

Why did Dooyeweerd want to tear out his hair?

By

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I. Introduction

In 2005, I wrote the article “Dooyeweerd versus Vollenhoven: The religious dialectic in reformational philosophy.”¹ In November of that year, I also gave a talk at Redeemer University College, Ancaster Ontario, in which I commented on the uneasy relationship between Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven. In response to the discussion following that talk, the people at Redeemer decided to explore some of the implications of what I had said. The result was a mini-conference held in April of 2006 at Redeemer University College. The conference was entitled “Dooyeweerd or Vollenhoven: Does it make a difference?” I did not attend the mini-conference, but I sent a note that summarized some of the differences between the two philosophers. I emphasized Dooyeweerd’s idea of the supratemporal heart, which he regarded as one of the key ideas of his philosophy. A copy of my note, which was distributed to the conference participants, is attached as Appendix A.

One of the people invited to speak at the mini-conference was Danie Strauss. You can find his comments in “The Reading Room,” an online site maintained by Theo Plantinga.² There is both a recording of what Strauss said at the conference, and a later written article that he submitted. Strauss makes no reference to my article or to most of the texts that I cited, texts in which Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven acknowledged their philosophical differences. But at the mini-conference, Strauss referred to an excerpt from a hitherto unpublished transcript of the discussion following Dooyeweerd’s January,

¹ J. Glenn Friesen: “Dooyeweerd versus Vollenhoven: The religious dialectic within reformational philosophy,” *Philosophia Reformata* 70 (2005) 102-132, online at [<http://www.members.shaw.ca/hermandoooyeweerd/Dialectic.html>][‘Dialectic’].

² Theo Plantinga, “The Reading Room,” online at [<http://www.redeemer.on.ca/~tplant/rr/index.html>]. The article by Strauss is entitled “Appropriating the legacy of Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven,” [‘Strauss’], and is available from The Reading Room.

1964 lecture to the Association for Calvinistic Philosophy. Strauss had located this transcript on a visit to the Dooyeweerd Archives in Amsterdam. This is the same document that I had cited in my article “Dialectic,” although I had quoted from excerpts, as found in Marcel Verburg’s book, where he cites Vollenhoven’s acknowledgement of his disagreement with many of Dooyeweerd’s ideas.³ I had not yet seen the original transcript.

At the mini-conference, Strauss referred in particular to Dooyeweerd’s answer to a question that had been asked by Peter J. Steen (1935-84). Steen was an American theologian and man of ideas, who had studied under Cornelius van Til, and who taught for some time at Trinity Christian College when Calvin Seerveld was also teaching there. In 1970, six years after Dooyeweerd’s 1964 Lecture, Steen published his doctoral dissertation at Westminster Seminary on the topic of Dooyeweerd.⁴ In that dissertation, Steen argued against Dooyeweerd’s idea of the supratemporal heart.

Strauss maintains that the 1964 transcript indicates that Dooyeweerd said, in answer to a question by Steen, that he wanted to “tear the hair from his head” for ever having used the expression “supratemporal heart.” Strauss’s story is very dramatic. But it does not fit the facts.

A careful examination of the actual text shows that Strauss has misinterpreted Dooyeweerd’s remark. Steen’s question was a theological one; it concerned the two natures of Christ. And it was in relation to that issue that Dooyeweerd said that he had never used the expression “supratemporal heart.” I have translated both Dooyeweerd’s lecture and the discussion that followed the lecture, so you can see this for yourself.⁵ The problem with the line of thought offered to us by Strauss is, first of all, that he fails to cite

³ Marcel Verburg: *Herman Dooyeweerd: Leven en werk van een Nederlands christen-wijsgeer* (Baarn: Ten Have, 1989).

⁴ Peter J. Steen: *The Structure of Herman Dooyeweerd’s Thought* (Toronto: Wedge, 1983).

⁵ Herman Dooyeweerd: “Center and Periphery: The Philosophy of the Law-Idea in a changing world,” January 2, 1964 Lecture to the Association for Calvinistic Philosophy, online at [<http://www.members.shaw.ca/hermandooyeweerd/1964Lecture.html>].

the Dutch words correctly, and secondly, that he fails to interpret them within the context of the rest of the document.

Let's look first at the historical context of Dooyeweerd's use of the idea of the supratemporal heart. After that I will come back to the text to look more closely at the context of Dooyeweerd's answer to Steen.

II. Historical Context

The idea of the supratemporal heart is one of Dooyeweerd's key ideas. If he had really retracted it in this 1964 discussion, then that would indeed have been a noteworthy event. But it is clear that he did not retract the idea. On the contrary, Dooyeweerd's 1964 lecture reaffirms the idea of the supratemporal heart, and emphasizes the importance of that idea for understanding the central operation of God's Word, and for understanding Christ's incarnation.

The most obvious evidence that Dooyeweerd did not retract the idea of the supratemporal heart is that Steen, who asked the question in 1964, continued to battle against the idea of the supratemporal heart in his 1970 doctoral thesis. A considerable part of that thesis is devoted to arguing against the supratemporal heart. Look at the index to the thesis. Look at the other critics of Dooyeweerd whom Steen lines up in his arguments against the supratemporal heart. If Steen believed that Dooyeweerd had really retracted the idea, he would surely have mentioned this important fact. He makes no such mention. Instead, he argues that Dooyeweerd's philosophy needs to be changed in such a way that it does not rely on this idea.

During the 1964 lecture itself, Dooyeweerd affirms the importance of his theory of time. He acknowledges that there has been criticism of his philosophy. "The theory of time, in my opinion a very fundamental piece of the philosophy of the law-Idea, has been struck at in its foundation" (1964 lecture, pp. 15,16). But Dooyeweerd does not accept the criticism that had been directed against him on this point. In the 1964 lecture, he reaffirms the importance of the supratemporal heart, as the center of man's existence in which he transcends the cosmic temporal order (1964 discussion, p. 4).

In the 1964 discussion, Vollenhoven also indicates that he continues to disagree with Dooyeweerd with respect to time. Vollenhoven would not have said such a thing if Dooyeweerd had retracted the idea of supratemporality. Vollenhoven had expressed already expressed his disagreement regarding supratemporality in 1953.⁶ The previous year, Vollenhoven had given a lecture where he had continued to set out his differences with Dooyeweerd, and in that lecture, he had again disagreed with Dooyeweerd's idea of supratemporality.⁷ Thus, if Dooyeweerd had changed his views in 1964, this would have been significant.

Furthermore, in 1968, four years after this lecture, Vollenhoven gave a lecture where he again referred explicitly to his continuing differences with Dooyeweerd, including his disagreement regarding the supratemporal heart. Vollenhoven refers this as a difference in ontology, and says that this is why Dooyeweerd had no problem with the succession of numbers in relation to the succession of time. Under the heading "Dooyeweerd's difficulties," Vollenhoven says,

⁶ D.H.Th. Vollenhoven: "Divergentierapport I," (1953), in A. Tol and K.A. Bril: *Vollenhoven als Wijsgeer* (Amsterdam: Buijten & Schipperheijn, 1992) [*Wijsgeer*], 107-117, at 116 [*Divergentierapport*]. The Dutch version is made available online by the Association for Reformational Philosophy [<http://home.wxs.nl/~srw/nwe/vollenhoven/52ms.htm>]. My translation is at [<http://www.members.shaw.ca/hermandoooyeweerd/Divergentierapport.html>].

⁷ The following quotation is from D.H. Th. Vollenhoven: "Problemen rondom de tijd" ("The problems around time"), a lecture given by Vollenhoven at the beginning of 1963 [*Problemen*], in *Wijsgeer*, 199-211, at 187. Translation online at [<http://www.members.shaw.ca/hermandoooyeweerd/Problemen.html>]. The words in square brackets are in the editors' original Dutch text, based on their best reconstruction of the text.

[Er is ook] *verschil*: [volgens Dooyeweerd is de] ziel boventijdelijk en in mij [d.w.z. de mens]; [Vollenhoven: de ziel is] niet boventijdelijk, [de mens is] mens *naar* ziel en lichaam. Ook bij de voortplanting [zijn] lichaam en ziel [betrokken].

[There are also] differences. [According to Dooyeweerd] the soul is supratemporal and within me [i.e. man]. [For Vollenhoven, the soul is] not supratemporal, [man is] man *according* to soul and body. Body and soul [are also] related in reproduction.

Hij onderscheidde bij de mens, net als ik, functies en de ziel of het hart, maar hij zag deze distinctie tevens als een tegenstelling, namelijk als die van tijdelijk en boventijdelijk. Zodoende voelde hij geen impasse waaruit hij zou moeten worden gered en waarvoor een oplossing zou moeten worden gevonden. Immers, de functies moesten als tijdelijk worden beschouwd, en dat gold dus ook voor de arithmetische functie, die immers de eerste is.⁸

Just like me, he [Dooyeweerd] distinguished between functions and the soul or the heart, but at the same time he saw this distinction as an opposition, namely that between the temporal and the supratemporal. From that standpoint, he felt no impasse from which he needed to be saved and for which a solution must be found. He thought that the functions must always be understood as temporal, and that held also for the arithmetical function, which is always the first.

Because of Dooyeweerd's idea of the supratemporal heart, he viewed all functions within the aspects as temporal; numerical succession was therefore a succession in time. Vollenhoven disagreed, and viewed numerical succession not as a succession in time, but as an order of magnitude.⁹ And later in this same 1968 lecture, Vollenhoven criticizes Dooyeweerd's view of the supratemporal heart as dualistic:

In de anthropologie valt de verhouding der functies tot de ziel niet, dualistisch, te typeren als die van tijdelijk tot boventijdelijk: het hart, prefunctioneel, bepaalt de religieuze richting van de mens in diens functionele bestaan (p. 211)

[In anthropology, the relation of the functions to the soul must not be classified dualistically, as a relation of the temporal to the supratemporal. The heart, the pre-functional, determines the religious direction of man in his functional existence.]

⁸ D.H. Th. Vollenhoven: "Problemen van de tijd in onze kring" ("Problems about time in our circle"), a lecture given by Vollenhoven in 1968 [*Kring*], in *Wijsgeer*, 199-211, at 187; see also 184-85. Translation online at [<http://www.members.shaw.ca/hermandooyeweerd/Tijd.html>], at 203-204.

⁹ I believe that Dooyeweerd's answer is that the idea of extensive magnitude is a spatial anticipation (*NC II*, 170), and that the notion of order in the sense of a succession of magnitudes is still an order of time (*NC I*, 32 fn1). In "Dialectic," I discuss some of the problems that result from Vollenhoven's view of number. If numerical succession does not occur in time, then is it a non-temporal order, as Vollenhoven says in *Divergentierapport* 115? How then does he avoid the *a priori* view of mathematics as found in rationalism?

If Dooyeweerd had really rejected the idea of supratemporality in 1964, as Strauss maintains, there would be no need in 1968 for Vollenhoven to continue battling against Dooyeweerd's idea of the supratemporal heart. In any event, what is important to realize is that both Vollenhoven and Steen continued to fight against Dooyeweerd's idea of the supratemporal heart.

Strauss refers to Dooyeweerd's 1960 discussion with Van Peursen, where Dooyeweerd said that the term 'supratemporal' could be replaced by another term (Strauss, p. 4). But that does not mean that Dooyeweerd wanted to do away with the distinction between what is temporal, on the one hand, and the center of our existence that transcends time, on the other hand. On the contrary, Dooyeweerd continued to emphasize the distinction. Even when he did not use the term 'supratemporal,' Dooyeweerd was using the same idea, when he spoke about man transcending time.

In any event, Dooyeweerd *did* continue to use the word 'supratemporal' after his discussion with Van Peursen. For example, he used it in *In the Twilight of Western Thought*.¹⁰ Dooyeweerd personally reviewed the first edition of the book and made

¹⁰ Dooyeweerd, Herman: *In the Twilight of Western Thought. Studies in the Pretended Autonomy of Theoretical Thought*, (Nutley, N.J.: The Craig Press, 1968, first published 1961) [*Twilight*]. On p. 7, Dooyeweerd refers to the central unity of the human selfhood, which is the supra-temporal, central unity and fullness of meaning:

This whole diversity of modal aspects of our experience makes sense only within the order of time. It refers to a supra-temporal, central unity and fullness of meaning in our experiential world, which is refracted in the order of time [...] the central unity of the human selfhood, which, as such, surpasses all modal diversity of our temporal experience.

And see p. 186 of *Twilight*, where Dooyeweerd refers to our heart as the spiritual root of all temporal manifestations of our life. The key to this true self knowledge is only given by the Christian Ground-motive, which itself cannot be understood without God Himself working in our heart:

But in this entire image of man [the opposing Greek view of man] there was no room for the real, i.e., the religious center of our existence which in the Holy Scripture is called our heart, the spiritual root of all the temporal manifestations of our life. It [the Greek view] was constructed apart from the central theme of the Word-revelation, that of creation, fall into sin, and redemption by Jesus Christ in the communion of the Holy Spirit. And it is this very core of the divine Revelation which alone

corrections in 1964, as confirmed by a letter *following* the January lecture that we are discussing.¹¹ In the new edition of *Twilight*, we find the term ‘supratemporal’ still being used in relation to man’s heart.¹²

And in 1975, in the last article he ever wrote, Dooyeweerd affirmed the importance of our transcendence of time yet again.¹³ He refers to his view that human existence, “although it is enclosed by cosmic time in its modal aspects and individuality structures, nevertheless transcends this time in its religious center” (pp. 83-84). And he says that without this idea of the religious root, we cannot understand the mutual irreducibility and unbreakable reciprocal meaning-coherence of the modal aspects, because these ideas are “not to be separated from the transcendental idea of the root-unity of the modal aspects in the religious center of human existence” (p. 100). Strauss must be familiar with this text, since Dooyeweerd’s last article was directed against him.

The idea of the supratemporal heart is one of Dooyeweerd’s key ideas. The first edition of Dooyeweerd’s *magnum opus*, entitled *De Wijsbegeerte der Wetsidee*, begins with this

reveals the true center of human life. It is the only key to true self-knowledge in its dependency on the true knowledge of God. It is also the only judge both of all theological and philosophical views of man. As such, this central theme of the Word-revelation cannot be dependent on theological interpretations and conceptions, which are fallible human work, bound to the temporal order of our existence and experience. Its radical sense can only be explained by the Holy Spirit, who opens our hearts, so that our belief is no longer a mere acceptance of the articles of the Christian faith, but a living belief, instrumental to the central operation of God’s Word in the heart, namely, the religious center of our lives.

¹¹ See Feb 26/64 Letter from C.H. Craig (of the Craig Press, the publisher), thanking Dooyeweerd for his corrections for the new edition of *Twilight*. Letter in *Lade I*, 2 of the Dooyeweerd Archives.

¹² See my discussion of the importance of ‘supratemporal heart’ in *Twilight* in Appendix D of my article “Imagination, Image of God and Wisdom of God: Theosophical Themes in Dooyeweerd’s Philosophy,” (2006), online at [<http://www.members.shaw.ca/hermandooyeweerd/Imagination.html>].

¹³ Herman Dooyeweerd: “De Kentheoretische Gegenstandsrelatie en de Logische Subject-Objectrelatie,” *Philosophia Reformata* 40 (1975) 83-101 [‘*Gegenstandsrelatie*’]. Translation and discussion online: [<http://www.members.shaw.ca/jgfrisen/Mainheadings/Kentheoretische.html>].

idea. On the first page of the Foreword (the very first part of the book), Dooyeweerd informs us about his discovery of the central significance of the heart, the religious root of the whole of human existence.¹⁴ Dooyeweerd says that it is the “root of all temporal reality.”¹⁵ As such, the heart, as religious root, transcends time; later in the text he refers to it as supratemporal.¹⁶ In the English translation, entitled *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* (which is also a revised, second edition), Dooyeweerd says,

In time, meaning is broken into an incalculable diversity, which can come to a *radical unity* only in the religious centre of human existence. For this is the only sphere of our consciousness in which we can transcend time.
(NC I, 31)

And Dooyeweerd then gives a long footnote, in which he specifically refers to this religious centre of human existence as supratemporal. In this footnote he takes the trouble to specifically reject the views of those people who regard the heart as merely pre-functional, and who deny supratemporality:

It has become apparent to me that some adherents of my philosophy are unable to follow me in this integral conception of cosmic time and its relationship to the concentration-point of philosophic thought.

¹⁴ *WdW* I, v. As translated in *A New Critique*: NC I, v:

I came to understand the central significance of the “heart”, repeatedly proclaimed by Holy Scripture to be the religious root of human existence.

¹⁵ *WdW* I, vi: “*de wortel van heel de tijdelijke werkelijkheid.*” NC I, vi “the root of all temporal reality.” Dooyeweerd makes it clear that those who do not accept this view are rooted in “the immanence standpoint,” or immanence philosophy.

¹⁶ See for example *WdW* I, 57 where he raises the central basic question [*grondvraag*]; Cf. NC I, 101: the second transcendental question] of the supratemporal unity-totality (*boventijdelijke eenheid-totaliteit*) for both law and subject. At *WdW* I, 66, he refers to the “meaning-totality of the law” as the “supratemporal unity above all meaning-diversity” [*boven-tijdelijke eenheid boven alle zin-verscheidenheid*]. And on the subject-side of this supratemporal unity, the meaning-totality of the cosmos is the religious root of the human race, now reborn in Christ. Or, as he said a few pages earlier, “the time-transcending root of our individual personality, in our reborn selfhood” (*WdW* I, 64). And at *WdW* II, 51, Dooyeweerd speaks of man as “the supratemporal creaturely root of creation” [*boven-tijdelijken creatuurlijken wortel der schepping*]. And at II, 407, he speaks of our time-transcending I-ness or selfhood [*ikheid, zelf-heid*], as the basis for our act of theoretical synthesis.

Some seek the concentration-point of human existence *in* time and suppose, that this religious centre must certainly be pre-functional but not supra-temporal.

But, at least within the horizon of *cosmic* time we have no single experience of something “pre-functional”, i.e. of anything that would transcend the modal diversity of the aspects. We gain this experience only in the religious concentration of the radix of our existence upon the absolute Origin. In this concentration we transcend cosmic time. How could man direct himself toward eternal things, if eternity were not “set in his heart”? (NC I, 31 fn1).

The next few pages continue this discussion of supratemporality, and Dooyeweerd says that he cannot agree with the tendency of some theologians who reject “the supra-temporal central sphere of human existence” (NC I, 33). He tells us that the heart is “the religious root and centre of the whole of human existence” and that it “transcends the boundary of cosmic time with its temporal diversity of modal aspects [...] For it is the fullness of our selfhood in which all our temporal functions find their religious concentration and consummation of meaning” (NC I, 506).

At the end of both the original Dutch edition, as well as the English translation, Dooyeweerd indicates that this idea of the supratemporal heart is in fact the basis of his whole philosophy, and he links what he said at the beginning of the work to what he says at the end. At the end of Volume III of *De Wijsbegeerte der Wetsidee* (p. 627), Dooyeweerd refers to man’s place in the cosmos as really the basic theme [*grondthema*] of his philosophy, and he says that his whole theory of the law-spheres and of individuality structures is continually set against the background of this central theme.

In *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* (p. 783), Dooyeweerd refers to his “thesis that the central question: Who is man? means both the beginning and the end of philosophical reflection.” It is important to look in more detail at what he says at the end of *A New Critique*:

All our previous investigations have been nothing but a necessary preparation for the latter [philosophical anthropology]. They all implicitly tended to the ultimate and doubtless most important problem of philosophical reflection: What is man’s position in the temporal cosmos in relation to his divine Origin? This question urged itself upon us at the outset of our inquiry and it returns at the end of this trilogy (NC III, 781).

and

At least one central point of a truly Christian anthropology must be made perfectly clear. Man, as such, has no temporal qualifying function like temporal things and differentiated societal structures, but at the root of his existence he transcends all temporal structures. [...].

In the radical community of the human race according to the divine order of creation, man is not qualified as a “rational-moral “being”, but only by his kingly position as the personal religious creaturely centre of the whole earthly cosmos. In him the rational-moral functions also find their concentration and through him the entire temporal world is included both in apostasy and in salvation. All things, beings, and factual relations qualified by a temporal modal function are transitory, the temporal bonds of love included. But man has an eternal destination, not as an abstract “rational soul” or a spiritual “mind”, but in the fullness of his concrete, individual personality [...]

The all-sided temporal existence of man, *i.e.* his “body”, in the full Scriptural sense of the word, can only be understood from the supra-temporal religious centre, *i.e.* the “soul”, or the “heart”, in its Scriptural meaning. Every conception of the so-called “immortal soul”, whose supra-temporal centre of being must be sought in rational-moral functions, remains rooted in the starting-point of immanence-philosophy.

But all this merely relates to the only possible starting-point of a Christian anthropology. Any one who imagines that from our standpoint human existence is no more than a complex of temporal functions centering in the “heart”, has an all too simple and erroneous idea of what we understand by “anthropology.” What has appeared in the course of our investigations in this third volume is that in temporal human existence we can point to an extremely intricate system of enkaptic structural interlacements, and that these interlacements presuppose a comprehensive series of individuality structures, bound within an enkaptic structural whole. This insight implies new anthropological problems which cannot in any way be considered as solved. But they do not concern the central sphere of human existence, which transcends the temporal horizon (*NC III*, 783-84).

Thus, this final page of *A New Critique* (remember, this is Dooyeweerd’s *magnum opus*) affirms the supratemporal heart as the central sphere of human existence in which we transcend the temporal horizon, and in which the entire temporal world is included. Note that Dooyeweerd also says that this is “the only possible starting-point of a Christian philosophy.” Dooyeweerd had stressed the same point in 1931: “This is the principal

point of departure for any truly Christian view of temporal society.”¹⁷ And on this last page of *A New Critique*, Dooyeweerd repeats what he said at *NC I*, 31, fn 1: the heart is not merely the center of our temporal functions (as Vollenhoven had proposed in his idea of the merely pre-functional heart). Dooyeweerd says that whoever holds to such a view has “an all-too simple and erroneous idea of what we understand by “anthropology.””

¹⁷ See Herman Dooyeweerd: *De Crisis in de Humanistische Staatsleer* (Amsterdam: Ten Have, 1931), where Dooyeweerd says that the supratemporal selfhood must be the point of departure for any truly Christian view of society:

Maar naar onze beschouwing, de Christelijke opvatting der persoonlijkheid, kan evenmin het ‘individuele ik’ in den tijd worden gezocht en daarmee nemen wij principieel tegen de ‘geesteswetenschappelijke sociologie’ positie, die zulks met de geheele immanentie filosofie juist wel doet. De individuele zelfheid is door en door religieus, boventijdelijk. In de kosmische tijdsorde kan nòch aan den individueelen mensch, nòch aan het verband zelfheid, ikheid toekomen. Dit is het cardinale uitgangspunt voor iedere wezenlijk Christelijke beschouwing der tijdelijke samenleving (p. 113).

[But according to our view, the Christian understanding of a person, the ‘individual I’ can no more be sought within time. And we thereby stand in principle against the position of sociology in the humanities, which seeks to do just this in its immanence philosophy. The individual selfhood is through and through religious, supratemporal. In the cosmic temporal order, selfhood or I-ness can be reached neither by [these sociological conceptions of] individual man, nor of societal structures. This is the principal point of departure for any truly Christian view of temporal society.]

And this is also what Dooyeweerd said to the Curators of the Free University in 1937:

According to my modest opinion, and in the light of the whole Scriptural revelation concerning human nature it is just this possession of a supratemporal root of life, with the simultaneous subjectedness to time of all its earthly expressions, that together belong to the essence [*wezen*] of man, to the image of God in him by means of which he is able to not only relatively but radically go out [*uitgaat*] above all temporal things. And that is how I also understand Ecclesiastes 3:11. See Dooyeweerd’s Second Response to Curators, Oct. 12, 1937, page 34, online at [<http://www.members.shaw.ca/hermandooyeweerd/Response2.html>].

At *NC III*, 781 (the fourth last page of the work), Dooyeweerd says that he plans to write more about the topic of philosophical anthropology in a separate work. That work was volume III of his planned new trilogy, *Reformation and Scholasticism*.

In the 1964 lecture, Dooyeweerd says (1964 lecture pp. 9-10) that he had no further interest in publishing Volume II of this proposed new trilogy, since recent developments in Roman Catholic theology had made publishing that work pointless. But Dooyeweerd says that he does still want to publish Volume III (the volume on philosophical anthropology), if he is given the strength (1964 discussion, p. 1).

Dooyeweerd did not publish Volume III, but he did draft a lot of material that was intended for the book. That material has been thoroughly investigated by W.J. Ouweneel, who has incorporated many excerpts from it in his doctoral thesis, *De Leer van de Mens*.¹⁸ An extract from this thesis was published in English in *Philosophia Reformata*, where Ouweneel says,

From around 1930 onward, this view of the Supratemporality of the heart or the religious root-unity of the cosmos becomes the essential, unchangeable, and indissoluble cornerstone of his thought. The pivotal place of this view in Dooyeweerd's thought must be emphasised over against all those who have expressed objections to this view. They suppose that it is possible to drop this idea but to maintain the "rest" of Dooyeweerd's philosophy. They fail to see that the very core of his thought—the metaphor of the prism with its law of refraction, the law of concentration, the idea of the unity, fullness and totality of the religious root, the theory of time, the transcendental critique of thought—as well as the whole theory of the modalities, according to which the modalities are seen as "temporal aspects," stand or fall with the idea of the supratemporality of the heart. The transcendence of the heart, as Dooyeweerd sees it, cannot be conceived as if the heart "points" *within* time *to* the supratemporal, as if it stands so to speak on the "boundary" of the temporal and the supratemporal, standing as it were on the shore of eternity but limited nevertheless to the beach. It is not the heart but the temporal modality of faith which Dooyeweerd calls a "border sphere" and

¹⁸ W. J. Ouweneel: *De leer van de mens* (Amsterdam: Buijten & Schipperheijn, 1986). This Dutch dissertation has a six page English summary, which is available online in the CPRT Index.

an “open window to eternity.” The heart to him is always entirely above temporal diversity.¹⁹

As Ouweneel points out, Dooyeweerd’s whole transcendental critique depends on this Idea of the supratemporal heart. I agree with that, since the three transcendental Ideas of Dooyeweerd’s transcendental critique depend on distinguishing eternity, supratemporality and cosmic time. The question of the Origin refers to God’s eternity; the question of Totality refers to the supratemporal selfhood and religious root in the *aevum* or created eternity; the question of coherence relates to cosmic time. Those who deny the supratemporal selfhood, and who start from some other basis for Totality have fallen back into what Dooyeweerd calls “immanence philosophy.”

III. Textual Context

So if the idea of the supratemporal heart was and remained so important for Dooyeweerd, how are we to interpret his discussion with Peter Steen? Let’s examine the transcript in detail.

Incorrect citation

The full paragraph of Dooyeweerd’s Response should be as follows (I have placed in bold font those parts either neglected or misstated by Strauss).

Wat uw eerste vraag betreft, ja, ik begrijp die nu beter, daar draait dat penibele punt, waar ik soms de haren uit mijn hoofd trek, (you understand?), **dat ik deze woorden ooit gebruikt heb, ik geloof ook nooit dat ik ze gebruikt heb, het boventijdelijk hart,** ik geloof niet dat ik deze uitdrukking ooit zo gebruikt heb. Ik heb wel dit gezegd, dat de mens in het centrum van zijn bestaan de tijdelijke, de kosmische tijdelijke orde te boven gaat. Dat is wel iets anders. **Translated in English: I only ascertain that man in the centre of his existence is transcending, does transcend the temporal order in its cosmic sense. To say in the sense of his world, with this world of this man, you see?**

Please note that the last two sentences in English, beginning with the words “Translated in English...” are Dooyeweerd’s own words and not my translation of something he said in Dutch. Dooyeweerd was responding to Steen, who asked his question in English. As

¹⁹ W. J. Ouweneel: “Supratemporality in the Transcendental Anthropology of Dooyeweerd,” *Philosophia Reformata* 58 (1993) 210-220, at 213.

we shall see, Steen's question is not itself recorded in the transcript. But the discussion was partly in English and partly in Dutch. In connection with Dooyeweerd's own rather halting use of English, it must be remembered that it was not his first language, and probably not even his second or third language. German would surely have been his second language.

Incorrect translation

According to Strauss's summary of this discussion (Strauss, p. 4), Dooyeweerd says in this transcript that sometimes he can "tear the hair from his head" that he ever used the expression "supra-temporal." But this summary is not accurate. Dooyeweerd does not regret having used certain words. He *denies* that he used the words that Steen attributes to him.

The correct translation should be:

Concerning your first question, yes, I now understand you better. It revolves around that painful point, where I sometimes pull the hair from my head (you understand?) that I have ever used these words—I also don't believe that I have ever used these words. The 'supratemporal heart'—I don't think that I have ever used this expression in that way. I have certainly said that in the center of his existence, man transcends the temporal, the cosmic temporal order. That is now something else. [the following words spoken in English by Dooyeweerd]: Translated in English I only ascertain that man in the center of his existence is transcending, does transcend the temporal order in its cosmic sense. To say in the sense of his world, with this world of this man, you see? (1964 discussion, p. 4)

There are two issues here that can easily get mixed up with one another. One is whether Dooyeweerd ever used a certain expression at all. And the second is whether he ever spoke of 'supratemporal heart' in a certain way or context.

The correct translation shows that what caused Dooyeweerd to want to tear his hair out was the attribution of words to him that he *never said*. Dooyeweerd *denies* using the phrase that Steen attributes to him, and that is very different from regretting that he used a certain expression. As for the expression 'supratemporal heart,' Dooyeweerd denies ever using those words "*in that way*." More specifically, Dooyeweerd denies using them

in the theological context of Steen's question, which was a theological question concerning the two natures of Christ.

Internal context

Thus, the context of Steen's question is most important if we are to understand Dooyeweerd's response. In what way did Steen use the word 'supratemporal heart'? What were the words that Steen improperly attributed to Dooyeweerd? Strauss says that Steen's question was "in connection with the idea of supra-temporality." But Strauss doesn't quote Steen's question. Why not? Because the question is not included in the transcript! Steen was too far from the microphone for his words to be recorded. The transcript reads:

Mr. [Peter] Steen (from Philadelphia).

I can answer you in English? But I am not sure that I have completely understood, what you mean and I think the real reason is that I am not a philosopher. You see that my questions were mainly theological and not philosophical. And especially the first question, I think I do not understand completely the meaning of this question. [...Too far from the microphone]

The transcript gives nothing further for Steen's question. So there is nothing in the transcript that would indicate that Steen's question is related to Dooyeweerd's use of the term 'supratemporal heart' *per se*. What Dooyeweerd denies ever saying, and what makes him want to tear out his hair, is some other expression that Steen has attributed to him, and which the transcript does not record.

So what was Steen's question? It happens that there is another source that sheds light on the matter, a source not consulted by Strauss. The Vollenhoven scholar K.A. Bril attended the lecture. It was Bril's practice to take notes at all meetings of the Association that he attended, and his notes distinguish between the question asked and the response given. I visited Dr. Bril recently in the Netherlands and discussed this matter with him in person. He shared his notes with me, and I have included these notes in my translation.

In this case, his notes record that Steen's question included: <The Word became flesh. As it was in the beginning by God. Transcends time and took place within time.²⁰>

So Steen, who says his question is *theological*, evidently asked something about how Christ's incarnation *related to* transcending time and to taking place in time. In the lecture preceding the discussion, Dooyeweerd had spoken both of man's central heart and of the Word becoming flesh. But Steen seems to have related these two issues in a way that caused Dooyeweerd to react in the way he did. Steen specifically identified himself as a theologian. And his later dissertation on Dooyeweerd was written in a theological setting at Westminster Seminary. From Steen's later writings, it is apparent that he regarded the supratemporal/temporal distinction as confusing the distinction between Creator and creature.²¹

Dooyeweerd denies that he uses the words that Steen attributes to him. And Dooyeweerd goes on to say that the expression 'supratemporal heart' [which he *did* use] was never used *in that way*. In his answer to Steen, Dooyeweerd continues to use the term, and

²⁰ Note from K.A. Brill's notes of Association meetings that he attended, with respect to Steen's question: "Steen: leerling van van Til: Het woord is vlees geworden. Zoals het was in den beginne bij God. Gaat de tijd te boven en heeft in de tijd plaats gehad."

²¹ Steen may have been influenced by J.M. Spier, who had previously argued against the idea of supratemporality by relating it to the issue of Christ's nature. Spier also rejected Dooyeweerd's idea of the *aevum*, which distinguishes man's supratemporality (as a created eternity) from God's uncreated eternity. See J.M. Spier: *Tijd en Eeuwigheid*, (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1953), 151, 163. In 1962, Okke Jager wrote *Het eeuwige leven, met name in verband met tijd en eeuwigheid* (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1962). Steen wrote a review of Jager's book later in 1964 (thus, after this discussion with Dooyeweerd). See *Westminster Theological Journal* (November 1964), pp. 61-65. In that review, Steen agrees with Jager that Dooyeweerd's view of time and eternity is faulty, in that it "eternalizes" God's acts to outside of time, and that it brings with it the danger of confusing Creator and creature. But it is evident that Dooyeweerd had not changed his views in response to Steen's 1964 question. For in his 1970 dissertation, Steen continued to battle Dooyeweerd's idea of supratemporality. See Peter J. Steen: *The Structure of Herman Dooyeweerd's Thought* (Toronto: Wedge, 1983), where there are many references to the issue. In that thesis, Steen cites both Spier and Jager in his arguments against supratemporality. But Steen does acknowledge at p. 149 that G.C. Berkouwer had defended Dooyeweerd against Spier's view that supratemporality involved some sort of super-creatureliness. G.C. Berkouwer: *Man: The Image of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962).

defines it in a way that shows he uses it for *man* and *not for Christ*. Dooyeweerd says, “I have certainly said that in the center of his existence, man transcends the temporal, the cosmic temporal order. That is now something else.” Something else than what? Not something other than the supratemporal heart, for if you look at Dooyeweerd’s lecture, which came before this discussion with Steen, Dooyeweerd identifies the heart as the center of man’s existence. There is no difference between the supratemporal heart and the center of man’s existence, so Strauss’s interpretation cannot be correct. Dooyeweerd refers to Kuyper’s idea, which was so important for Dooyeweerd’s own philosophy:

In the second place, there was an idea that was most closely related to the first idea. Although Kuyper did not develop it in his great theological works, but rather in his more popular writings, it was an idea of very far-reaching importance. It is the idea that man was created by God with a religious center of life, which the Bible concisely names “the heart,” out of which are the issues of life. In Old Testament terminology, the heart must be circumcised. According to the testimony of Jesus Christ, it is out of the heart that all sins come forth. And it is in the heart that man’s rebirth takes place, through the working of the Holy Spirit. This central Biblical vision of man had become lost in the scholastic philosophy. And under scholastic influence, it was also lost in Reformed [*Gereformeerde*] theology (1964 lecture, p. 6).

And in the lecture, Dooyeweerd contrasts this Biblical view of the heart with the Greek view:

In this [Greek] picture of man there was no room for the nucleus [*kern*] of human existence as it has been revealed to us by the light of the Bible, namely the religious center of man’s existence, the concentration point of his whole existence. It is what the Bible concisely names “the heart, out of which are the issues of life.” (1964 lecture, p. 8)

And again on pages 13-14 of the lecture, Dooyeweerd affirms the importance of the heart that transcends time in a central way, as distinct from our bodily existence:

And just as man, who was created by God, with a great diversity of functions and structures with respect to his bodily existence, but with *one* central unity. The heart of his existence, that religious center out of which are the issues of life, and which according to the order of creation was destined to concentrically direct all the powers that God had placed in the temporal world (1964 lecture, pp. 13-14).

Dooyeweerd thus contrasts our heart as the religious center of our existence, with the temporal world. This is also the way that Dooyeweerd had previously referred to the

supratemporal heart–man’s heart is where he transcends the cosmic temporal order. The *aevum*, or created eternity, is set in man’s heart, while his body (or “mantle of functions”) is within time.²² And this reading of the situation also corresponds with the lengthy passages from *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* that I have already cited.

Dooyeweerd emphasizes that man’s supratemporal heart refers to the way in which *man* transcends the temporal order. The way that man transcends time is something different from the way that Christ, the Word made flesh, transcends time. Dooyeweerd says, in answer to Steen, “That is now something else.” Surely the distinction is between Christ’s eternity and man’s supratemporality. Both eternity and supratemporality transcend time, but eternity also transcends the supratemporal *aevum*. Dooyeweerd again emphasizes the difference between man’s supratemporal heart and Christ’s transcending time: “in the sense of his world, with this world of this man, you see?” The heart is *man’s* center, not Christ’s.

Steen’s question therefore relates to the two natures of Christ, and how Christ became temporal. Perhaps Steen had read J.M. Spier’s 1953 book in which Spier argued against supratemporality by relating the issue to Christ’s two natures. Another reason that

²² See for example,

Wanneer wij in het diepste concentratiepunt van ons bestaan den tijd niet to boven gingen, dan zou ook ons bewustzijn noodzakelijk in den tijd opgaan, en daarmee de mogelijkheid der religieuze zelf-concentratie ontberen. Het zou geen tijdsprobleem kennen, want tot wezenlijk probleem wordt de tijd eerst, wanneer, wij distantie tegenover hem kunnen nemen in het boven-tijdelijke, dat wij in het diepst van ons wezen ervaren. Slechts omdat de eeuw (het *aevum*) in ‘s menschen hart gelegd is, terwijl hij met geheel zijn functiemantel in den tijd besloten is, kan hij ook wezenlijk tijdsbesef hebben. (“Het tijdsprobleem en zijn antinomieën,” *Philosophia Reformata* 4 (1939), 1-2)

[If we did not transcend time in the deepest concentration point of our existence, then our consciousness would necessarily be swallowed up in time, and we would thereby miss the possibility of religious self-concentration. We would know no problem of time, for time only becomes a real problem whenever we can take distance from it in the supratemporal, which we experience in the deepest part of our being. Man can have a real sense of time only because eternity (the *aevum*) is set in his heart, while he with his whole mantle of functions is enclosed in time.]

Steen's question may have upset Dooyeweerd is that the doctrine of Christ's two natures was one of the issues raised by the Curators of the Free University in their lengthy investigation of Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven.²³ The Curators even made Vollenhoven write an article on the idea of "*anhypostatos*" as a kind of homework to be done regarding the nature of Christ. Valentijn Hepp had asserted that Christ had only an impersonal nature, and the Curators wanted Vollenhoven to agree with that view. He did not agree, but he wrote the article in 1940, about 4 years after the investigation began.²⁴

In any event, coming back to the transcript, the page immediately following Steen's question confirms the analysis offered above; it shows that Steen's question was a theological one, and that it related to the nature of Christ and the Word becoming flesh. Strauss doesn't mention this page, which provides a fuller context for Dooyeweerd's answer to Steen. According to the transcript, Dooyeweerd said:

Now you will say, "Yes, but, the Word became flesh," which you of course accept, and how can that be whenever there is a community, a community [*gemeenschap*] of egos, or shall I say, of "I's" [*ikken*], OK now, which transcend the temporal order [Following three sentences spoken by Dooyeweerd in English] "Transcend the temporal order. Well, I think there is no contradiction at all with these two assertions. It is so, man is with his bodily existence completely incorporated in the temporal world." According to his bodily existence, man is naturally wholly contained [*vervat*] in the temporal order. But man is also able to direct himself to the things that transcend time. That is a pure Biblical idea. In the *eternal* things. Paul speaks there expressly about the contrast: the things that man sees are temporal, but the things that man does not see, they are eternal.²⁵ Well now, man is able to direct himself, to direct his

²³ Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven: "Responses to the Curators," online at [<http://www.members.shaw.ca/hermandooyeweerd/Curators.html>].

²⁴ See D.H. Th. Vollenhoven: "Anhypostatos?" online at [<http://www.aspecten.org/vollenhoven/40a.htm>].

²⁵ The reference is probably to 2 Corinthians 4:18: "While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal."

See also Romans 1:20: "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, [even] his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse."

heart to the things that transcend time. And it [this directing to invisible things] is also necessary if we want to understand that part of our salvation, the incarnation of the Word. [Dooyeweerd says the next sentence in English] “That the world has been incorporated, infleshed.” It is completely needed, completely necessary, for that is an event, a real event, the incarnation of the Word, an event that simultaneously reaches into the central sphere of our life as well as in the temporal sphere of our bodily existence. The Word became flesh, the Word itself, yes, just as it was in the beginning with God and through which all things were made—that Word was not bodily. About that we can agree. And it was also not temporal. But that same Word became flesh. This is a doctrine of our salvation, that we believe this, and that we learn to see this. Thus we must see in the incarnation that it is at the same time a completely incomprehensible mystery—that it is an event that transcends time—and at the same time that has taken place in the middle of time.

Dooyeweerd’s extended answer confirms the distinction between man’s supratemporal existence and his simultaneous temporal existence. Dooyeweerd contrasts man’s bodily, temporal existence with the direction of his heart to the things that transcend time. He says that the distinction is necessary in order to understand the incarnation of the Word. But Dooyeweerd’s answer makes it clear that man’s supratemporal heart is something different from the incarnation of the Word. He says that the incarnation was an event that both transcends time and takes place in time. And it is something that he says “simultaneously reaches into the central sphere of our life as well as the temporal sphere of our bodily existence.” So Dooyeweerd again affirms the importance of the distinction. On the one hand, there is that which is central or supratemporal in man, and on the other hand, there is that which is bodily or temporal. He says that the distinction is necessary to understand Christ’s incarnation, but it is not the same as the incarnation. That is the point of the whole discussion. And it is also something that Dooyeweerd had earlier raised in his lecture (See 1964 lecture, p. 8).

In the lecture, Dooyeweerd had also said that the distinction is necessary in order to understand the central working of the Word of God in our lives, for “Holy Scripture also has a center, a religious center and a periphery, which belong to each other in an

or Colossians 1:16. “For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether [they be] thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him”

unbreakable way” (1964 lecture, p. 14). True knowledge of God and true knowledge of self are also obtained by the central working of God’s Word in our heart:

But when it concerns true knowledge of God and true knowledge of self, then we must say, “There is no theology in the world and no philosophy in the world that can achieve that for man. It is the immediate fruit of the working, the central working of God’s Word itself in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, in the heart, the *radix*, the root unity of human existence (1964 lecture, p. 14)

Strauss’s statement that the discussion with Steen shows that Dooyeweerd relativizes the distinction between temporal and supratemporal (Strauss, p. 5) and between creational diversity and the central religious dimension (Strauss, p. 23) is therefore not at all supported by the text. In the lecture as a whole, and in the full context of his answer to Steen, Dooyeweerd *affirms* the importance of these distinctions. The distinctions are necessary to understand the incarnation as well as the central working of God’s Word in the center of our existence, the heart.

The conclusion I cannot escape is that Strauss is simply mistaken in supposing that this verbal exchange with Peter Steen indicates that Dooyeweerd had changed his mind on this key point in his philosophy, and that this January 2, 1964 lecture and discussion somehow relativizes Dooyeweerd’s distinction between supratemporal and temporal (Strauss, pp. 5 and 23). On the contrary, the lecture affirms the distinction. Two conclusions can be drawn from Strauss’s apparent error. First, it is important to read historical sources in their context. Secondly, confusion is easily created when elements from classical Reformed theology are inserted into philosophical discussions in such a way as to suggest that philosophy and theology form a single universe of discourse. For Dooyeweerd they do not. For Dooyeweerd, theological issues are always dependent on philosophical assumptions. And for Dooyeweerd, one of those key philosophical ideas is the idea of the supratemporal heart.

What is required is a thorough and conscientious reading of Dooyeweerd’s texts, and a respect for the integrity of his work, in order to interpret his ideas as a whole. For it was the attribution to Dooyeweerd of terms that he did not use, it was the failure to listen to him and to actually read what he had written, that made him want to tear out his hair.

Appendix A

From: J. Glenn Friesen

Date: April 2, 2006 4:08:10 PM MDT (CA)

To: Theo Plantinga

Subject: Conference on Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven

Dear Theo,

Thank you for advising me of the April 7 conference, “Dooyeweerd or Vollenhoven: Does it make a difference?” I regret that I will not be able to attend, although I am certainly very interested in the implications of the acknowledged differences between the two philosophers.

A key difference is Dooyeweerd’s idea of the supratemporal heart, participating in the restored religious root. This is not an optional add-on to Dooyeweerd’s philosophy, but rather its very center. As he explained to the Curators of the VU, it gives us hope for continued existence after bodily death. But he also told the Curators that the supratemporal heart is not only a future reality; he emphasized that even now we really transcend time (see also 1940 article on time). He rejected Vollenhoven’s views of a merely pre-functional heart in time (NC I, 31, fn1). The transcending of time is what allows us to form theoretical Ideas of that which transcends theoretical thought (1967 *Encyclopedia*). It also explains the *Gegenstand*-relation, which is the entry of our supratemporal heart into its temporal functions (1946 and 1963 *Encyclopedia*). It is also the foundation for the irreducibility of the aspects (last article, 1975). And it is the “key of knowledge” for understanding the Christian Ground-motive of creation, fall and redemption (*Twilight*, 124, 125, 145). We are limited *by* time, but not *to* time (NC II, 561). When the transcendent dimension is opened, the light of eternity breaks through, illuminating even the most trivial parts of temporal reality (NC III, 29). Our transcendence of time is also what allows us to ascend the temporal aspects, “from anticipatory sphere to anticipatory sphere” until our thought finds rest in its religious root (NC II, 284). This makes our theoretical thought itself an act of religious worship and adoration, a kind of ladder of contemplation that ends in apophatic wonder. I hope that the participants in your conference will emphasize the joyous experiential nature of Dooyeweerd’s philosophy.

I understand that you will be recording the conference, and I would appreciate receiving a copy of that recording when it becomes available.

Blessings,

Glenn