Clouser asked Dooyeweerd to write an
introduction to the book that would result from his thesis. In a rather prescient remark,
Clouser says, “For unless you do, and state in that introduction that the work correctly
represents your thought, I can only expect that for years to come I will be accused of
misrepresenting you.” Clouser repeated this request when they met in September, and he
repeated it a third time by letter dated March 20, 1972. He says that without
Dooyeweerd’s approval, many adherents of Dooyeweerd’s philosophy will simply regard
his interpretation as “wildly inaccurate,” and that “without some introductory words to
the contrary, I will spend the next thirty years defending this book as a correct
interpretation of the New Critique.” But Dooyeweerd did not write such an introduction.
What Dooyeweerd did write was his last article “Gegenstandsrelatie” (Dooyeweerd
1975), directed against the logicistic views that Clouser is now advocating.

7. In 2009, Clouser tried to avoid the force of Dooyeweerd’s last article by distinguishing
between abstraction and deduction. He now tries a different argument—that Dooyeweerd
only rejected the idea that we can know modal structures by abstraction, and not that we
can know the nuclear moment of an aspect by abstraction (Clouser 2011, 223-24). But the
nuclear moment is not different from the modal structure; it is the center of the modal
structure and guarantees the sphere-sovereignty of the entire aspect. Every aspect is
expressed in its own modal structure, a law-sphere, which includes the nuclear moment
or kernel as well as its analogical meaning-moments (NC II, 74-5, Dooyeweerd 1975,
91). Since the modal structure cannot be known by abstraction, neither can the kernel of
that structure. The kernel cannot even be logically defined. The aspects are “universal
modalities of temporal being” (NC I, 3 fn1). This universal modal character cannot be
discovered by abstraction from things:

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).

8. Dooyeweerd does refer to abstraction. But aspects are abstracted from the continuity of time, and not by abstraction of properties from things. Clouser cites NC II, 469 (Clouser 2011, 223), but Clouser leaves out the crucial statement, “That which is abstracted in anti-thetical theoretical thought appeared to be nothing but the continuity of time.”

9. I made no reference to panentheism in my critique of Clouser. Clouser’s discussion of this issue is a diversion from answering my critique of his Aristotelianism. Clouser himself does not believe in panentheism, but that is not the point. The issue is what Dooyeweerd meant. Clouser’s theology gets in the way of the reading of Dooyeweerd’s text (although it is surprising that Clouser has to rely on non-canonical texts like the Dead Sea Scrolls for support). Panentheism does not require a belief in emanation or that we are temporal bits of God’s own being. Dooyeweerd criticized the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*. He says it should not be considered as a conceptual definition, and he warns:

> 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 (“Cornelius Van Til and the Transcendental Critique of Theoretical Thought,” Jerusalem and Athens, p. 459, fn15).

God alone is Being. All creation is “out, from and towards” God as Origin (Theses 48, 52). See also my Response to Gerrit Glas and Henk Geersema (online). For a detailed review of the history of the development of Dooyeweerd’s philosophy, including the issue of panentheism, see “Two Ways of Reformational Philosophy” [http://www.members.shaw.ca/hermandooyeweerd/History.html].

10. Thinknet is an online discussion group for reformational philosophy. For a time I was a member; I left the group because the discussion was frequently personally abusive and unscholarly, confusing arguments *ad hominem* with real philosophy. I still have copies of my Thinknet correspondence with Clouser. Clouser has mischaracterized this discussion, apparently because he misunderstands Dooyeweerd’s view of time. It is not that our souls exist from all eternity in God (Clouser 2011, 227). Rather, Dooyeweerd says that our soul/heart/central selfhood was created and exists in the *aevum*, the heavens. The *aevum* is a created eternity. But the *aevum* is not God’s eternity. And Dooyeweerd distinguishes between the supratemporal ‘heavens’ and the temporal ‘earth,’ (Theses 7, 40, 53-56 and 65). Abraham Kuyper also refers to a created eternity as our true home; he calls it a ‘created heaven’ in contrast to earth (Kuyper’s “Pentecost Meditation,” which Dooyeweerd praised in a video interview). Nor is it correct that a supratemporal selfhood means a disembodied existence, although in this dispensation, our embodiment is temporal (Theses 6-8, 20, 40, 56, 68, 70, 73, 80, 82). Our selfhood is presently the religious concentration point of our entire temporal existence (Theses 5, 9-11, 65-67, 74, 77-78, 94). And see Dooyeweerd’s appreciation of Marlet, who
emphasized that what is important for Dooyeweerd is the concentric movement towards the supratemporal center, by which the peripheral temporal reality is fulfilled.