

A Brief Sketch of Dooyeweerd's Theory of Reality

In order to appreciate the difficulties this article is up against, imagine yourself trying to write a brief introduction to, say, Aristotle's philosophy, addressed to those who have never heard of it. The hardest decisions you would have to make are what points to leave out. Then there would be choices concerning which of its internal difficulties need to be covered. Finally, you would also have to make difficult selections concerning which variations on it should be treated and which should be omitted as beyond the scope of a brief introduction.

Now the same holds true for the philosophy of Dooyeweerd, despite the fact that it has not been around for over 2300 years as has Aristotle's. For Dooyeweerd's major opus, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, is without a doubt the most original contribution to philosophy since Kant, among the most at odds with Kant's theories since Kant, and presents a theory of reality that – while closer to the intentions of Aristotle than anyone since Descartes – exceeds even Aristotle's in explanatory power.¹ (And if that doesn't get your attention, then I don't know what will!)

What makes my task somewhat easier, on the other hand, is the fact that I can expect my readers to read *The Myth of Religious Neutrality* which gives a more detailed account of Dooyeweerd's theories, and that frees me to confine my sketch to the following topics: I.) the nature of religious belief, II.) its role in theory making, and III.) an outline of his theory of reality. Each of these requires preliminary explanatory comments.

First, when Dooyeweerd speaks of "religious belief" he means any belief that takes something to be "the absolute origin" of everything else – no matter how that something is conceived. The term "religious", then, is not primarily a reference to worship, a formal creed, or membership in a religious organization. It is rather a reference to a person's orientation with respect to what he or she takes to be *that on which everything else depends*.² In this he reflects his Dutch Calvinist background, for it was Calvin who said: "...that from which all other things derive their origin must necessarily be self-existent and eternal." (*Inst.* 1,5,7), and who took the view that whatever is believed to be the origin of all else is thereby regarded as divine. This holds true whether or not a person believes it is the God of traditional theism who is that divine origin. So theories that take matter/energy, or sense data, or mathematical laws, etc., to have that status are every bit as much committed to divinity beliefs as are people who believe the origin of all else is God, Brahman-Atman, Dharmakaya, or the Tao.³

The second point in this connection is that Dooyeweerd's main application of this idea of what forms the core of religious beliefs, is to highlight the way theories of reality cannot avoid including or presupposing one or another such belief. A theory can either be developed on the premise that the divine transcends the cosmos, or on the premise that some part (or all) of the cosmos itself is divine. But either way, the specific content of

one or another religious belief becomes the key to how any theory of reality gets constructed.

Third, by “theory of reality” Dooyeweerd always intends a theory of what a Theist would call *created* reality; it does not attempt to include God in its scope. Since he takes God to be the origin of everything “found in creation” (Calvin) - mathematical and logical truths not exempted - nothing in creation exists independently from the rest of creation or from God. Therefore, he takes this rule as his guideline to all theorizing: belief in God requires that nothing in the cosmos be regarded as self-existent or as the origin of all else in the cosmos.⁴ This then becomes the pivotal point for his own theory of reality: since nothing in the cosmos is what all else depends on, all ontological reduction theories are excluded.⁵ His project was therefore to develop a theory of reality that is a systematically non-reductionist account of the natures of things and of the cosmic order.

As note 4 should have made clear, Dooyeweerd is not using “reduction” to mean merely the continued analysis of wholes until we reach their most basic parts, coupled with the claim that the nature of the whole is the same as that of the basic parts. That sense of “reduction” is a mixed bag: for certain subject matters it has yielded important insights, while for others it has been the source of great mischief. But what Dooyeweerd has in his sights is not just whole to part reduction, but that long parade of ontological claims that assert reality to be – whether exclusively or essentially – characterized by one or two selected *kinds* of properties and laws exhibited to our experience. I’ll name only a few of these, but they’ll be sufficient to give you the general idea. They include such claims as: everything is *numbers* (Pythagoras), *or physical* (Epicurus, Smart), *or sensory* (Hume, Mach). They are not all monistic, however. They also include such mix and match dualisms as the claim that everything is the product of the combination or interaction of the *physical* and the *mathematical* (Heisenberg), or the *logical* and the *sensory* (Kant), and so on.

Aspects of Experience

To begin his non-reductionist ontology, Dooyeweerd distinguishes a number of large-scale kinds of properties-and-laws that seem to him to be unsusceptible of either elimination or of explaining or producing one another. He calls these kinds “aspects” of reality as it is given to our common-sense experience. And although he argues for his list of aspects as genuinely irreducible, I must immediately point out that the ontology he develops does not depend on accepting his particular list of them. Other thinkers have differed with him as to the correct list of aspects but nevertheless followed the contours of his theory so as to give a non-reductionist account of their aspect lists. In what follows, however, I will be using Dooyeweerd’s own list which is this:

Fiduciary
Ethical
Justitial
Aesthetic

Economic
Social
Linguistic
Historical
Logical
Sensory
Biotic
Physical
Kinematic
Spatial
Quantitative

I have tried to avoid nouns in this list so as not to give the impression that the terms designate classes of *things*. This has resulted in some odd terms and special meanings for some familiar terms, so I need to comment on them. I will also comment on the order of the aspects on this list, from bottom to top.

The term “quantitative” is used to designate the “how much” of things, and should not be taken to refer to a distinct realm of numbers or to abstract systems of mathematics devised for calculating quantity. There is evidence that animals have a sense of quantity even though they don’t invent symbols to represent quantities or discover and formulate laws relating them.⁶ Therefore the term designates quantitative properties and the laws that hold among them.

“Kinetic” is used for the movement of things – their motion in space. Many scientists include kinetic laws within physics, but Galileo and a number of contemporary scientists disagree.⁷

The term “sensory” is used of the qualities of both perceptions and feelings; it designates the phenomenal properties and laws of animal and human *sensitivity*.

The term “historical” is familiar but needs explaining anyway. It does not here refer to everything that has happened in the past, because that’s not what historians are interested in. What does interest them is whatever in the past is of *cultural* importance. So what this term picks out is the activity and transmission of culture forming power. (Other thinkers have used “cultural”, “formative,” or “technical” for this aspect.) What it focuses upon is the human ability to form artifacts from natural materials. This includes the formation of language, theories, music, and social organizations as well as such things as clothes, cars, and houses.

Likewise, the term “ethical” is familiar, but in need of clarification. Often “ethical” is used indiscriminately for what are in fact two different senses of right and wrong. Here, however, it will not mean that something does or doesn’t conform to the norms of justice, but rather that something does or doesn’t conform to the norm of love: you shall love your neighbor as yourself. So I will use the term “justitial” to as the qualification of acts that conform to or violate the norm of *fairness* (Dooyeweerd’s term

is “juridical”), and reserve “ethical” for acts that fulfill or violate the norm of *beneficence*.⁸

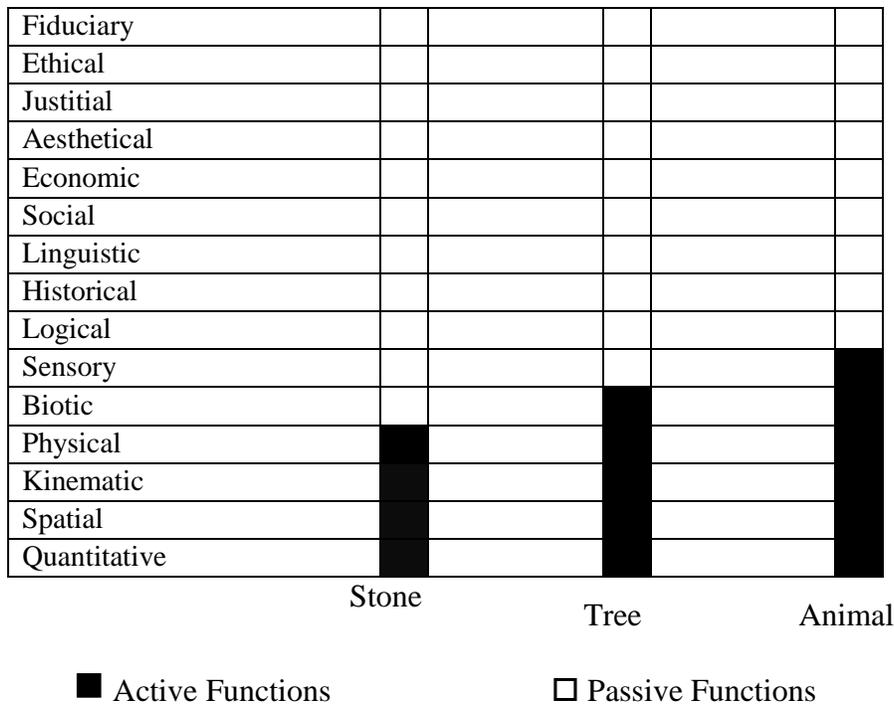
Finally, *fiduciary* is my term for the reliability or trustworthiness that people, things, beliefs, etc., may have. (Dooyeweerd’s own term was “pistical”, from the Greek for trust.)

The non-reductionist thrust of Dooyeweerd’s ontology starts with regarding the properties of each kind, and the laws relating the properties of that kind, as correlates: there are no utterly unordered properties and there are no aspectual laws that do not order properties of the same kind. (There are other sorts of laws besides aspectual laws, of course, and I will explain those in due course.) In addition to regarding laws as correlates of what they govern, Dooyeweerd proposes another idea concerning all laws of the cosmos – an idea that is the key to his ontology, namely, that the law-order of reality is a distinct component of the cosmos, not originating in either the human knowing subjects or in the objects they know. They are not, therefore, merely generalizations of the ways things with fixed natures behave, as traditional objectivism would have it. Nor are they the order our minds impose on what we experience, as subjectivism maintains. Law-order is *sui generis* with respect to both knowing subjects and known objects; it governs and connects both but is produced by neither.⁹ Hence his title for this philosophy: The Philosophy of the Idea of Law (which I shorten to the “Law Framework theory”). This frees us from the old dilemma of objectivism vs. subjectivism. Neither the knowing subject nor the objects known are the source of the orderliness of the world we experience. God alone is law-giver to creation.

Furthermore, according to this theory all concrete things are governed by all the aspectual laws simultaneously, so that every concrete thing always has some properties of every aspectual kind. This point can only make sense, however, if we distinguish two ways in which a thing may possess a property: actively and passively.¹⁰ This is why the theory can speak of them as the two ways a thing can exist and function under the laws of an aspect. But for all the difference between them, these two ways are not mutually exclusive. Instead, the theory sees all things as functioning passively in every aspect all the time, so that it is only active functions that a thing may lack in certain aspects. In fact, it is the appearance of active functions that is reflected in the order of the aspect list given above, whereby a thing may have active functions in aspects lower on the list but lack them in aspects higher on the list. The order is thus one in which active functions in lower aspects are preconditions for - but not causes of – active functions in aspects higher on the list.

Consider the example of a stone. According to the distinction being proposed, the stone functions actively in the quantitative, spatial, kinematic, and physical aspects. That is, it possesses properties of each of those aspects and is subject to the laws of each in a way that does not depend upon the stone’s relations to the active functions of humans. The stone does not function actively in the higher aspects, however. It is not biotically alive, it does not sensorily perceive, think logically, or use a language. But were the stone not subject to the laws of biology, it could not be biotically safe or dangerous nor could it

function passively in the life processes of living things. But stones clearly can have passive biotic functions without being alive. They can be swallowed by a bird and take part in grinding the food in its gizzard; they can be the wall of an animal's den; they can be the hard surface on which a bird drops a clam in order to open its shell. Likewise, although a stone has no active sensory function, it can be passively perceived by animals and humans that do have such an active function. That is to say, unless it were passively governed by sensory laws and possessed passive sensory properties, a stone could not be seen as having any color. Unperceived it has no color *actively*; but unless it possessed the passive potential to appear a certain color, that color could not be actualized by animals or humans who do have such an active sensory function. Ditto for its logical properties. Were the stone not subject to the laws of non-contradiction, identity, and excluded middle, and so possess passive logical properties, we could not logically distinguish it or form a concept of it. (Be sure not to confuse "active" with "actual" here. Passive properties can be either potential or actual, while active properties are always actual.)¹¹ Just so, a stone has passive properties that are linguistic (it can be spoken of), economic (it can be valued, bought, and sold), justitial (it can be someone's property or a murder weapon), and so on. The following chart may help clarify these concepts:



Even at this early stage of explanation, it is possible to see some of the benefits of this theory. Consider only its results for understanding sensory perception. A stick, it says, has the passive dispositional property of appearing brown to normal perception in normal light. When this passive potentiality is actualized in relation to a perceiver the stick actually appears brown. By the same token, however, the stick has the passive sensory dispositions of appearing bent in water and smaller at a distance. Thus, there is no need to postulate that what appears bent or smaller is something other than the stick.

No need, in other words, to be led into the dead-end of thinking that what we really experience are internal “sense data” rather than the external stick. On the sense data theory, the existence and nature of the real stick are forever unknowable. But on the Law Framework Theory we are not isolated from the world and locked into ourselves, knowing only our own internal states.

At the same time, however, this theory allows us to appreciate the elements of truth in both objectivism and subjectivism. For example, we agree with the subjectivist that apart from being perceived the stick does not *actually* (manifestly) have brown color. But we deny the subjectivist hypothesis that such qualities are therefore created by us wholesale or exist only in our minds. Thus, the theory allows us to agree that sensory qualities are not *actively* inherent in objects, without being committed to a wholly subjectivist explanation of them. Likewise, we can agree with the objectivist denial that color is only in our minds, or that “beauty is in the eye of the beholder,” or that economic worth is entirely our own invention. From the Law Framework point of view, were not sensory, economic and aesthetic norms embedded in the law-side of reality, and did not all things have those kinds of properties passively in correlation to those norms, we could not experience anything in those ways. For instance, were a stone not subject to the norms of supply and demand and diminishing returns, we could not actualize an economic value for it. It is the economic passive potential of the stone that we actualize when we value it.

The proposal of a distinct law-side to reality, and the difference between the active and passive ways things can be governed by them, also shows why it is not plausible that entire aspects emerge from others. The element of truth in such views is that the active functions of things have emerged in higher aspects following the order suggested for the aspects: there was a time on earth when there were no living things followed by their emergence, for example. But the emergence of things with a new active biotic function could only have taken place in relation to the laws and passive properties already true of things in the biological aspect. What sense would it make, for example, to claim that the cosmos originally had only physical properties and laws, while later on sensory and logical properties emerged? Were there no sensory laws already governing passive sensory potentials of the early cosmos, nothing about it could be depicted or imagined by us because nothing in it would have had any appearance whatever. And were it not passively governed by logical laws from the start, we could not now distinguish it from anything else or form concepts of it.

In this way the active/passive distinction removes the temptation to deny that aspects are all equally real with respect to their passive properties and laws, and paves that way for a more plausible theory of what I will call “strong emergence”: 1) things having active functions in aspects lower on the list are preconditions for other things to acquire new active functions in aspects higher on the list; 2) the order of pre-conditionality is not a causal order, so we do not need to postulate causal relations between things that are mutually exclusive in nature, as reductionist theories do; 3) in fact, the Law Framework theory says that every concrete thing, event, or state of affairs has some properties of every aspect at least passively. Thus, when this theory denies that

everything is, say, exclusively physical, it does not do so by way of maintaining that there are utterly non-physical things. Rather, it does so by maintaining that all things have passive properties in every aspect of reality and active properties in at least several aspects, one of which is always the physical. (I think that this part of the theory calls for the postulation of emergence laws, but Dooyeweerd never did that.)

The Natures of Things

The Law Framework Theory is well aware, however, that merely pointing to the difference between the active and the passive possession of properties will not, all by itself, get us far in delineating the distinctive natures exhibited by specific types of things. For that, we also need to focus on the way the properties and laws of one particular aspect always characterize a thing's nature more centrally than its other aspects do. This is why the theory speaks of the aspect central to a thing's nature as "qualifying" it. For example, with reference to the chart given previously, it says that a stone is physically qualified, a plant is biotically qualified, while an animal is sensorily qualified. The qualifying aspect, then, is the one that: 1) is central to the nature of a thing, 2) the one whose laws govern the internal organization of the thing taken as a whole, and 3) is the highest aspect on the list in which the thing functions actively (this third requirement is true of natural things but not of artifacts as I will explain shortly).

The idea of a qualifying function has several advantages that recommend it. First, it is an empirical theory open to confirmation, disconfirmation, and revision. It is not a rule to be followed whether or not things fail to fit it. Second, it confirms and corresponds to the way we classify natural things in ordinary common-sense language when we speak of them as animal, vegetable, or mineral. By confirming and accounting for such common-sense classifications, the theory sets the stage for an ontology that recognizes irreducible levels in reality, levels that are strongly emergent with respect to one another. It also differentiates between the ways ordinary language speaks of things as "physical" as opposed to the way many reductionist theories do. Ordinary language refers to a thing as physical to mean that it is real rather than imaginary, or simply that it has physical properties. It *never* means a thing is exclusively physical since nothing is ever experienced that way. The Law Framework theory serves to confirm the ordinary language view by pointing to the way a thing can be physically qualified.

By contrast, an act of perception can be sensorily qualified. Such an act has other active functions which don't qualify it, of course. It actively possesses quantity, spatial location, motion, and includes physical and biotic processes. And passively it can be logically conceptualized, linguistically named, economically worth money, or be just, loving, or trustworthy. But it is qualified by sensory properties and internally governed by sensory laws. In the same way, acts of humans can be qualified economically (buying and selling), biotically (eating), aesthetically (dancing), or justitially (being fair in a transaction). Yet they will all occur under the governance of the laws and norms of every aspect and have passive properties in every aspect, which is why they can be studied from the standpoint of any aspect.

Another advantage that recommends the idea of a qualifying function is the way it enables us to draw the important distinction between wholes comprised of parts and wholes comprised of sub-wholes (as well as parts). Aristotle held that something is to be taken as a part of a whole provided that it: 1) participates in the internal organization of the whole, and 2) it is either unable to come into existence or unable to function apart from the whole. This definition has been widely accepted in western philosophy for nearly 2300 years. But the Law Framework theory says that while this is correct as far as it goes, it is not an adequate definition. Human beings surely function in the internal organization of social communities and cannot come into being apart from the social community of their parents. But humans are not merely *parts* of families, schools, businesses, states, churches, or clubs. The supplementary criterion that needs to be added to Aristotle's definition is that a part *must share the same aspectual qualification as the whole*. From this standpoint, then, it would not be accurate to call a rock a *part* of a garden because a rock is physically qualified while a garden is an aesthetically qualified whole. The rock is included in the internal organization of the garden, of course, but because it has a different aspectual qualification it is included in it as a sub-whole within a greater whole.

Capsulate Wholes

In this way, the idea of a qualifying function enables us to draw the distinction between part/whole relations and sub-whole/greater-whole relations. The Law Framework theory speaks of the larger whole as “encapsulating” a sub-whole, and the larger whole as a “capsulate whole”.¹² This turns out to be a valuable distinction, and so further recommends the idea of a qualifying function. Take, for instance, the example of a marble sculpture of a human body. How are we to understand the relation of the marble to the statue as a whole? It cannot possibly be a *part* of the whole; the parts of the statue are its arms, legs, torso, etc. Even on the traditional view the marble can't be part of the statue because it can exist apart from the statue. But the idea of a capsulate whole does much better. According to it, the marble is a physically qualified sub-whole included in the larger capsulate whole that is the aesthetically qualified statue. Moreover, the relation between the marble and the finished art work displays another constant feature of the relation of a sub-whole to capsulate whole: there will always be features of the greater capsulate whole that cannot no amount of knowledge of its sub-wholes can yield.

Here are additional examples of the same distinction. The atoms that are included in a plant are not parts of the plant but sub-wholes encapsulated within it. They can exist and function apart from the plant, they are physically qualified while the plant is biotically qualified, and no amount of knowledge of the atoms can yield knowledge of the nature of plants. (This is further confirmation of a point I made earlier, because the idea of capsulate wholes supports the broader idea of strong emergence.) By contrast the cells included in the plant are parts of it. They have the same biotic qualification, and cannot come into existence or function apart from the plant. On the other hand, the relation of atoms to a molecule would be a capsulate relation. The atoms of hydrogen and oxygen that combine to form a water molecule are sub-wholes within the capsulate molecule even though they do have the same (physical) qualification. That is because the

atoms can exist and function apart from the molecule, and because no amount of knowledge of the atoms allows us to infer that, say, water would freeze at 0 centigrade, expand when it freezes, or feel wet.

Another characteristic of capsule relations is that, in every case we can think of, a sub-whole included in a larger capsule whole has its qualifying function subsumed by the greater whole and contributes to the functioning of that larger whole (think of the stone in a bird's gizzard, or a rock in a garden). Moreover, while every capsule whole will have properties none of its sub-wholes possess, some may have a qualifying function all its sub-wholes lack (think of the aesthetic qualification of the statue not possessed by the marble that was carved to form it). This is an additional reason why sub-wholes cannot be considered *causes* of the greater wholes encapsulating them. They are necessary conditions for the capsule wholes but are never sufficient for their existence.

Type Laws

This last point leads to the question as to what accounts for the ways properties of different aspectual kinds, as well as sub-wholes with different qualifying functions, combine to form things of a particular type. Put another way: why is it that some combinations of properties, parts, and sub-wholes seem not to be possible while others are possible? The answer, says the Law Framework theory, is yet another sort of laws, laws that range across aspects. These I call "type laws": laws that make possible the combining into one thing of properties, parts, and sub-wholes so as to form things of a specific type.¹³ This idea further refines our focus upon the natures of things. It is not enough to point to the different qualifications things may have, or to notice that some things are composed of sub-wholes as well as parts. We must now go a further step and distinguish *types* of things according to their type laws.

Please notice, however, that "differentiating according to type law" is not intended to suggest that we can gain knowledge of any such law prior to experiencing things of the type it makes possible. Rather, we postulate such laws to account for what makes possible the combinations of properties of different aspectual kinds, and of sub-wholes with different aspectual qualifications, within individual things of the same type. On this view, then, a concrete thing is *an individual structural assemblage of properties, parts, and perhaps sub-wholes, made possible by a type law and qualified by the aspectual laws that govern its internal organization*. An individual concrete thing is not, therefore, merely a heap or bundle of parts and properties, as some other theories have it. But at the same time the Law Framework theory does not need to postulate another reality behind each thing – a "substance" – to explain what combines all its constituents into that thing. That job is done by the thing's type law.

The idea of a type law also explains why not all the combinations of properties, parts, and sub-wholes we can think of are really possible. That is, we can think of combinations of them forming things which, while not self-contradictory, are nevertheless not possible: a talking rock, a flying horse, etc. The explanation is that these are not possible because there is no type law for them. On this view, then, there is a

difference between “impossible” and “not possible:” while we can speak of things that are *impossible* because they would violate a law (a square circle, a self-levitating stone), there are also others that do not violate any law but are *not possible* simply because there is no type law for them (a feathered tree).

It should also be noticed that, unlike aspectual laws, type laws do exist prior to the things they make possible and are not strictly correlative to them. On this theory, there are not only type laws for every type of natural things but every type of artifact as well.¹⁴

Artifacts

So far, I have applied the concepts introduced by the Law Framework theory only to natural things, because the natures of artifacts are more complex. They require more than the specification of the qualifying function of their natural material and their type law, if we're to account for what a natural material has *become* in an artifact. For example, the stones used to build a house would, by themselves, have no more than a physical qualification. But once they have undergone human formative control and been transformed into a house, the new whole that encapsulates them acquires an additional *social* qualification despite the fact that all its parts and sub-wholes have only a passive function in that aspect. Unless we recognize that such a transformation of the stones has occurred, however, we would not recognize that the stones *now form a house*, and so would miss what they have *become*.¹⁵

For these reasons, two new components need to be added to the theory in order to specify the nature of an artifact. First, we must recognize that an artifact, unlike a natural thing, may be qualified by an aspect in which it has only a passive function. Secondly, we need to expand the idea of what qualifies the nature of an artifact to include both the aspect qualifying the *process of transformation by which it was produced*, as well as the aspect qualifying the *kind of plan which guided its formation*. The aspect qualifying the process of an artifact's formation is what Dooyeweerd called the artifact's *foundational function*, and the aspect qualifying the plan which guided its formation he called its *leading function*. So with respect to the example of stones formed into a house, the theory says that the foundational function of the house is *historical* (or cultural) because the process of building it is qualified by the human ability to transform natural materials. But what then is its leading function? One plausible candidate would be to say it is biological, and there is no doubt that a house does serve biological needs. We would form them very differently were our bodies significantly different from what they are. But a house is more than bare biological shelter - which is why it differs from a mere lean-to or hut. It provides a place for social exchange and accommodates the need for privacy. In addition, the varying sizes, shapes, and arrangement of its rooms usually reflect a difference in social status among its occupants. In fact, if a building lacked these features we wouldn't call it a house. For these reasons, the theory says that the leading function of a house is *social*.¹⁶

There is not the space here to give many further examples of how these concepts serve to bring the natures of artifacts into focus, but here are a few. A book would be said

to have a historical foundational function and a linguistic leading function. The poetry signified in the book, on the other hand, would have a historical foundational function and an aesthetic leading function.¹⁷ Likewise, a painting or sculpture would also have an aesthetic leading function. A completely different example is a warehouse which, with its loading platforms and storage areas, shows an historical foundational function and an economic leading function. Of course, a bank has the same leading function. What distinguishes a warehouse from a bank is the type law of each; the law that determines the internal relations of its properties, parts, and sub-wholes such that it conforms to its type. This is why a fuller account of an artifact's nature must include its type law as well as its qualification by its foundational and leading functions.

At this point it may seem as though all artifacts would have an historical (cultural) leading function. After all, they're all formed by humans, no? While that is true of most artifacts, there are nevertheless some that have their foundation in an aspect other than the historical. To make this point clear, however, I must first add that the theory also sees social communities as artifacts, formed when humans give specific organization to aspectually differentiated inter-human relations. These differ from non-social artifacts in that their "natural materials" are other human beings. That said, there appear to be (at least) two communities that should not be taken to have a cultural foundational function: marriage and family. The reason is that they are not free cultural creations in that they are rooted in our biotic, sexual, nature. Humans give these communities specific forms, to be sure. But it is our biotic make-up that drives the process of their formation and is the reason these institutions are invariably given some social form or other.

Social Emergence: Sphere Sovereignty

We have already seen why many wholes cannot be analyzed only by distinguishing their parts, but need to be seen as capsule wholes including sub-wholes. This is especially true of social communities, since they include humans *who are never merely their parts*. In keeping with the Theism underlying this ontology, human existence is seen as centered in the "heart" or "soul" of a person which functions in all the aspects alike but cannot be identified with (confined to) any of them. Human nature thus has no aspectual qualification.¹⁸ While the human heart acts within the constraints of all the laws of creation, there is a real sense in which it is not under their control so that it has genuine freedom. Humans are never, therefore, merely *parts* of a family, school, church, or what have you, but are sub-wholes encapsulated in them.

This last point is also true of the various communities with respect to one another: they are almost never parts of one another as they have different leading functions and display conformity to different type laws. So, for example, a family cannot be part of a state as is shown by the fact that its members can be citizens of different states. But what is even more important is that *neither can any of the major types of social communities be encapsulated within one another*.¹⁹ Recall that when a sub-whole is encapsulated in a greater whole, the leading function of the greater whole overrides the qualifying function of the sub-whole (think of the stone in a bird's gizzard serving a biotic purpose). In the case of the major social institutions, subsuming one under another would mean that the

one(s) subsumed would have their qualifying function overridden by the leading function of the capsule whole. This why subsuming a business, school, or church under the state, for instance, would have the effect of stunting or outright cancelling the leading functions of the subsumed communities in favor of the state's leading function of public justice. *This requires that we take a non-hierarchical view of society as a whole.*

Here's the same point from a different angle, the angle of authority in human life. Is there one supreme source of authority in human social life? If so, what *kind* of authority is it? There have been many reductionist answers to this question. There are theories that have claimed that the source of authority is power, reason (or reason plus virtue), wealth, or superior will. But a genuinely Theistic view must reject all such proposals because all authority originates with God who has built subsidiary authorities into human life. There is the authority of parents in a family, of owners in a business, of elected officials in the state, of clergy in a church, temple, or mosque, of doctors in a hospital, and so on. Such organizations are formed to promote and preserve aspectually distinct facets of life: ethical love (family), economic life (business), public justice (state), religious belief and practice (church, synagogue, mosque), biotic health (hospital), etc. Each of these communities has its own foundational and leading functions, its own type law, and its own type of authority.

This idea of multiple kinds of authority, each with its own proper domain or "sphere" was called "sphere sovereignty" by its great champion, Abraham Kuyper.²⁰ It stresses that no one kind of authority – and thus no single institution – is the source of all authority in life, or the supreme authority over all other kinds. Rather, social institutions of each distinct type have a sphere of competence which corresponds to their leading function, so that each community has a relative immunity from interference by authorities of different types, or which arise in organizations with different leading functions. In practice this means, for example, that parents set children's bedtimes not governments, churches set requirements for membership not courts, courts interpret the criminal law not churches, schools set educational requirements not parents, and businesses decide what products or services to produce not schools, and so on. Moreover, while a school may be supported by a family, state, church, or business, it may not be *run* by them. If being run by the state is what is meant by "state school," then the idea is as self-contradictory as "state church" or "state family."²¹

One of the most important results of Sphere Sovereignty as a social norm is that the idea of distinct, limited authorities is what can best restrain the power of government so as to avoid a totalitarian state. Democracy alone cannot do that. For where government is viewed as all-controlling, giving everyone a vote as to who makes the laws will only result in a tyranny of the majority. Notice too, that the sphere sovereignty idea not only protects individual rights by limiting the authority of government, but protects the rights of non-governmental communities as well. In addition, these communities are then not only protected relative to the state but relative to one another. Sphere Sovereignty is therefore the social principle that embodies a strongly emergent view of social life as a distinct aspect of reality. And more than that, by standing in opposition to all reductionist

attempts to subsume all authorities under some one kind, it also reconfirms the non-hierarchical view of the social institutions exercising differing kinds of authorities.

Conclusion

Dooyeweerd's ontology may fairly be called one of "strong emergence" or simply "non-reductionist." This is not only because it insists that no large-scale kind of properties-and-laws is identical with another or may be eliminated in favor of another, but also because no aspect can be the cause of any other. The idea that one aspect can produce another is opposed, first, by pointing to the fact that the sort of causality needed to support any such claim (for example, the claim that purely physical entities combine so as to produce non-physical properties) is a stronger sense of "cause" than anything that can be observed in the universe. What we observe is that a physically qualified cause (heating a copper wire) may result in the wire changing its sensory color (glowing green). But in that case the heating is merely the *occasion* for the green glow; it is not the reason there are such things as green glows in the cosmos; that is, the sensory aspect of reality is not the product of the physical aspect. But that is precisely what causal reductionist theories need to say. (Another way of phrasing the same point is to say that the Law Framework Theory acknowledges local causality but rejects global causality.)

Of course, it is open to the reductionist to say that the strong sense of causality needed by that theory can be postulated as bridge laws that needn't be directly observed to have explanatory power. The Law Framework reply to that is to point to the fact that causal relations are themselves multi-aspectual and are qualified by every aspect from the physical upward on the list. So, what *kind* of law is a bridge law supposed to be? If it is itself a physical law, then how does it explain its allegedly non-physical effects? Attempts to answer that question still run into the stone wall that defeated Descartes' efforts to explain the mind/body relation. It's still the case that relations without any likeness between cause and effect cannot so much as be conceived. By contrast, the Law Framework theory sees a multi-aspectual likeness of everything in the cosmos with everything else in the cosmos.

To sum up: Dooyeweerd's Law Framework theory possesses impressive explanatory power. Its ideas of irreducible, equally real aspects of reality, the concepts of a thing's qualifying aspect, capsule wholes, type laws, and foundational and leading functions for artifacts, all converge to recommend that the cosmos is better understood without assuming from the outset that explanation can only mean reduction.

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NOTES

¹ The original edition of the *New Critique* was published by the Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Co., Phila., 1953. It was reissued by Mellen Press, Lewiston, NY, 1997 (hereafter abbreviated as *NC*). By saying that Dooyeweerd's ontology has greater explanatory power than Aristotle's I do not mean it is more detailed, but that it avoids several dead ends Aristotle's couldn't avoid such as explaining the relation of form to matter or explaining how artifacts can be new despite his theory that there are no such things as new forms.

² Belief in something as the unconditional reality on which all else depends is central to all religions and is the only characteristic they all have in common. For Dooyeweerd, such beliefs are a product of a person's innate religious impulse and experience, rather than proofs or arguments - though it must be kept in mind that such beliefs can be unconscious assumptions as well as fervent commitments. Moreover, the experiences that give rise to divinity beliefs vary in their content. For example, while Calvin says "...Scripture bears on the face of it such evidence of its truth as do black and white of their color, sweet and bitter of their taste." (*Inst.* 1, 7, 2), Paul Ziff said: "If you ask me why I'm a materialist ... it's not because of the arguments. I guess I'd have to say that reality just looks irresistibly physical to me." (Comment made in class at the University of Pennsylvania, March, 1962.)

³ Dooyeweerd never attempted a defense of this definition of religious belief or of the proposition that beliefs in anything as self-existent are equally religious whether or not they occur in theories or in religious traditions. Both these points are defended at length, however, in chapter 2 of *The Myth of Religious Neutrality* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2005).

⁴ On this point Dooyeweerd's position is the same as that of Orthodox theology. As St Gregory Palamas put it, "Christians cannot tolerate any intermediate substance between Creator and creatures..." (quoted in John Meyendorff's, *A Study of Gregory Palamas* (London: Faith Press, 1964), 130.

For the same reason, Dooyeweerd also rejected every attempt to prove God's existence, holding instead that "Whatever can be proven would thereby not be God." The reason is that since the being of God is the creative origin of everything "visible or invisible" including the laws of proof, it is not subject to those laws. Thus, attempts to prove His existence inadvertently demote Him to the status of a creature by subjecting Him to the laws of creation rather than maintaining Him as their divine origin.

⁵ Not every use of the term "reduction" is meant in an ontological sense. For example, there is no objection to the replacement of the caloric theory of heat by that of molecular vibration. The major sorts of reduction theories that are objectionable may roughly be described as follows:

- A. Meaning Replacement. The nature of all reality is to have only properties of kind X, and to be governed by only X laws. This is defended by arguing that all terms with allegedly non-X meaning can be replaced by X terms with no loss of meaning, while not all X terms can be replaced by non-X terms. (Berkeley, Hume, and Ayer defended phenomenalism this way.)
- B. Factual Identity. While the terms of non-X vocabularies cannot be entirely replaced by X terms, nevertheless non-X terms refer only to X properties or laws. The selection of X is defended on the ground that the only or best explanation for anything whatever always has X terms as its primitive terms and X laws as its basic laws. (JJC Smart defended materialism this way.)
- C. Metaphysical Causal Dependency. The nature of reality is basically (not exclusively) made up of X (or X plus Y) kind(s) of things. This is defended by arguing that there is a one-way dependency of all non-X properties and laws upon entities whose nature is exclusively of the X (or X plus Y) kind(s). (Aristotle and Descartes each defended their idea of "substance" this way.)
- D. Epiphenomenalism. This is similar to metaphysical causality except that the dependent, caused, kinds of properties are less real in that they have no laws of their own, so that no explanations can be given in terms of epiphenomenal properties. (Huxley and Skinner argued that states of consciousness are epiphenomenal on purely physical bodies or behavior.)

⁶ See Tobias Dantzig, *Number: The Language of Science* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1954), 2-3.

⁷ Planck and Einstein, for example. See Einstein's remarks in "Autobiographical Notes" in *Albert Einstein, Philosopher-Scientist*, Ed. P.A. Schlipp (New York: Harper Torchbooks), 43.

⁸ The aspects lower on the list are regarded as having rigid laws, while the order found in the aspects higher on the list are considered *norms*. Unlike rigid laws such as gravitation, the norms of language, politeness,

economics, aesthetics, justice, ethics, and faith are principles of order that humans have the freedom to violate.

⁹ For there to be objects with fixed natures there would already have to be (at least) aspectual laws governing how the properties of each aspect relate to one another. And for law-regularities to be imposed by knowing subjects on their experience there would already have to be law-like regularities governing the subjective knowing process. For these reasons, objectivism and subjectivism both point – despite their intentions – to a distinct law side to reality rather than having laws originate in either the object or the subject.

¹⁰ Dooyeweerd’s terms for these ways are “subject functions” and “object functions” which has led to much confusion since “subject” and “object” are then used equivocally.

¹¹ See *NC*, III, 78.

¹² Dooyeweerd’s own terms for this idea were “enkapsis” and “enkaptic whole.” I have simply Anglicized them.

¹³ Dooyeweerd’s own term for this was “individuality structure” (see. *NC*, III). This term has so often been misunderstood to mean the internal organization of a concrete individual rather than the law that makes a type possible, that I have coined “type law” as a substitute.

There are, of course, what are usually called “causal laws” in reality as well as aspectual laws and type laws. But the Law Framework theory prefers to call them “causal *relations*” because, although they are parts of the order of reality, they are multi-aspectual and so have different aspectual qualifications. Moreover, there are no causal relations in the three lowest aspects; causality arises first in the physical aspect. But although founded on the physical, there are causal relations qualified by each of the aspects above the physical. For example, reproduction is a biotically qualified cause, entailment of a conclusion by premises is a logically qualified cause, and the scarcity of a commodity is an economically qualified cause.

¹⁴ *NC*, III, 106.

¹⁵ Animals also form artifacts, and the account of these is somewhat different. For brevity’s sake, I deal here only with human artifacts. For the full account see *NC*, III, chapters 2 & 3.

¹⁶ Since the aspect qualifying the leading function of an artifact is the one that qualifies the plan that guided its formation, the idea of a leading function cannot be divorced from the idea of purpose. What is intended, however, is not any subjective purpose a person may have toward an artifact, but the purpose embedded in the plan that guided its formation. This sense of “plan” means that although someone may use a chair as a ladder or marry for money, the purposes embedded in chairs and marriages remains biotic and ethical (love) respectively, despite being perverted by a subjective purpose. See *NC*, III, 143, 574.

¹⁷ More precisely, the words of the poem are linguistically qualified while the *event* of reading the poem is aesthetically qualified. See *NC*, III, 110, 111.

¹⁸ The terminology here is tangled. In fact, Bible writers never use “soul” for the center of human existence but use it for the life of the body – so that for them it is precisely the soul that dies. Most often they use “heart” for the identity of a person, the self which is the seat and source of a person’s intellect, will, emotion, talents, dispositions, etc. On this biblical view, then, human nature is not to be identified with any aspectual function. The human heart lies behind them all as the agent acting in them. So while humans alone have active functions in all the aspects, they have no qualifying function.

¹⁹ There are instances of communities being sub-wholes within a greater capsule whole, but that is never true of the major institutions of society. The examples are all of auxiliary organizations formed to serve another community such as a PTA formed to serve a school, or a fund-raising group organized to support a charity or hospital.

²⁰ One of the clearest expositions of this idea was given in his “Lectures on Calvinism,” which were the Stone Lectures at Princeton Seminary for 1898.

²¹ On the other hand, pointing to distinct *spheres* of authority means that the spheres can be found permeating all institutions and practices. It is not the same as the difference between public vs. private, for example. A crime committed in private or in a church or school still falls within the sphere of justice and so is the responsibility of government.