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Findings

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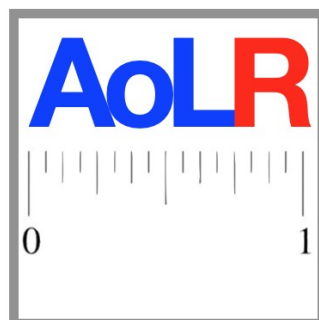
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Political Order in Herman Dooyeweerd

Anderson Paz

1. Introduction

One of the most dramatic political events in modern history was the French Revolution. The relationship between individuals, institutions and social structures underwent significant transformation. One of the main consequences of this revolution was the rejection of any conception of norms established in the order of reality for politics and society. Following Enlightenment thought, the French Revolution embraced the postulate of the autonomy of natural reason as a premise for creating appropriate norms for individuals to exercise their individual freedom. Through universal reason, it would be possible to identify imperatives for the political and social order without any reference to parameters preceding human will. Norms endorsed by universal reason would be able to preserve individual freedom and human autonomy.

On the other hand, German Idealism, perceiving the loss of communal horizon due to the revolutionary emphasis on individual freedom, asserted the dimension of community in human relations. A human being should be conceived as part of a social whole capable of giving him meaning and identity. In Idealism, freedom resided within a communal whole capable of attributing meaning to individuals. These perspectives created a polarization between individual freedom and communal ideal. While liberal social theories sought to defend individual autonomy, communitarian social theories argued for the need to integrate individuals into a comprehensive whole.

Herman Dooyeweerd (1894-1977) lived in a European context in which thinkers polarized individualistic and communal theoretical perspectives. For him, this theoretical polarization led to a misunderstanding of social order because while individualistic perspectives emphasized the autonomy of individuals – disregarding the importance of communal life – communitarian perspectives defended an ideal of a total community – such as the State – to unite individuals and other spheres as parts of a whole.

Dooyeweerd witnessed the practical consequences of individualistic and communal philosophical conceptions. That is, the totalitarian phenomenon was preceded by masses of atomized individuals who found in the all-encompassing State entity a sense of national community. The consequence of the atomization of individuals was the co-optation of the masses by all-encompassing national States led by political discourses in defence of a national communal identity.¹

For Dooyeweerd, this polarization had its foundation in a crisis of religious origin. The crisis occurred within the fundamental beliefs of Western civilization. For him, it became essential to understand the reasons behind this sociopolitical crisis and to identify the appropriate norms for the preservation and development of social order.

In this context, it seems relevant to investigate what is the main theoretical object that characterizes Herman Dooyeweerd's sociopolitical philosophy. The theorists Roel Kuiper and Jonathan Chaplin find similarities between Dooyeweerd's concerns and communitarian thought. This text argues that

1 Hannah Arendt. *The origins of totalitarianism* (1951). (New York: Mariner Books, 1973).

Dooyeweerd's sociopolitical philosophy is concerned with the theoretical identification of the order of a plural society. He was interested in identifying the structures, principles and functions related to social spheres and social relations. This paper assumes, initially, that Dooyeweerd's sociopolitical concern was related to the "problem of order," *i.e.*, the theoretical identification of the sociopolitical order anchored in the structural principles and norms of divine creation. The argument is that the approach that Chaplin and Kuiper have taken to the relationship between Dooyeweerd's sociopolitical theory and communitarianism cannot be derived from Dooyeweerd's philosophy. The text does not assert that the interpretations of Kuiper and Chaplin are incorrect, but are developments of Dooyeweerd's discussions.

The essay has been written to contribute to the debate on Dooyeweerd's social philosophy. This text does not aim to develop or present a comprehensive Christian social theory. The goal is to argue that the central focus of his social philosophy is the "problem of order," not communitarian issues. The aim is not to claim that Chaplin and Kuiper were wrong in their readings of Herman Dooyeweerd's philosophy. In fact, they have made legitimate developments by relating Dooyeweerd's social philosophy to what has been highlighted by communitarian contributions. Thus, this article emphasizes that Dooyeweerd's social theory was not oriented by communitarian concerns, but in comprehending the relation between creational order and social order.

Dooyeweerd understood that God, in creating the cosmos, instructed humanity to shape culture, spheres and social relations. Humans were meant to mould culture and society within the parameters set by God in His creational order. Humanity should exercise power in creating culture and sociopolitical structures "in subjection to the principles laid down by God in His world-order."² According to Dooyeweerd, humans deviated from this purpose due to the bondage of sin. They lost sight of the divine order. He suggests that it is necessary "to be completely restored in its irreplaceable value within the Divine world-order by considering its modal sense in the light of the Biblical basic motive."³ This is the theoretical purpose of his sociopolitical philosophy: to comprehend, in theoretical terms, the sociopolitical order based on the normative structure of divine creation. Dooyeweerd assumed that there are structural principles and norms arranged in the order of creation for every thing, event, relation and social sphere. It is the task of philosophical reflection to seek an understanding of the structural principles of the divine order for politics and society.

2. The Quest of Communitarianism

Some readings of Dooyeweerd's sociopolitical philosophy have been based on communal concerns in the face of the atomization of individuals and the loss of the horizon of communal life. The Dutch philosopher and politician Roel Kuiper explains that Dooyeweerd's concerns were "pluralistic" and he sought to preserve the space of social spheres and their mutual relations from the expansion of the modern State. Nevertheless, Kuiper understands that Dooyeweerd, like other pluralists, did not provide a perspective on the interaction between bonds and communities and did not define a shared common good perspective.⁴

2 Herman Dooyeweerd. *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*. Vol. II: The General Theory of the Modal Spheres. (Paideia Press: Reformational Publishing Project, 1984) 248.

3 Dooyeweerd. *A New Critique*, Vol. II, 248.

4 Roel Kuiper. *Capital moral: o poder de conexão da sociedade*. (Brasília, DF: Editora Monergismo, 2019) 251.

According to Kuiper, Dooyeweerd's approach is generalist, giving significant importance to responsible human action and implying a great concern for the boundaries between spheres of responsibility. Thus, Dooyeweerd's sociopolitical philosophy indicate concern only with the internal cohesion of social spheres. In Kuiper's words, the philosophy of Dooyeweerd has "much *connection* and few *bridges*,"⁵ meaning that there is no concern for a "moral community" with external moral bridges between social spheres. Therefore, Kuiper suggests that there is a need for greater reflection on political pluralism in the context of modern society and, for this purpose, he approaches to the work of Michael Walzer on the "spheres of justice."⁶

In turn, the political philosopher Jonathan Chaplin believes that Dooyeweerd's sociopolitical philosophy has a "distinctly communitarian flavor" in dealing with "solidary conduits for the exercise of a communal responsibility to promote some normative purpose."⁷ He also suggests that Dooyeweerd's critique of sociological individualism has a "communitarian claim."⁸ When analyzing the concept of "sovereignty of the spheres" in Dooyeweerd – which asserts that each sphere and social relation has its own domain, as well as rights, duties and competences given by God – Chaplin understands that Dooyeweerd's philosophy shares similar purposes with Michael Walzer's theory of justice.

In this sense, Chaplin asserts, "Walzer's maxim, 'good fences make just societies,' could serve as a pithy summary of what Dooyeweerd's idea of sphere sovereignty is all about."⁹ Nevertheless, Chaplin emphasizes that Dooyeweerd's formulation distinguishes itself from Walzer's theory. While the latter gives primacy to the political community as a morally integrative community, Dooyeweerd affirms "the full moral and legal equivalence of plural social spheres, of which the State is just one."¹⁰

In summary, while Roel Kuiper believes that Dooyeweerd's sociopolitical philosophy is pluralistic and insufficiently communitarian because it does not concern itself with the formation of a "moral community," Chaplin finds in Dooyeweerd's philosophy a "distinctly communitarian flavour." For Kuiper, Dooyeweerd's philosophy is insufficiently communal and, for Chaplin, it contains some communal elements. The next topic will seek to present how Dooyeweerd's philosophy is more related to understanding sociopolitical order than communal issues.

3. In Search of Order

3.1 The theoretical project

Herman Dooyeweerd's "Philosophy of the Cosmonomic Idea" constitutes a philosophical reflection on cosmic order. God created the cosmos and ordered it through His law. Divine law reveals itself,

5 Kuiper. *Capital moral*, 254.

6 Michael Walzer. *Spheres of Justice: A Defense of Pluralism and Equality*. (Basic Books, 2008).

7 Jonathan Chaplin. *Herman Dooyeweerd: Christian Philosopher of State and Civil Society*. (Indiana: Notre Dame, 2011) 124.

8 Chaplin. *Herman Dooyeweerd*, 152.

9 Chaplin. *Herman Dooyeweerd*, 199.

10 Chaplin. *Herman Dooyeweerd*, 199.

within time, as “modal aspects” in which concrete things, events, relations and social spheres exist and function. The modal aspects, irreducibly ordered in unbreakable coherence, enable theoretical knowledge and human experience in temporal reality.

In dialogue with German philosophy and Dutch neo-Calvinist tradition,¹¹ Dooyeweerd developed an original reflection on the structure of reality. Besides critiquing the postulate of the neutrality of reason by identifying “religious ground motives” that guide theoretical thought, Dooyeweerdian philosophy understands that there are irreducible and universally ordered modal aspects in cosmic time that make experience possible. The Philosophy of the Cosmonomic Idea presents itself as a theoretical reflection on the conditions of existence and functioning of the cosmos, thought and natural and social structures.

Dooyeweerd argued that divine law governs the cosmos and reveals itself, in cosmic time, as “law-spheres” that make experience possible. Therefore, the concept of the “idea of law” (*wetsidee*) is central to his thinking. Dooyeweerd himself named his theoretical reflection “*wijsbegeerte der wetsidee*”, translated it into English as “the philosophy of the cosmonomic Idea.”¹² This philosophy is oriented by the “Idea of a divine world-order.”¹³ From this, Dooyeweerd sought to identify the law-spheres in which natural things and social relations exist and function. For him, divine law “is the boundary between God and the cosmos,”¹⁴ as God is not subject to any law but is the ordering authority of His creation. While God is above the law, His creation is under the law. Thus, the goal of the Philosophy of the Cosmonomic Idea is to understand how, within cosmic time, all things express themselves and relate under the ordering divine law.

Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) had apprehended that each social structure has its own “law of life” determined by God, being “sovereign” in its own sphere of responsibility.¹⁵ Establishing a sociological principle, for Kuyper, each social sphere, such as the State, Church, school, etc., has its own authority instituted by God that cannot be obliterated by another sphere. Dooyeweerd expanded Kuyper’s concept of “sphere of sovereignty” to the understanding of the order of reality. Inspired by Kuyper’s thought, Dooyeweerd developed a philosophy that assumes the divine creational order is made possible and preserved by law-spheres within cosmic time. This premise was transposed to Dooyeweerd’s sociopolitical philosophy.

Indeed, Kuyper was concerned to identify spheres of authority for each social structure. But it was Dooyeweerd who proposed a philosophy capable of identifying normative principles in the order of divine creation for understanding the political and social relations. While Kuyper understood that each social structure has its own “law of life” established by God, it was Dooyeweerd who sought to identify such laws as normative principles, formulating an original sociopolitical philosophy.

11 Albert M Wolters. *The Intellectual Milieu of Herman Dooyeweerd*. In: *The Legacy of Herman Dooyeweerd: Reflections on Critical Philosophy in the Christian Tradition*. (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1985).

12 Herman Dooyeweerd. *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*. Vol. I: *The Necessary Presuppositions of Philosophy*. (Ontario, Canada: Paideia Press, 1984) 93.

13 Pierre Marcel. *The Christian Philosophy of Herman Dooyeweerd*: Vol. I. *The Transcendental Critique of Theoretical Thought*. (Aalten: WordBridge Publishing, 2013), 108.

14 J M Spier. *O que é filosofia calvinista?* (Brasília, DF: Editora Monergismo, 2019) 38.

15 Abraham Kuyper. *Lectures on Calvinism*. (Hendrickson Publishers, 2008).

Before highlighting some elements of Dooyeweerd's sociopolitical philosophy, it is necessary to understand his perspective on the loss of comprehension of social order in the West.

3.2 *The loss of social order*

In Dooyeweerd's perception, there is a problem in humanist theory in adequately grasping the structure of social spheres and social relations without falling into reductionisms. According to him, after various Christian attempts to unify culture under the dominion of the Roman Catholic Church, the nominalism of William of Ockham (1287-1347) gained prominence in asserting that the Church and the State had independent laws, and that natural law was a norm independent of God's revelation.¹⁶ For Ockham, the Church and the State were two independent spheres, existing side by side. In Ockham's nominalism, in purely natural legal matters, such as marriage between a Christian and a non-Christian, the State could deviate from canonical laws if necessary for the common good. Ockham also attacked the rational foundations of hierarchical office ordination, suggesting that the origin of all authority rested on the sum of citizens in the State or on the congregation of believers in the Church. This proclamation of the State's independence from the Church was accompanied by the withdrawal of the Christian religious foundation from the State.

By the end of the Middle Ages, the Renaissance became a cultural phenomenon in a society searching for a new religious orientation for life and a legal foundation for its social order. Thus, Dooyeweerd questions whether "the humanist movement provide a worldview with a different law-idea, and if so, what is the significance of that law-idea for the problem of Christian politics?"¹⁷ He aims to address these questions by examining four phenomena of humanist secularization related to the foundation of social order:

1. The emergence of the doctrine of *raison d'état* (reason of state).
2. The development of the modern concept of science in the foundation of the natural sciences.
3. The development of notions of toleration as symptomatic of the modern approach to religion.
4. The emergence of the modern theory of natural law and the science of constitutional law.¹⁸

The first humanist phenomenon of secularization was that of the doctrine of the State by Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527). His realist view of politics (*realpolitik*) suggested that the political sphere was an independent realm whose sole principle was "the interest of the State, to which all personal, ethical and legal considerations must yield."¹⁹ In Machiavelli, politics became independent. In Italy, the State became an artificial creation that could be adapted to the needs of the situation without any reference to the Christian faith. In Machiavelli's thought, morality and justice became "values that

16 Herman Dooyeweerd. *The Struggle for a Christian Politics*. (Paideia Press: Reformational Publishing Project, 2012) 57.

17 Dooyeweerd. *The Struggle for a Christian Politics*, 65.

18 Dooyeweerd. *The Struggle for a Christian Politics*, 65.

19 Dooyeweerd. *The Struggle for a Christian Politics*, 65.

are *made, made by the State* for the benefit of the State.”²⁰ Machiavelli adopted a conception of “universal natural law” to base his rational political view in guiding the actions of State agents. Politics assumed an autonomous and pragmatic reason, separate from morality and religion, to achieve its objectives.

The second humanist phenomenon of secularization was the development of modern science, notably the prominence of mathematical natural science in relation to other mechanical sciences. According to Dooyeweerd, starting with Nicolaus Copernicus (1473-1543), Johannes Kepler (1571-1630) and Galileo Galilei (1564-1642), modern science sought to mathematize nature, suggesting that the only knowable objects of exact science were those resulting from mathematically provable relationships. The scientific method began to seek causality relationships generalizable to every discovery. In this sense, every phenomenon should be “investigated experimentally in order to come to a universally valid conclusion.”²¹ For Galileo, there was no phenomenon in the world that did not have mechanical causality. Consequently, the development of natural science resulted in the proclamation of the sovereignty of natural reason, *i.e.*, the autonomous human reason would be guided by the laws derived from nature independently from religion.

The third humanist phenomenon of the secularization of social order was the notion of tolerance as a symptom of modern perception regarding religion. For Dooyeweerd, the humanist view of religion, proclaiming the sovereignty of natural reason, revealed its political tendencies through the concept of tolerance, which “propagated the separation of Church and State in the civil liberty of the various religions.”²² As humanism sought to rationalize its worldview, religion was pressured to take on universally naturalistic contours. That is, religion became just one of the natural spheres of life that could be exercised before God without the mediation of the Church. The Christian worldview lost ground to “religious naturalism” that preached religious tolerance for all kinds of religious practices. This tolerance implied the consideration that all religions were equal, according to the conception of a “universal theism.”

This universal theism advocated the “the conviction that the divine has gradually revealed itself equally in the various religions and philosophical systems and that it is still doing so today,” so that “divine revelation is expressed in the moral consciousness of every noble human being.”²³ One of the consequences was the concept of Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466-1536) of “moral rationalism” that emphasized a purely practical concept of ethics derived from Christian grace. That is, for Erasmus, “to believe is above all to give intellectual assent to the truth, and faith is a practical ethical application of that intellectual conviction.”²⁴ Both universal theism and moral rationalism provided ample space for the humanist ideal of tolerance because they ensured the autonomy of human reason in relation to religion and the religious foundation of morality, equalizing various expressions of faith.

20 Dooyeweerd. *The Struggle for a Christian Politics*, 71.

21 Dooyeweerd. *The Struggle for a Christian Politics*, 93.

22 Dooyeweerd. *The Struggle for a Christian Politics*, 103.

23 Dooyeweerd. *The Struggle for a Christian Politics*, 111.

24 Dooyeweerd. *The Struggle for a Christian Politics*, 132.

Therefore, Dooyeweerd understands that the Christian faith lost ground to the naturalistic idea of immanence, which proclaimed that divine laws were imprinted on natural reason. In turn, natural science began to claim the final word on issues of religion, morality, law and politics. In this context, the humanist idea of law, based on the sovereignty of reason, became the foundation of law, setting aside the sovereignty of God's will. The result was the pressure from modern States to restrict religion to the private sphere. Thus, for Dooyeweerd, the first three humanist phenomena of secularization of life spheres occurred "in politics (the rise of the doctrine of *raison d'état*), natural science (the adoption of the modern concept of science), and theology (the development of universal theism and moral rationalism with their specifically humanist idea of toleration)."²⁵

The fourth humanist phenomenon of secularization was the emergence of modern natural law theory. According to Dooyeweerd, the conceptions of *raison d'état*, modern science, humanist religion and moral rationalism converged on the issue of modern natural law. He, then, seeks to show how nominalism was the hidden force in humanist natural law. Dooyeweerd explains that Ockham's nominalism supported the authority of the State over free individuals. Popular sovereignty became a principle of authority based on natural law. In this conception, natural law implied that "all government obtains its authority directly from the sovereign people."²⁶

From Ockham onward, the people, dissolved into free individuals, were understood to have voluntarily transferred their authority to the government for the common good. The principle of majority rule was supposed to compensate for the anarchistic consequences of this nominalist individualism by imposing limits on individual choices. The nominalist notion of natural law allowed the human intellect to begin formulating legal rules to determine what is and what is not advantageous for the community. Such rules "are the positive formulation of what could be called the *lex naturalis*."²⁷ Natural law became purely secular, utilitarian in nature and the State's objective became to promote the material happiness of its citizens. Thus, natural law identified the State with the utility of positive law. In nominalism, there was no foundation to justify "any *fixed* substantial form of human social nature, supposedly anchored in an eternal cosmic order and to be accepted by reason as a given."²⁸ Nominalism, therefore, represented the loss of understanding about the foundation of human social order.

Without structural norms for the State, various discussions about its power emerged. For example, Hans Kelsen's (1881-1973) legal positivism represented a deepening of the theoretical crisis regarding the structure of the State.²⁹ Dooyeweerd's argument is, therefore, that Renaissance humanism, grounded in Ockham's nominalism, resulted in sociopolitical theories that do not recognize the structures and principles of social spheres and social relations ordered in the divine order of creation. In the case of the State, the failure to recognize its structure and limits allowed the formulation of theories that suggested the aggregation of individuals to a totalizing will of the State

25 Dooyeweerd. *The Struggle for a Christian Politics*, 158.

26 Dooyeweerd. *The Struggle for a Christian Politics*, 179.

27 Dooyeweerd. *The Struggle for a Christian Politics*, 185.

28 Dooyeweerd. *The Struggle for a Christian Politics*, 193.

29 Herman Dooyeweerd. *The Crisis in Humanist Political Theory*. (Paideia Press: Reformational Publishing Project, 2010).

apparatus. This theoretical crisis led to the advocacy of a natural law that subjected individual freedom and the freedom of social spheres to the determinations of the State, and opened a gap for the rise of positivist thought.

3.3 *The restoration of social order*

In the third volume of *New Critique*, Dooyeweerd investigates the “structures of individuality.” The concept of structures of individuality is related to the laws, on the law side of temporal reality, that determine the typical arrangement of properties and functions that structure an individual totality.³⁰ Thus, each individual totality — such as natural things, events, relations and social spheres — is ordered by a structure of individuality constant on the law-side, which is neither subject to historical changes nor human will. Only the forms of individual totalities on the subject-side can vary according to human action.

Regarding sociopolitical theory – named by Dooyeweerd as “structures of individuality of temporal human society” – to understand the social structures of individuality involves investigating which laws make possible the order of properties and functions that shape singular events, relations and social spheres. In this sense, exploring the social structures of individuality means to comprehend the structural type that characterizes the State, the family, the school, etc. — namely, the constant laws that combine their respective properties and functions, defining its singular social structure. While a social individual totality may vary in its form due to human action on the subject-side, the structure of individuality does not vary because it is the universal and unchanging law — on the law-side — that characterizes a particular sphere, institution or social relation. The structure of individuality defines the distinctive identity of an individual social totality. Therefore, the structure of individuality is the universal and unchanging law that orders individual social totalities.

From this postulate, Dooyeweerd rejects the view of modern social theory that tries to examine human social relations as pure facts through empirical scientific investigation. For him, every social theory requires a “normative view starting from the order of divine creation.”³¹ The separation suggested by modern theories between social facts (“being”) and ideal social norms (“ought to be”) leaves no room for structural principles of human society. Because of this, social theory does not have a complete view of human society.³² In his criticism of historicism and positivism, Dooyeweerd understands that modern theories about society do not consider the structural principles because they do not acknowledge that there is a qualifying ordering of social structures not subject to historical changes or to arbitrariness of human will.

According to Dooyeweerd, it is fundamental to reflect on the “structural principles” of social relations because they are “the transcendental conditions for every possible experience of factual societal relationships.”³³ The structural principle defines the identity of an event or social sphere

30 Roy A Clouser. *O mito da neutralidade religiosa: um ensaio sobre a crença religiosa e seu papel oculto no pensamento teológico*. (Brasília, DF: Academia Monergista. 2022) 385, n. 16.

31 Herman Dooyeweerd. *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*. Vol. III: The Structures of Individuality of Temporal Reality. (Paideia Press: Reformational Publishing Project, 1984), 157.

32 Chaplin. *Herman Dooyeweerd*, 315.

33 Dooyeweerd. *A New Critique*, Vol. III, 158.

according to its own unique and specific functions. It is essential to recognize that the typical structural principles of social structures “have a constant and invariable character, as they determine the internal nature of the spheres.”³⁴

For Dooyeweerd, the positivist view of modern sociology, which seeks causal interactions among social facts, cannot explain the structural unity of social individual totalities due to the lack of a holistic theory of society. That is, the apprehension of social facts as disconnected data does not lead to a comprehensive theory of society and its intercommunal and interindividual relations. Sociology depends on a theoretical view of social structures and their mutual integration to achieve an understanding of the social whole and its causal relations. The lack of a total social theory of society demonstrates the “factual elimination of the modal structures of the different aspects of human society”³⁵ and leads to the absolutization of one structure at the expense of others. Therefore, for Dooyeweerd, society cannot be seen as an individual whole that encompasses various parts or as various social structures to be studied and understood as having no connection. A comprehensive and non-reductionist view of society is necessary.

Then, in the search for order that enables a comprehensive vision of society, Dooyeweerd tried to identify the individuality structures specific to each sphere and social relationship. To address this, he understood the necessity of dealing with three transcendental problems of a theoretical view of human society. These problems are related to the conditions of possibility for a non-reductionist sociopolitical perspective. They are:

1. Where is the basic denominator to be found needed for a comparison of the different types of societal relationships, set apart and opposed to one another in the antithetic *Gegenstand-relation* of theoretical thought?
2. How is their mutual relation and coherence to be viewed?
3. Where do they find their radical unity and totality of meaning, or in other words, from which starting-point can we grasp them in the theoretical view of totality?³⁶

According to Dooyeweerd, immanentist social theory can only result in the absolutization of modal aspects and the absolutization of individual totalities because the basic denominator for comparing different types of social relationships and spheres, their mutual coherence and their radical unity, is sought within temporal reality. The humanistic basic motive guides social theory toward considering a function or a temporal community as deserving priority. However, neither the basic denominator, nor the coherence between structures, nor the unity of meaning can be found in space-time without theoretical reductions. In contrast, Dooyeweerd argues that, from a Christian perspective, the unity and totality of meaning of temporal social structures can only be found in the religious community of humanity according to the biblical basic motive of creation, fall and redemption.

34 Herman Dooyeweerd. *Estado e Soberania: ensaios sobre cristianismo e política*. (São Paulo: Vida Nova, 2014), 124.

35 Dooyeweerd. *A New Critique*, Vol. III, 161.

36 Dooyeweerd. *A New Critique*, Vol. III, 168.

Dooyeweerd understands that

This starting-point excludes in principle every universalist sociological view, which seeks the unity and all-embracing totality of all types of societal relationships in a temporal community of mankind. Neither a nation, nor the Church in the sense of a temporal institution, nor the State, nor an international union of whatever typical character, can be the all-inclusive totality of human social life, because mankind in its spiritual root transcends the temporal order with its diversity of social structures.³⁷

By rejecting humanistic sociopolitical theories, Dooyeweerd argues that only the biblical perspective can resolve the three transcendental problems without theoretical reductionism. For this, it is necessary to find the basic denominator for a theoretical social view in “the temporal world-order rooted in the divine order of creation”. In Dooyeweerd’s words,

The basic denominator for a theoretical comparison of the different structural types of human society can here only be the temporal world-order rooted in the divine order of creation. The mutual relation between the social structures of individuality is only to be viewed as that of an inner sovereignty of each structure within its own orbit, balanced by its coherence with the other structures in cosmic time; the latter guarantees enkaptic external functions of any particular social relationship in all the others, insofar as their different structural principles are realized.³⁸

Thus, according to Dooyeweerd, a comprehensive view of society without theoretical reductionism can only be achieved if the starting point finds its radical unity and totality of meaning beyond cosmic time, namely, in the religious root of humanity. Since the order of the world is rooted in the divine order of creation, the three transcendental problems can only be answered without theoretical reductionism from the biblical basic motive. Based on this, Dooyeweerd addresses the transcendental problems. Firstly, the theoretical basic denominator of the temporal order of the world must be founded on the divine order of creation. Secondly, the mutual relation between the social structures must preserve the sovereignty of the spheres and their coherence. Thirdly, the starting point for grasping a total theoretical view of reality must maintain the mutual relations between spheres and social relations, preserving their respective structures.

It is necessary to recognize that each sphere and social relation has an internal structure that does not vary according to historical conditions. Despite assuming distinct forms in each society, social relations and social spheres have constant structural principles without which humans could not experience them. In this sense, rejecting a historicist view of society, Dooyeweerd asserts that

When we say that a marriage, a State, a Church, etc., present a constant nature, determined by their structural principles, we do not mean that all of these [social structures] have been realized in every phase of human development. We mean only that the internal nature of these types of social relationships cannot be dependent on variable historical conditions of human society. That is, as soon as they are realized in a factual human society, they seem to be bound by their structural principles without which we could not have any social

37 Dooyeweerd. *A New Critique*, Vol. III, 169.

38 Dooyeweerd. *A New Critique*, Vol. III, 169-70.

experience of them... this does not diminish the great variability of the... forms in which they are realized.³⁹

Dooyeweerd, therefore, proposes a sociopolitical philosophy that investigates the necessary foundation for the relationship between different structures of individuality without theoretical reductionisms. According to him, modern sociopolitical theory has been in a dialectical process between the poles of universalism (collectivism) and individualism. Every attempt for an alternative path has failed because it has taken an immanent starting point. This is because “the radical and integral freedom of the individual or the radical and integral community of mankind were sought in the temporal order of our earthly existence.”⁴⁰

For Dooyeweerd, only the Christian perspective can offer a path that balances individual freedom and communal connection in social relationships. A Christian view of society and politics essentially

...excludes in principle both universalism and individualism, and it enables us to see the structural patterns in the complicated interlacements between inter-individual and communal relationships. The internal sphere-sovereignty of the different temporal structures of societal relationships is the expression of the transcendent destination of mankind. This is the only basis of a harmonious relation of authority and freedom in social development.⁴¹

Thus, Dooyeweerd seeks to provide a Christian theory as an alternative to universalist and individualist views of society. The investigation must start from the basic biblical motive to reflect on temporal reality. The basic motive of creation, fall and redemption allows overcoming the religious antitheses that guide universalist and individualist views. It enables the recognition of norms established in creation that prevent any reductionist social perspective. Therefore, it is crucial to ground the Christian social theory on the basic biblical motive because it “destroys in principle any claim made by a temporal community to encompass all of human life in a totalitarian sense.”⁴²

The concern to identify an order for politics and society was not exclusive to Herman Dooyeweerd. The last book published by the German-American philosopher Eric Voegelin was “In Search of Order.”⁴³ Voegelin wanted to understand the order for science, politics, society, history and consciousness. Similar to Voegelin, Herman Dooyeweerd experienced a historical moment marked by the rise of totalitarian regimes in Europe that destroyed the sociopolitical order. Both philosophers formulated sociopolitical theories guided by the concern to understand the order of social relations and social spheres, rejecting historicist and positivist conceptions of society.

However, Voegelin concluded his philosophy still “in search of order” because he understood that order is an open mystery and an unattainable process in consciousness. Voegelin maintained a

39 Dooyeweerd. In Roy A Clouser. *O mito da neutralidade religiosa: um ensaio sobre a crença religiosa e seu papel oculto no pensamento teórico*. (Brasília, DF: Academia Monergista, 2022), 403 n. 4.

40 Dooyeweerd. *A New Critique*, Vol. III, 602.

41 Dooyeweerd. *A New Critique*, Vol. III, 603.

42 Herman Dooyeweerd. *A Christian Theory of Social Institutions*. (La Jolla CA: The Herman Dooyeweerd Foundation, 1986), 48.

43 Eric Voegelin. *Order and history*. Vol. 5. In search of order. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000).

profound division between his reflection on the order of Being and the concrete sociopolitical order. On the other hand, Dooyeweerd found the ground of social structures in the order of divine creation, according to the revelation of the biblical basic motive. In Dooyeweerd's thought, social relations and social spheres have structures grounded in the order of creation, which can be known throughout the historical process.

4. The quest of order

It seems reasonable to say that the concern of Herman Dooyeweerd's sociopolitical philosophy was related to the "problem of order," *i.e.*, the understanding of sociopolitical order according to the normative parameters of divine creation. Kuiper's suggestion that Dooyeweerd's sociopolitical philosophy is insufficiently communitarian appears to presuppose that Dooyeweerdian reflection was guided by concerns for a society with stronger and more moral communities. On the other hand, Chaplin's suggestion that Dooyeweerd's philosophy has a "distinctly communitarian flavor" does not seem to be the best interpretative key for Dooyeweerdian sociopolitical reflection. The study of Dooyeweerd's philosophy indicated that he did not develop a reflection primarily oriented towards the question of society having stronger and more moral communitarian bonds. The approach between Dooyeweerd sociopolitical theory and communitarianism cannot be derived from Dooyeweerd's philosophy.

Roel Kuiper suggests that Dooyeweerd's perspective is generalist and does not build bridges between social spheres. According to Kuiper, Dooyeweerd was not concerned with morally-oriented connections capable of creating a "moral community" oriented towards "shared common good."⁴⁴ This criticism does not seem reasonable because, in Dooyeweerd's view, every social sphere and social relation expresses itself in the moral aspect and, through enkaptic intertwinements, moral bridges are created and maintained between social structures. The moral substrate resides in the divine creational order in such a way that each relation and sphere functions by establishing moral bonds of solidarity and fraternity.

These moral bonds, in turn, are guided by some vision of "the good" as there is a pistical (faith) aspect in reality that guides individuals with distinct worldviews according to a certain vision of the good, the just and the true. These shared beliefs among a people can generate a greater or lesser degree of integration for a common good or some goods. For Dooyeweerd, despite individuals not sharing a common view of what "good" is, the creational order allows people with different beliefs to intuitively find bridges in a "moral community." It seems, therefore, that Kuiper's suggestion that Dooyeweerd only holds a generalist philosophical conception without concern for bridges between social structures is not supported by Dooyeweerdian sociopolitical theory, which, for its turn, reflects on the importance of intertwinements between communities, institutions and individuals.

On the other hand, Chaplin understands that Dooyeweerd's sociopolitical philosophy has a "distinctly communitarian flavour," with a particular affinity to Michael Walzer's theory of justice. Chaplin suggests that the concept of sphere sovereignty in Dooyeweerd establishes boundaries

44 Kuiper. *Capital moral*, 251.

between social spheres, with each having its own rights, duties and competences. According to Chaplin, this concept aligns with Walzer's idea of justice that "good fences make just societies."⁴⁵

Indeed, Dooyeweerd considers that every sovereign social sphere has their own respective goods, rights and competences, indicating a pluralistic conception of justice. In Dooyeweerd's view, the conception of justice cannot be understood solely by considering the spheres of justice within their respective "good fences" without their enkaptic interrelations with other social structures. Divine creation is an ordered and coherent whole, so the understanding and identification of justice depend not only on the comprehension of good fences according to the goods, rights and competences of each social sphere but also on the relationship between the structural order of each sphere and their intertwinements with other social structures within the limits of the normative divine creational order.

Dooyeweerd wrote in a context of polarization in sociopolitical theory between universalist and individualist conceptions. In response to this, he sought to identify the religious root of the crisis in these theories that did not recognize the permanent structures and principles of social relations and social spheres. His sociopolitical philosophy proposed a reflection based on the understanding of the order of social structures from the fundamental biblical motive. The Dooyeweerdian interest was fundamentally theoretical in understanding the sociopolitical order, considering the singular nucleus and justice within the spheres of sovereignty, as well as their mutual enkaptic intertwinements. It seems, therefore, not advisable to approach Dooyeweerd's sociopolitical philosophy with communitarian concerns. Readings that make such approaches are not necessarily wrong, but are developments of Dooyeweerd's discussions that cannot be derived from his philosophy.

Therefore, it seems more appropriate to assume that the central key to interpreting Dooyeweerd's sociopolitical philosophy is the understanding of the order of social structures, their enkaptic relationships and the human limits of giving shape through history within the divine creational order. He sought to identify the structures of individuality and their respective structural principles that order politics and society within the limits of the normativity of divine creation.

Nevertheless, it is more reasonable to understand that, overall, Dooyeweerd's concern aligns more with the interest in the "problem of order" found in Eric Voegelin. However, while Voegelin maintained an irreconcilable division between the order of a mysterious Being and concrete reflection on society, Dooyeweerd identified normative principles in the structure of created reality for political and social order based on a ground motive that reveals who the Being is and what structural norms He determined.

Dooyeweerd's philosophy is indeed original. In his view, the sovereignty of God orders and sustains the cosmos and human experience. It is possible to identify structural principles for each social relation and social sphere. Each social structure has a sphere of sovereignty with its respective authorities, norms and boundaries of competence. It becomes possible to reflect on the order of social structures for a plural, stable and relatively harmonized society.

45 Chaplin. *Herman Dooyeweerd*, 199.