
[Page references are to this work, unless otherwise noted]

Despite some major flaws, this is an excellent introduction to the philosophy of Herman Dooyeweerd (1894-1977), and very different from other such books. Troost emphasizes ideas that Dooyeweerd said were the most important for understanding his work, but which have been rejected by most other reformational philosophers. These include his ideas of supratemporality, totality, the human heart that transcends time, the religious root unity of creation, and the law of religious concentration of all creation towards that root unity. These are ideas that Troost also emphasized to me in his course on philosophical ethics in the 1970’s.

Andree Troost (1916-2008) was a theologian, and this book is a translation of lectures to his theology students. The lectures are sometimes repetitive, and they lack adequate footnotes to Dooyeweerd’s work. I will at times give references in a shorthand way by referring to the corresponding Thesis in my own summary of Dooyeweerd (Friesen 2009). The original title of Troost’s lectures was “Antropocentrische Totaliteitswetenschap” [Anthropocentric totality science]. Troost regarded these lectures an introduction to his major work, Vakfilosofie van de Geloofswetenschap [Special philosophy of the science of faith], published in 2004.

The idea of supratemporality is fundamental to Dooyeweerd’s philosophy. Troost contrasts reformational philosophers like Dirk Vollenhoven, Hendrik Van Riessen and J.D. Dengerink who denied this time-transcending dimension. Dooyeweerd’s emphasized the rootedness of our heart in the supratemporal, supra-spatial, supra-historical center of unity in Christ (Troost 2004, 113 fn28). The supratemporal is not a separate heavenly kingdom, but the depth dimension, a more-than-historical reality. Thus this is not a dualism or even a duality. It is not timelessness, but the fullness of time (p. 140-44. 177, 237 fn96; Troost 2004, 270). Although Troost prefers Willem Ouweneel’s term ‘fullness of time,’ (p. 40) it is clear that this is the same as Dooyeweerd’s idea of the supratemporal. The supratemporal is a third possibility between time and eternity. The supratemporal should not be confused with God’s eternity; the supratemporal is a part of creaturely reality, but it transcends the temporal. It goes beyond time. Troost makes it clear that ‘supratemporal’ or ‘fullness of time’ also means something more than a mere temporal coherence (pp. 31, 38, 41, 126; Troost 2004, 225 fn19).

God’s work of creation did not itself take place in time. Creation was completed in the supratemporal realm. This completed creation is “manifested” or “revealed” or “unfolded” within time. Insofar as the Bible speaks of creation, it is referring to primordial time; creation is not in time, but “prior” to it. Any reference to primordial time is mythological, religious language, and Troost explicitly refers to Mircea Eliade’s usage of the term. “In the beginning” is not the same as the Big Bang. There is a distinction between creation (“in the beginning”) and genesis in time (pp. 127-130, 160, 177, 219 fn87.) Dooyeweerd also says that creation was completed and is
only being unfolded in time (Thesis 59). We might re-phrase this as follows: Everything in time from the Big Bang onwards is an unfolding of what was created in a completed way outside of time.

As humans, we were already created before our existence in time. We were created “in Christ,” the root of all creation. Troost translates Col. 1:16-17 as created “in Christ.” This means not only that we were created “by” Christ, but that our supratemporal reality was contained within him, first in Adam who was created in Christ and then as further individuals. Adam, the first man, was not only a representative of future humans, but contained within himself all of later humanity. This seems to be a good explanation of what Dooyeweerd means by both a "spiritual generation" and a temporal generation of man (Thesis 64). We sinned “in Adam.” Although Troost regards Adam’s fall as an historical event, he says that Adam’s sin was primarily in his heart, supratemporally. Out of that flowed the temporal transgression. We are bonded with others in this supra-individual and supratemporal religious unity (pp. 42, 60, 183, 193). Man’s creation was completed in the supratemporal, but man’s existence is disclosed or revealed within time.

Troost, like Dooyeweerd, also emphasizes our supratemporal heart, the center of our being. He distinguishes between our supratemporal “I” and our selfhood which is a temporal expression of that “I.” We might quibble over the terminology—whether the supratemporal should be called “I” or “selfhood” and whether the temporal expression should be called ‘ego,’ but what is important is Troost’s distinction. Our temporal body, and the fullness of our entire temporal life are contained within our heart. Our heart survives our death and our heart precedes our conception and birth. I am not my body, but I can abandon my body as an “earthly tent” (2 Cor. 5:1) and live on without this body. It is not that I will have no body after death, but rather a resurrected body of supratemporal fullness, or a “spiritual body” (pp. 24, 173-76, 181, 190). Traditionally, the heart is referred to by the term ‘immortal soul.’ Other terms used for heart are ‘transcendent center,’ ‘religious concentration point,’ ‘supratemporal unity,’ ‘totality,’ and ‘selfhood’ (Troost 2004, 44-6).

There is an error in translation on p. 175 of the text. It says that the heart is “no more than a figure of speech.” But the original text says that it is the term heart that is merely figurative. In other words, ‘heart’ does not refer to the physical organ in our body. But although the term may be figurative, the heart itself is a “genuine reality,” as Troost affirms on the next page.

Troost uses the idea of man’s completed supratemporal creation in order to discuss the ethical implications of abortion. Troost says that many current objections to abortion are based on the wrong reasoning. We cannot really say that our existence begins at conception or even birth. Our birth is not our origin; our origin is not in time (pp. 153, 179).

Those who deny the supratemporal are immanence philosophers. Immanence philosophy is a “horizonalist” view of reality (pp. 31, 40 fn 21, 43, 171).
Immanentism “does not recognize a concentration of temporal reality into a temporally transcendent totality and unity” (p. 91). Not to acknowledge the supratemporal leads to secularization of philosophy and science and to relativism (Troost 2004, 224).

Dooyeweerd's kind of reformational philosophy is contrasted with immanence philosophy primarily by its vision of time-transcending fullness—by its reference to a supratemporal root unity (Troost 2004, 100). Some confusion has been caused by the editor of the lectures, who included footnotes defining immanence in terms of a failure to believe in a transcendent God (pp. 21 fn 14, 91 fn42). But that is not correct. Troost is at pains to explain that his idea of immanence, like Dooyeweerd’s, is not to be understood in that way, but in relation to the idea of time and the supratemporal. He says,

Reformational philosophy (in Dooyeweerd’s version) primarily relates transcendence and immanence to time. In other words, “transcendence” in its language is always temporal transcendence, supra-temporality—but not “eternity.” Temporal reality is less than total reality.” [...] Consequently, immanence here is always temporal immanence, that which exists and functions in time. So both words transcendence and immanence, do not relate directly to God, as they do in theology. (p.39)

The dividing line between immanence philosophy and Dooyeweerd’s philosophy is not belief or disbelief in God, but rather the idea of the supratemporal heart:

The most important feature of his entire philosophy, if not to say its very foundation, stands or falls with his concept of the heart. Here lies the criterion, the breaking-point between what he called “immanence philosophy” and Christian transcendence philosophy. (p. 174)

In other words, one may believe in a transcendent God, but still be an immanence philosopher if one denies the supratemporal nature of our heart. This was also Dooyeweerd’s meaning of ‘immanence philosophy’ (Thesis 44). Although Troost does not say so directly, this implies that most reformational philosophers today are immanence philosophers. The editor has caused additional confusion by adding a glossary to Troost’s book, which makes the same and other errors since it relies more on Vollenhoven’s philosophy.

Troost emphasizes that man was created as the supratemporal root unity of all temporal creation, the center of the cosmos. Man’s position in the cosmos is central. Non-human creation relates to God only via man. Man relates the rest of creation to God in the “opening process.” This includes cultural achievements, in the “unfolding” [ontsluiting] of reality, the realizing of the possibilities within temporal reality. But it also includes miracles and signs, which are not supernatural but are part of the opening process. When man fell from his central position, a New Root was required. Christ is the New Root, in whom we participate (pp. 35, 50, 183-6).

Troost, like Dooyeweerd, says that creation is “out, from and towards” God (p. 21; Thesis 52). For Troost, this means the same as saying that we are created “in Christ.”
There is a unity of our origin, continued existence, and destination. Created reality diverges and is disclosed from its Origin, but converges and concentrates in its destination (p. 2; Troost 2004, 225-6). Troost acknowledges theological difficulties in the idea that creation was “in Christ,” but says that this is not pantheism. He also says that it is not panentheism, but he fails to distinguish between the two terms (Troost 2004, 53). He admits that Paul used the panentheistic terminology of his contemporaries in Acts 17:28 (Troost 2004, 55). Troost’s objection to the term panentheism seems to be that we do not return or sink back into God like a drop in the ocean (Troost 2004, 221-22). But Troost does not seem to recognize that panentheism does not necessarily mean a loss of individuality, any more than being “in Christ” means a loss of individuality.

Further clarification is given by Troost’s discussion of mysticism. Mysticism contains many positive points: that we can have non-rational knowledge of God, that we have joy in God, an ek-stase that cannot be conceptualized, and that there is a striving for unity. But Troost opposes any individualistic kind of spirituality. Furthermore, mysticism sees supratemporality as the ‘moment’ of sinking into and becoming one with God. This (1) misunderstands supratemporality as God’s eternity; (2) improperly seeks to escape from the temporal; and from the temporal body in particular; (3) and it also misunderstands unity with Christ as unity with God. Our unity is with Christ, supratemporally, but we remain creatures. We do not become divine or merged with God, unlike beliefs of Gnosticism or Neo-Platonism (Troost 2004, 214, 221-24).

Troost correctly distinguishes between faith and religion and between faith and theology. Religion is not to be identified with its manifestations in worship or church, religious views, mystical feelings, or other manifestations in time (p. 72, Troost 2004, 63). And Troost is correct that faith is itself a mode of our experience (p. 65). But Troost says that faith is a special kind of knowledge, enkaptically intertwined with other kinds of knowledge (p. 284, 291). But Doyeweerd does not speak of enkapsis in relation to acts of knowing. There are analogies within faith, but that is different from enkapsis. Troost’s view of faith as giving a different kind of knowing seems to be more similar to the ideas of Karl Barth, although he has his own criticism of Barth. Barth also emphasized creation in Christ, something known only by faith. Barth’s view was characterized as ‘Chrestomonism’ (Troost 2004, 268).

The idea of the supratemporal expressing itself within the temporal is also the basis for Troost’s explanation of Christ’s incarnation. Troost says that Christ is not only the root of creation, but also the first created being. Christ was “the first creature” in whom “all mankind was present” (p. 219). Although creation is “in Christ,” Christ himself was created, “the firstborn of all creation” (Col. 1:15, Rev. 3:14) (Troost 2004, 120, 437). We are “blocked” from seeing this simple statement of Scripture because of a wrong view of reality that has no room for a creaturely transcendence of fulfilled time (Troost 2004, 121). Creaturely transcendence includes Christ’s human nature. Both natures of Christ were created supratemporally; Troost does not want to see any split between them (p. 141 fn57). Christ was supratemporal before becoming manifest in Jesus of Nazareth (p. 171). This supratemporality was
the “order of Melchizedek.” Jesus said, “Before Abraham was, I am,” and this is not merely a reference to his divine nature (p. 141). Troost prefers not to speak of the ‘pre-existence’ of Christ, since that is a temporal expression, and not appropriate to refer to the supratemporal (Troost 2004, 82).

In referring to Christ as the first created being, Troost’s theology goes well beyond what Dooyeweerd says. In his 1964 Talk and Discussion, Dooyeweerd did say that the supratemporal is the basis for explaining the incarnation. Christ’s incarnation was in both the supratemporal and the temporal. Both the supratemporal and the temporal are created reality. But that does not mean that Christ himself was created. Rather, Dooyeweerd speaks of the eternal Christ being incarnated in both the supratemporal and the temporal. This fits with the creedal formulation “begotten not made.” I also think that this is more in accord with the roots of Dooyeweerd’s philosophy, as found in Daniël Chantepie de la Saussaye and J.H. Gunning, Jr., who first introduced the term ‘supratemporal’ to Reformed theology, as well as the sources on which these theologians relied (Dooyeweerd 1964, Friesen 2006, Friesen 2011). Although the 1964 Discussion is not clear, it seems that Dooyeweerd objected to Pete Steen’s theological question as to whether the supratemporal heart can be equated with Christ. I would re-phrase the answer to say that the heart is man’s supratemporal center, which is contained within and created in Christ, who was incarnated as the supratemporal New Root of creation, with his own body and supratemporal center. Both Troost and Dooyeweerd seem to agree that Christ was fully incarnated in the supratemporal and then revealed in the temporal. The supratemporal is part of created reality, and the incarnation both transcends time and takes place within time. And Christ’s incarnation is an event that also simultaneously reaches into the central sphere of our life as well as in the temporal sphere of our bodily existence.

The supratemporal expresses itself in the temporal. Christ, incarnated supratemporally, expresses himself temporally. This is the basis for revelation. Because the supratemporal Christ expresses himself in temporal reality, Christ can also express himself in the sacraments. That is why for Troost there is a “real presence” in the sacraments. He disagrees with Calvin and other reformers (p. 194 fn75). The presence of Christ in the sacraments, the doctrine of original sin, the meaning of “one holy and catholic church”, Christ’s role as Mediator, the two natures of Christ: all of these doctrines are affected by the view of...

...Christ as transcendent, supratemporal “firstborn” in whom all temporal reality was created as in a unity and fullness (Col. 1:15-20) and in whom man participates religiously in the supra-temporal heart of his existence (pp. 45-6).

The total community of Christ includes the dead as well as those who have not yet been born. The church is a temporal manifestation of this ‘mystical body of Christ,’ ‘unio mystica’ or ‘the one invisible church’ (pp. 234-5; Troost 2004, 220-21).

Troost defines predestination in terms of the fact that we are created and redeemed in Christ. In Christ the post-fall creation is being preserved and redeemed from evil;
this involves “the whole human race.” All things are reconciled unto Him (Col. 1:20). (p. 31, 220; Troost 2004, 100) This is similar to what Dooyeweerd says, that nothing will be lost in all of creation. It seems to imply a universalism, although this is not stated.

We ourselves sinned in Adam. We also died in Christ, were buried and raised up and ascended to heaven. The primary importance of Christ’s death is not its historical nature but its supratemporal root. There had been other resurrections from the dead. What made that of Jesus so special is that he was the “firstborn from the dead” (Col. 1:18). It was an historical manifestation of Christ’s supratemporal mode of being. There is a transcendent ‘root’ of historical actions, which takes place from out of the ‘fullness’ of time (Troost 2004, 115-118). We may compare this to Dooyeweerd’s view that actions take place from out of the center, and that Christ as the New Root gave real propitiation (Theses 75-79, 81).

The writer of Hebrews saw supratemporality as “the order of Melchizedek” (Heb. 7:1-4). Troost says that the writer was expressing himself in traditional, mythical manner (in a way conformed to belief). This order of Melchizedek is “where all historical points of time with their past, present and future are one in Christ” (p. 161). This is why the Bible speaks in varying terms of the same event. Thus, we can speak of Christ’s death in the first century, but Revelation 13:8 can also speak of the Lamb “slain from the foundation of the world.” Christ is both the root and the offspring of David (pp. 147, 172). John 3:36 says: Whoever believes in the Son has life—this having life now is witness to a relativizing in principle of all time and of past, present and future (Troost 2004, 223). Because of this unity or fullness of time, it is “theologically irresponsible” to speak of the order of salvation as if it were an order of time (p. 161). The order of Melchizedek is a “supratemporal priesthood” (Troost 2004, 3235). This is an idea also emphasized in Margaret Barker’s theology, but further elaboration and comparisons are beyond the scope of this review.

In matters of epistemology, Troost is on less certain ground. Although Troost acknowledges that there is a difference between Dooyeweerd’s view of theory as relying on the Gegenstand-relation and the view that theory relies on abstraction, he says it does not make a difference for his purposes (pp. 92, 215, 313; Troost 2004, 94, 307). He therefore seems to fail to recognize how the idea of supratemporality makes a difference in our epistemology. He does acknowledge that knowledge is ultimately rooted in the supratemporal unity of the human “I” (p. 16). But then he falls back on the idea of abstraction of the aspects (p. 74, 79, 85, 102), a view of theory explicitly rejected by Dooyeweerd (Thesis 19). And Troost incorrectly refers to aspects as modes of being, a view that Dooyeweerd denied (p. 314; Thesis 12). There is therefore an inconsistency between Troost’s philosophical anthropology, which relies on Dooyeweerd, and his epistemology, which relies on Vollenhoven and his followers.

Troost seems reluctant to discuss our own experience of transcending time. He is correct that we do not have conceptual knowledge of what transcends time, but only ideas, which are visions or intellectual insight (pp. 41, 175). He is also correct that our ideas use figurative language to refer to what is beyond time. However, the fact
that our language is figurative should not be used to deny that we have an experience beyond time and or to Troost’s conclusion that we know of these realities only by faith (pp. 17, 49, 51, 59). Troost does not adequately discuss how our ideas come before our concepts, and how our ideas are based on our experience beyond time, and how in theory we move back and forth between the unity of our supratemporal selfhood and the diversity of meaning (Theses 90-92). Troost also rejects Dooyeweerd’s idea of intuitive insight [in-zien] in favour of Vollenhoven’s view of knowledge in terms of “coming to know” (p. 311). Troost also says that since the ascension of Christ, we can no longer have a personal meeting with God. Instead, we are restricted to the historical transmission of revelation in tradition and in Scripture (Troost 2004, 225). But Troost’s rejection of direct experience of God is a theological dogma. I do not find it in Dooyeweerd, who emphasizes experience, including the experiences of enstasis, of religious self-reflection, of cosmic consciousness and cosmological consciousness, and the experience of the light of God’s eternity breaking in (Theses 1-7, 46, 91).

A final difficulty with Troost’s book is that he does not examine the historical sources of Dooyeweerd’s philosophy. Troost therefore spends too much time disputing and/or trying to reconcile his ideas with various Reformed confessions. But of course, his lectures were intended for Reformed theological students. I hope that my review has shown their significance for a broader audience.

Bibliography


Troost, Andree (2004): Vakfilosofie van de Geloofswetenschap (Damon).


J. Glenn Friesen