

The Inner Man

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Introduction

Dooyeweerd regularly appeals to presumed biblical teaching about the “inner man.” This appeal is vital to his philosophical enterprise. In this essay I will investigate what the bible teaches about the human condition which, according to Dooyeweerd, is the precondition for philosophical and other theoretical reflection. It may be that this leads to a renewed understanding of “the relation of the bible to reformational philosophy.”

In an appendix to this bible-study I deal with some of the theoretical perplexities we encounter in Dooyeweerd’s texts. Perhaps it also contains some indication for their solution.

Throughout the text of this essay I use “man,” “he,” and “his” where I refer to all human beings, of whatever gender.

1. The inner man

The expression “inner man” is found only three times in the new testament. Compared to a word like faith, which occurs 250 times or more, this seems negligible. Does it then follow that the inner man is of little importance within the whole of biblical teaching?

That is not necessarily to be concluded. It could also be that the inner man is in fact presupposed in the notion of faith. If that is the case, its scant occurrence points to something about faith which has to become explicit, something that we might otherwise easily overlook.

My hypothesis is that the inner man has a central significance in the whole of biblical revelation. Therefore, I will here try to answer two questions: What is this inner man? And: What is its importance?

Let me start by quoting the three new testament places where we find this expression.¹ In Romans 7:22 we read: “I delight in the law of God after the inner man.” In 2 Corinthians 4:16 we find: “The inner man is being renewed day by day.” And in Ephesians 3:15–16 we read that “according to the riches of the Father’s glory he [the Father] may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. [...] Then [you will be] rooted and grounded in love.”

It is not immediately evident from these texts what the inner man is. In order to get some idea of it, we may look at what is said about it. First of all, the inner man is the reality “after” which Paul

experiences delight. Secondly, it can be older or younger: It is “renewed day by day.” In the third place, it is the reality in which we may have more or less power and strength.

These three things are not hard to understand. If we taste any delight, it is in our inner self. Also, when we wake up refreshed in the morning we taste and feel this freshness in our inside. Three, when we experience vigorous strength, it is in the inside of our body. Energy is felt inside. So, it does not seem that the inner man is very far deep down, away from our experience. It appears to be our experiencing self.

It seems like the inner man is some sort of “place.” This appears not only from the term “inner,” which refers to spatial differentiation, but also from the spatial preposition “in(to)” of which it allows. It may be said to be the “place” of self-experience: where we feel vigorous, where we experience delight, where we experience our energetic strength. That is our first conclusion: the inner man is a “place” of experience.

But there is more. The inner man is the place of a particular kind of experience. The experience of self is not like sense-experience (seeing or hearing for example), nor is it the experience of thinking. It is an experience of feel. Since feeling is also used for touching and for fleeting emotion, we may use the word affect here. The inner man is the “place” of affect. That is our second conclusion: the inner man is the affective man.

The third conclusion has already been hinted at: the inner man is man in his self-experience. When I delight, I experience myself as delighting. When I feel old and tired or vigorously young, I experience myself. When I experience dynamic energy, I experience myself. The inner man is the place of self-experience.

Our fourth conclusion is that there can be no inner man if there is no live man. A dead man has no experience at all. To be experiencing means to be alive. So, we must say that the inner man presupposes life. Therefore, on the basis of the foregoing conclusions, we may also say that the inner man is the “place” where we experience ourselves as alive. Surely, when we experience our energy, we experience our aliveness. And, evidently, when I wake up on the morning of a new day and feel refreshed, it is my aliveness that I experience. And last but not least: there can be no delight apart from delight in my aliveness. All delight is at the same time delight in life itself – for the same reason that I cannot feel anything without

feeling myself: When I feel the table touching my hand, I feel my hand, myself, touching the table. Affect is affect of life itself.

Finally, all this points to the personal character of the inner man. I am that inner man. When I feel my strength, I feel myself. When I feel my delight, I feel myself. When I feel my life, I feel myself.

Assuming that scripture appeals to us in the language of naïve experience (NC2: 52), we can summarize what we found so far as follows: The inner man is (1) a “place” of experience. (2) It is a place of affective experience. (3) It is a place of self-experience. (4) It is a place where life is experienced. (5) It is the place where I have experience of myself as a person.

But we are not done by only looking at the literal expression. The idea of the inner man is found throughout the new testament. It is mainly designated by the Greek word which the King James Version faithfully translates as “bowels” (*splanchna*).² Other translations are “(inward) affection(s),” “within,” “compassion,” “mercy,” “mercies,” “heart.” This Greek word occurs some 11 times throughout the new testament. Here are some examples.

“[Y]ou are restricted in your own affections” (2 Corinthians 6:12, RSV). “[H]is heart goes out all the more to you” (2 Corinthians 7:15, RSV. The KJV has “inward affection”). “Put on ... compassion” (Colossians 3:12, RSV. KJV has: “bowels of mercies”).³

Still, there is more. Besides the noun for bowels, there is also a verb that is derived from it (*splanchnizesthai*). Its meaning is “to have mercy.” In the Gospels it occurs some 12 times.

We may conclude that the idea of the inner man is present throughout the new testament as referring to a very basic reality, and that its spatial meaning refers to the inside of the body, which is understood as an affective inside.

2. Man’s heart of hearts

Clearly the inner man is invisible. For the outward eye, which cannot but perceive the outer world, it is the hidden man. It is the place of the “secrets of the heart” (1 Corinthians 14:25). It is the heart itself, man as “soul,” man as self, man in his “heart of hearts.”

The inner man is man as known only to himself and to God. It is the place *that counts*: where alms are really given or not at all.⁴ It is the place known to God (Matthew 6:4,6,18). It is the place where God is (Matthew 6:18).

Once we can equate the inner man with the heart, it becomes more familiar, for the heart is mentioned 150 times in the new testament and more than 800 times in the old testament. So, let us review some important points about man's heart.

Jesus's sayings about the heart are well known. It is the heart from which comes all that counts: either the good things come from the good treasure of a man's heart, or, from an evil treasure "within" originate evil thoughts, theft, murder, pride, unintelligence, etc. (Matthew 12:35; Luke 6:45; Mark 7:21–22). Clearly, the divide is whether a man in his heart of hearts is filled by the love of God or not. We are to love him with all our heart (Luke 12:30). His love is to be poured out into our heart (Romans 5:5). We are to be filled with all the fullness of God (Ephesians 3:19). Then, surely, the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will protect our heart (Philippians 4:7).

The old testament is just as clear. Our heart can be hardened, but this goes obviously against its well-being. In our heart we either hate or love our brother and JHWH.⁵ We are to love our God JHWH with all our heart (Deuteronomy 6:5). We are to love our neighbor as we love ourselves (Leviticus 19:18). And clearly, there are fools who say in their heart "nix God" (Psalm 14:1), but it is to be expected that such fools, who do not search for JHWH, will not revive in their heart (Psalm 22:27), simply because it does not delight in him.

We are back to where we started: there is a connection between delight and heart. What we must find out is the nature of this connection. Is it an intrinsic connection? How is this connection related to being a self? How is it related to existing createdly? How is it related to the reality of God JHWH?

Before we get to these questions, I give a summary of what we found thus far: The inner man is man in his heart of hearts, the "place" of his most hidden motivations. It is only known to himself and to God. It is the place of the divide between good treasure and evil treasure. It appears to be a place of treasure as such, a kind of overflowing store-house: Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks (Luke 6:45).⁶

3. Life

The bible has a remarkable conception of life. It states that we are to "enter" life (Matthew 19:17), and that this "eternal" life consists in some kind of "knowing." Eternal life is to know the only true God and Jesus Christ (John 17:3). Such is the "true life" (1 Timothy 6:19), the

“new life,” which is “at work in our bodies” (Romans 6:4; 2 Corinthians 4:10–12).

We are told that we have no life in ourselves (John 6:53). This is curious indeed! How can we exist if we are not alive? A dead I is certainly not an I. There is only one kind of I, namely the I that experiences itself as alive. Apart from life there exists not a single I.

The idea, of course, is that we are “alienated from the life of God” (Ephesians 4:11). Though it is beyond doubt that we are alive, this “aliveness” of ours is an alienated existence. True life is to be found beyond this alienation.

That is why we are to “know God.” When we realize that “to know” means “to be in communion with”⁷, we can understand why this knowing is necessary. We are to be in union with God, so as to find true life. But what is this “true” life? What is the kind of knowing that is being meant here? What is the nature of the union in which man’s destination consists?

We are not ourselves the source of our life. We are to “come to” Christ in order to have life (John 5:40). Then we will be able to experience the new life. As we already saw, our inner man will then be renewed from day to day. Rivers of living water will flow from our inside (our “belly” in the original of John 7:38). These “rivers” must no doubt be the currents of power and strength of the Father’s Spirit (Ephesians 3:14–16). In fact, JHWH is himself the source of these living waters (Jeremiah 2:13). He is man’s basic hope.⁸

What is this “coming to Christ,” and what is the nature of the communion that is necessary for life? What does it mean to “know God”? Are these things matters of “belief”? If they are, then surely they must be extremely extraordinary. But could it be that we know experientially what it is to know God, for the simple reason that to know God is to experience God? This is not at all to be excluded, since we are being admonished to “taste” that JHWH is good (Psalm 34:8). Surely, tasting is a matter of experience! Just like something springing from my belly is a matter of experience.

To sum up. The idea is that we are to learn to know and love our life, JHWH. True life is the life that we live by being in communion with God JHWH. The next things we are to find out is the nature of this communion and how this communion is related to “coming to Christ.”

4. Communion

The bewildering thing is our alienation from God. Originally man *is* in communion with God JHWH. Originally God shared his own breath of life with us. “God JHWH breathed the breath of life into his nostrils. That is how man became a living being” (Genesis 2:7). But now man is alienated from his original true life. Man turned away from his Origin in the illusion that he could be something apart from Him, imagining that he could be himself apart from being rooted in his Origin. This is curious, to say the least, for what can be known of God is plainly manifest to man: God’s eternal power and his divine nature were known to man. But he took no delight in it. Foolishly he gave up the lustre of God. That is how his heart and mind became darkened (Romans 1:19–23). Surely, alienating sin is the most irrational thing. It is being at odds – at war – with one’s own Origin.

But now the tide has turned. Through Christ we can again be in communion with the Spirit of the original life of delight, with JHWH himself, who is the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:17).⁹

The Spirit is poured out abundantly into the renewed life (Titus 3:6). We may be filled with it (Ephesians 5:18). This then must be the source of the currents of living water welling up inside us (John 7:38). JHWH himself is the fountain of these living waters (Jeremiah 17:13). We are to be born again of water and the Spirit (John 3:5). Then we shall again live the reality of being “children who issue from God” (1 John 4:4), who call “Abba! Father!” (Romans 8:15), and who know the steadfast love of the fountain of life (Psalm 36:5,9).

It is most instructive to realize that the original biblical word for spirit is “breath” (*ruach*).¹⁰ When God JHWH blew his spirit of life into man’s nostrils it was the *ruach* of life that he shared: life itself, the energy of life. Spirit makes us spirited. The Spirit is our life. It always was; the crucial thing is that we must not turn against it. We must not grieve the Holy Spirit of God (Ephesians 4:30).

That is what “coming to Christ” entails. We are to learn from him, taking in his meekness of heart (Matthew 11:29) – so that we can again trust the Source of life in us, have faith in Him and live again in tune with his lustre. Coming to Christ is coming to the One who sent him (John 6:44). Coming to Christ is trusting God (John 12:44). He who follows Christ will live a life of light (John 8:12).

Then we will find our communion with the Father (1 John 1:3). By the outpouring of the Spirit we will be a dwelling place of God (Ephesians 2:22). Our body will then be a temple of the Spirit within us, in which we can glorify God (1 Corinthians 6:19). That will be

peace and joy (Romans 14:17). For the Spirit is the spirit of lustre (1 Peter 4:14).

To sum up. Christ brings us back into the communion with the source of life, the Spirit, with JHWH himself. This is our new life of delight and joy in the inner man, in the body.

5. The Spirit

It is often thought that the Holy Spirit came late: at Pentecost. Or that the Spirit is to be associated with all kinds of extraordinary phenomena, like speaking in tongues. But the opposite is the case.

The Spirit comes first. In the beginning the Spirit of God was moving over the waters. In the beginning God spoke – by his own breath, by his spirit (Genesis 1). In the beginning God breathed his spirit into man’s nostrils (Genesis 2). In fact, JHWH himself is the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:17). It is God’s own spirit that makes us move.

Spirit is the usual translation of the Hebrew *ruach*. It means breath, moving air, wind, dynamics, energy, life. “Spirit” is dynamic energy. It is the breath of life, the creative activity of God himself. The Spirit is life (Romans 8:10).

Pentecost is the *return* of the Spirit, only this time in abundance. It is the affluent pouring out of the Spirit (Joel 2:28; Acts 10:45; Titus 3:6). It is the turn of the tide in the wake of the coming of Christ, when “the things that had been hidden since the foundation of the universe” were proclaimed (Matthew 13:35). The Spirit is not the latest, it is the oldest. It is foundational and original.

The Spirit revives even dead bones (Ezekiel 37:1–10). It makes alive (2 Corinthians 3:6; John 6:63). It renews (Titus 3:5). It turns a stone heart into meekness (“a heart of flesh”) (Ezekiel 11:19). The inner man is renewed: a new heart and a new spirit (Ezekiel 36:26). For the Spirit of God lives in us (Romans 8:9), bearing witness with our spirit (or, as Peterson translates, “confirms who we really are”) that we are children of God (Romans 8:16).

Our reality, then, is our reality as dynamic, a reality moved by JHWH, the Spirit himself. Our spirit is our *ruach*, our breath, our energy, our life. Life as lived by us issues from the Origin of life. Thus, our concentration on the inner man is our concentration on our rootedness in our Origin. The divine Origin of our reality is to be found in the root of our being.

6. Basic drive in communion

On closer inspection we find that the equivalent term for the “inner man” occurs plenty of times in the biblical writings. The “inside” of man is mentioned at least 47 times in the old testament, of which 19 times in close connection with the heart and 7 times in close connection with man’s *ruach*. Again, out of the latter, there are three occurrences where we find the “within” mentioned in one breath with both the *ruach* and the heart.

But these statistics are probably relatively unimportant. They merely show that the scant occurrence of the expression “inner man” in the new testament does not mean that equivalent expressions do not occur in the biblical writings.

But that, too, is not the point. Not only are we after statistics, we are not after linguistics either. What we need is an understanding of the biblical idea of the inner man. It seems that this idea is presupposed all through the biblical conceptuality. We find it not only in expressions that literally name man’s inwardness, but also in passages that speak of man’s *leb* (heart), *ruach* (spirit), or *nephesh* (soul), as in everything that is said about them, whether directly or indirectly.

The best way to corroborate the idea of the “religion of the inner man” is to take it as a hypothesis and to see whether it is confirmed in our faithful listening to scripture’s living Word. I expect that we will find that this idea was there all the time as the substructure of the biblical understanding of reality. I also expect that this will clarify what Dooyeweerd meant by the “biblical ground-motive of creation, fall and redemption, in the communion with the Holy Ghost.” And most of all, I expect that the finding of this “key” to scripture will greatly enhance our understanding of the drive of JHWH’s living Word.

7. A place of laughter and delight

Meanwhile, it is worthwhile to continue our search in the Hebrew bible. There are surprising things to be learned. For example, that the inside of man is a place of laughter. When Sarah heard the promise that she would have a son in her old age, she laughed in her inside (Genesis 18: 12). We already found that the inner man is also a place of delight, and the place where alms are given.

These observations of man’s inside are to throw light upon the biblical view of man and his relation to God. Sometimes in reading about “the heart” we may get the impression that this is merely

primitive Hebraic phraseology for man in his thoughts. It is true that this is how the Hebrew bible does speak, for example in expressions like “speak in your heart” (Psalm 4:5). Such formulations indeed refer to deliberation, which we would locate in our head. And it is true that thoughts are not visible to the outside world. They definitely belong to the inner man. But this does not take away that the heart is indeed man’s heart of hearts – as I wrote, the place of man’s deepest motivations.

This is to say that we are not at all led astray by romanticism when in our language we reserve certain things for the heart. It is also to say that the bible does not mean anything less than the “heart of hearts” when, for example, it forbids us to hate our brother *in our heart* (Leviticus 19:17), and spurs us to forgive him *in our heart*.¹¹ Likewise, we are admonished to love JHWH our God *with all our heart* (Deuteronomy 6:5, emphases mine). Such admonitions clearly refer to the seat of our affects.

As we already found, the inner man is the affective man. Our motivations then must be of an affective nature. It is understandable that nothing less than what affects us can motivate us. So, the question becomes: How does God affect us?

8. Affect

In order to find out about this, we may first of all look at man’s affectiveness. In one of the latest stories about Jacob we find a moving example of man’s affective make-up. This story is very instructive for our understanding of the biblical view of man. It brings out the close connection between life, the inner man, and spiritedness.

When Joseph’s brothers return from Egypt to their father Jacob, and tell him that Joseph is still alive, Jacob’s heart “remained cold, for he did not believe them.” But “when he saw the wagons which Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of Jacob their father revived in him.” That is how Jacob finds the faith of hope and love again: “I will go and see him before I die” (Genesis 45:26–28).

At first his heart remains cold. Of course, he is more than cautious, for these sons of his have played dirty tricks on him before. He has no choice but to “keep vigilant watch over his heart,” for “*that’s* where life starts” (*The Message*, Proverbs 4:23). But then, when he is convinced, “his *ruach* revives in him.” He feels relieved, breathes freely again, and life returns.

Surely, this is a moving and telling story. It points to the affective nature of the inner man and to its relation with the *ruach* of his life's motivation. We can easily picture what happens in this scene. Father Jacob carries a heavy grief because of the supposed death of his beloved son Joseph. He may even have felt that Joseph's brothers knew more than they had told him about Joseph's disappearance. Anyway, he must have had reasons not to believe them. He will not again, in his old age, be disappointed and shocked. So, he keeps his breath, and he freezes. His heart grows cold. It becomes a heart of stone (cf. Ezekiel 36:26). His heart is at stake, his love, his motivation, his life.

What the story makes perfectly clear is the primal nature of man as an affective creature. His life, which he does not have from himself, is an affective life. Not only is it easily touched (one of the primal meanings of "to affect" is "to touch"), but life is itself of such a nature that it *can* be and *must* be affected. That is why life is said to issue from the heart (Proverbs 4:23). And that is the reason why man's *ruach* is an affective *ruach*: Being moved has an effect on our breath. We either start to talk, or even to scream; or we may turn into dead silence. We may even stop breathing altogether. Or the very opposite: while our heart beats in its cage, our breath may start panting, and we may feel our heart in our throat.

9. Soul, spirit, heart, and God

The question now is: Is the rootedness of our being in God JHWH also of an affective nature? To get some idea, let us look at a few other passages in scripture. Not only is the inner man referred to as heart (*leb*) and spirit (*ruach*), but another very common term is *nephesh*. It occurs some 500 times in the old testament. Statistically it is therefore also very important. But not only statistically, as we will see.

Many translated versions of the bible render this word *nephesh* as "soul." But because of its extremely close association with the Platonic soul, which is far from "central" or root-like, we should avoid this translation. I will therefore write "*nephesh*" for "soul," just as in some instances I wrote "*ruach*" where most translations have "spirit." Both words, "soul" as well as "spirit," are far too much associated with Greek intellectualistic accounts of the nature of the inner man.

The three terms, *nephesh*, *ruach*, and *leb*, all refer to the inner man. Dooyeweerd sometimes writes "heart or soul," but otherwise he

avoids the words “soul” and “spirit” as much as possible, for the reasons just mentioned. His preference is for “heart.”

Although these three words equally refer to the inner man, they must reflect some different shades of meaning. It appears that *nephesh* points to the inner man as always dependent and in need¹², *ruach* points to the inner man as energetically empowered¹³, while *leb* points to the inner man in its deliberation and choice.¹⁴

But, if we do not translate *nephesh* as “soul,” what, then, are we to think of when we come across this word? What does it refer to? In its most primitive meaning *nephesh* refers to the throat as the bodily organ of food and drink.¹⁵ We read in Psalm 107:4: “Some (were) hungry and thirsty, their *nephesh* fainted in them,” and in vs. 9 we read about longing and hungry *nephesh*. Ecclesiastes 6:7 tells us that “All the toil of man is for his mouth, yet his *nephesh* is not satisfied.” Isaiah writes: [...] “as when an hungry man dreameth, and, behold, he eateth; but he awaketh, and his *nephesh* is empty [...]” (29:8). Jeremiah writes: “They shall come and sing aloud[...] over the grain, the wine, and the oil, and over the young of the flock and the herd; their *nephesh* shall be like a watered garden, and they shall languish no more” (31:12).

The *nephesh* is also the bodily organ of breath.¹⁶ “A wild ass used to the wilderness, in the lust of her *nephesh* sniffs up the wind” (Jeremiah 2:24). This can be compared to the imagery of Psalm 42:1: “As the hart (= deer) panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my *nephesh* after thee, o God.” As a bodily organ the *nephesh* apparently stands for man’s ever dependent and needy nature.¹⁷

From the throat to the neck is but a small step.¹⁸ For example, Psalm 105:18 has: “His feet were hurt with fetters, his *nephesh* was put in a collar of iron.”

The inner and outer *nephesh*, in connection with man’s need and dependence, also stand for man’s vital yearning and desire.¹⁹ Very often the word *nephesh* is connected with the Hebrew verb for desiring.²⁰ Apparently, the *nephesh* is also considered as the organ of desire. Hence, *nephesh* can even become desiring and love as such.²¹ When it is said that we are to love JHWH with all our *nephesh* (Deuteronomy 6:5), it means that man is to include all his vitality of desire and passion in his love for the unique God JHWH.

From desire and love to affect in general is again but a small step.²² We read in Exodus 23:9: “You shall not oppress a stranger; you know the *nephesh* of a stranger, for you were strangers in the land of

Egypt.” Although the RSV has translated *nephesh* here by “heart,” this is the kind of meaning that we might render as “soul.”

Finally, the word *nephesh* often means “life.”²³ This seems natural when we realize that life is connected with water, food, and breath, and that life is what we desire and need the most. “[H]e who finds me (wisdom) finds life and obtains favor from JHWH; but he who misses me injures his *nephesh*; all who hate me love death” (Proverbs 8:35–36). Clearly, *nephesh* here means life, the opposite of death. The same meaning occurs in Psalm 30:3: “JHWH, thou hast brought up my *nephesh* from Sheol, restored me to life from among those gone down to the Pit.” And we get to the last shade of meaning of the word *nephesh* when we realize that for the words “my *nephesh*” we can simply read “me.” *Nephesh*, therefore, also stands for the person and functions as a personal pronoun.²⁴

From *nephesh* as dependent and affective life, we get to “God and the self,” to the inner man and its rootedness in its Origin. But the same is achieved by following *leb* and *ruach*. The list of possible examples is very long. Here are just a few of them.

From the book of Psalms: “JHWH restores my *nephesh*” (23:3). “Our *nephesh* waits for JHWH” (33:20). “Yea, our heart is glad in him” (33:21). “My *nephesh* makes its boast in JHWH” (34:2; *The Message* has: “my lungs expand with his praise”). “O taste and see that JHWH is good!” (34:9). “JHWH, say to my *nephesh*: ‘I am your deliverance’” (35:3). “My *nephesh* longs for thee” (42:1). “Fill me with joy and gladness . . . Create in me a clean heart . . . put a new and right *ruach* within me” (51:8,10). “In thee takes my *nephesh* refuge” (57:1). “My *nephesh* thirsts for thee” (63:1). “My *nephesh* clings to thee” (63:9). “My *nephesh* waits for JHWH” (130:6). “My *nephesh* longs, yea, faints [] my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God” (84:2). “He heals the brokenhearted, and binds up their wounds” (147:3).

From Isaiah: “My *nephesh* yearns for thee in the night” (26:9). “I [the high and lofty One] dwell [...] with him whose *ruach* is beaten and brought down, to revive his *ruach* and his heart” (57:15).

From Ezekiel: “I will give them a new heart, and put a new *ruach* within them” (11:19). “A new heart I will give you, and a new *ruach* I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh” (36:26–27).

The agreement between the three words *nephesh*, *leb* and *ruach* in pointing to the inner man appears most clearly from Psalms 51 and 84, as well as from Isaiah 57 and Ezekiel 11 and 36.

Just as man's relation to his fellow man is a heart-felt life-relation, even so man's relation to his Origin is affective in nature. It is in fact the relation of our ego to its own createdness, for only by being affected by our life, which generates us, do we have any self-knowledge. There is no createdness apart from the Creator-Origin. There is no life that is not coming from the Origin of life. There is in fact no self-experience, and hence no self apart from the experiential knowledge of our Origin. To experience oneself as "I" is to experience life at work in us. John Calvin knew this when he wrote the very first page of his *Institutes* and pointed to the complementary relation between the knowledge of God and the knowledge of ourselves.

Thus, since man's life originates from the *ruach* of JHWH, He must himself be the motive of our heart's affectiveness. That is to say that God JHWH, who is himself the Spirit, is the Origin of our affective heart. Indeed, the radix of our existence is rooted in its Origin. We are being moved where the root is – in the "ground." There our motivation originates. Hence Dooyeweerd's idea of the true ground-motive, the biblical "basic drive."

10. Relating

These things are found in the bible. Are they for that reason matters of "belief"? Or are they matters of belief for another reason?

It seems that if there is belief involved, it is not different in kind from the belief that the Eiffel Tower is in the capital of France. But if we take these things in the context of our innermost need, as met by the "author" of that desire, and if we respond to his calling with boldness and confidence, then that would be *faith*.²⁵ The meaning of these things lies in their reality and in the conscious realization of their significance and of what follows from them.

For, as we have seen, we are alienated from our Origin. The inner man is "fallen," and does it hurt! It hurts so much that our minds have become darkened (Romans 1:21). That is why Christ came to restore us. His admonition is that we do enter life and light (Matthew 7:13; John 8:12). How? By seeking and knocking (Matthew 7:7). Paul says that we are to live a life of prayer. "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). This is a matter of "meditation day and night" (cf. Psalm 1:2).

We are to seek in order to find. When must we seek? Where must we seek? Clearly, we have no choice but to seek Him where he can be found. When do we have the opportunity? Today! "Today,

when you hear his voice,” says the Spirit, “do not harden your hearts” (Hebrews 3:7).

Where are we to find Him? Where He *is*: “in the secret” of our heart (Matthew 6:18). That is where He is at work. That is where His life can be experienced by us.

11. Conclusion

The inner man is where we know our Origin. It is the place of our heart’s original “tasting,” where we “taste and see that JHWH is good.” Life issues from this inner experience where we are touched by JHWH’s living Word. The inner man is not a “second man” inside us. It is the affective inside of our body. It is us. It is the place where we are rooted in the Origin, the fountain of life. Our philosophical theory can never be true if we bypass it. If we try to do so, we are to fancy a substitute origin by absolutizing something relative. In this way, we will surely miss the totality of meaning, for we are then excluding ourselves from it. Hence, we miss both root and Origin, we pass by ourselves and hence by JHWH.

Appendix about some difficulties in Dooyeweerd's theory

A1. Concentration on the self

Throughout his oeuvre, Dooyeweerd talks about concentration on a “center.” There is a “central totality” (NC1: 4), a “subjective totality,” a “central point of reference.” This is the ego. It is “I who remain [...] the deeper unity above all modal diversity [] of my temporal existence” (NC1: 5).

The philosopher is to concentrate upon this “self” that is “actually doing the work” in philosophical thought (NC1: 5). Without knowing himself, a philosopher can never produce an all-inclusive philosophy. Therefore, our ego should direct its reflecting act of thought towards itself (NC1: 7). For the I *lies at the basis* of all human functioning (NC1: 5), including human philosophizing. In all that I do, experience, or go through, I am always the subject of my activities. I cannot be excluded from cosmic reality.

Clearly, the concentration meant by Dooyeweerd is first of all a movement away from the dispersion in theoretical activity. He makes this plain when dealing with the second problem of his transcendental critique (NC1: 45-52). He writes that “theoretical thought directed to the totality of meaning of our temporal cosmos, cannot arrive at a transcendental idea of this totality without critical self-reflection” (NC1: 49).

While participating in the totality of meaning, I myself remain meaning (NC1: 8). Meaning is the nature of our existence as a selfhood (NC1: 4). Our ego shares in the nature of meaning, namely, to refer to everything else and to be expressive of it (NC1: 4). This is to say that our ego cannot exist by itself.

But that is not all. Without an origin of meaning, I sink into nothingness (NC1: 97). Meaning has a religious root and a divine origin. The universal referring and expressing is “of religious root” and “of divine origin.” (WdW1: 6). What does this mean?

It is clear that our ego cannot exist by itself. We are on all sides and in all ways dependent beings. The reality of our cosmic nature refers to, and is expressive of, all that we are dependent upon. That defines us as meaning, for meaning is defined as “universal referring and expressing” (NC1: 4). But then Dooyeweerd adds that even the subjective totality of our selfhood presupposes the creativity of a divine origin (NC1: 4, 9). Meaning supposes an origin which creates it (NC1: 9). This is to say: One, there is no meaning apart from an origin. Two, there is no meaning apart from being created. Three, the

origin of meaning is divine. For every individual ego this means (1) that it is never without or apart from its origin. The reality of selfhood implies the reality of origin, (2) the ego exists createdly, (3) man's existence has a divine "side."

It is generally accepted among Dooyeweerd interpreters that this reality of meaning confronts the philosopher with the inevitability of transcendental ideas. And indeed, no philosophy can avoid them. Every philosophy will in fact show an idea of the basic denominator of reality, an idea of the totality of meaning, as well as an idea of origin. I will not deal with this point separately. Rather, my concern is the content of Dooyeweerd's idea of the self. I want to look for an answer to the question about the *how* of the ego's "religious" nature.

When we are concentrically directed away from theoretical thought, where do we in the last analysis arrive? The first station along this concentration route is indeed the transcendental ideas. But ultimately we arrive at the specific content of Dooyeweerd's transcendental idea of the self. I tried to describe it in the main text of this essay.

What does the concentration upon ourselves involve? Does it mean that when we turn away from the dispersion in the theoretical view of reality we get to some other kind of "view"? The word "*theoria*" means "view," and theory *is* in fact a kind of view. Are we to pass, then, from one kind of view to another kind of view? Are we to arrive at a world-and-life-view? Are we to arrive at belief? But would that make a decisive difference?

It does not seem so. The world-and-life-view is just as much a function *of* the ego as is theoretical thinking and thinking in general. So also is belief (*pistis*). But we are to pass from the functions to the *root* of them, to the one *of whom* they are functions, to the living self. It is *there* that it becomes apparent that we cannot escape what could be called "*religion*."²⁶ Religion is the heart-felt pull upon man to look for the Origin of his meaning. In Dooyeweerd's own words, religion is "the innate impulse of the human selfhood to direct itself toward the ... Origin of all temporal ... meaning" (NC1: 57). This "concentration-impulse ... is concreated in the human heart" (NC1: 63).

The root, which characterizes humanity as such, is *in concreto* the individual man himself. It is man as denoted by the biblical term "heart." The ego *is* the heart, according to Dooyeweerd (PhR1961: 44). The heart is "the *full concrete unity of self-awareness and awareness of God, the self ... the 'inner man' in the biblical sense*" (PhR1939:

204). As concrete individual self, man “in his heart” is in need of his true Origin of meaning. Dooyeweerd finds the true Origin of the human self in the biblical self-revelation of God JHWH.²⁷

Therefore, it seemed necessary to explore whether the idea of “concentration on the inner man” can be corroborated by what we find in the biblical writings. What *is* this “biblical sense” to which Dooyeweerd makes an appeal?

My motivation for this exploration is directly related to what Dooyeweerd writes about the scholastic attempt to compromise between the biblical ground-motive and the motive of autonomous philosophy. The latter has (in theory) replaced the real center of man by his function of theoretical thought. One of the results of this compromise has been the “false idea that Holy Scripture offered certain solutions to ... the problems discussed in scholastic theology ... This was a source of confusion ... oppressive to the Christian faith ...” (NC1: 510). Since scholasticism is sticky stuff, there is no guarantee that an emphasis on the inevitability and necessity of transcendental ideas and on the legitimacy of non-theoretical presuppositions will liberate Christian faith from its oppression. Christian faith will continue to be oppressed by this scholastic presumption if it is to take the burden of religion, and this is precisely what happens when the function of thought is taken as the core of human personality. Faith will then ultimately assume the shape of belief, hardly distinguishable from an assumption of thought.

But ultimately, it is not Christian belief that is decisive; it is biblical religion. So, the problem of my exploration may be formulated as: “What is biblical religion?” or: “How does man encounter the Origin of his meaning,” or: “What is the biblical understanding of the nature of the communion of man with his Origin?” Biblical faith and belief can only be lived in practice – and understood philosophically – within the context of biblical religion.

I can summarize what I found as follows. “Heart” is not an indication of committed functioning, such as when we say, for example: “I believe with all my heart.” Rather, “heart” is (1) the way in which the ego shows itself. It is the way of being a self. And (2) “heart” represents the biblical understanding of the self in its existential-religious situation.

Unless it has to be assumed that by “heart” Dooyeweerd meant some metaphysical “point,” we may assume that by circumscribing it as “the inner man,” he has given us a useful clue to understand his meaning.

A2. No biblical confirmation of theoretical ideas

It is important to emphasize that biblical study can in no way confirm anything theoretical. Such a confirmation is impossible for the simple reason that the bible does not teach us any theory, not even by implication. Moreover, the point of my discussion is that Dooyeweerd's idea of the center of human existence, even though it functions within the philosophical ground-idea, is in itself not a theoretical idea at all.

If the human ego can in no way be considered to be accessible by theory, it must be assumed that Dooyeweerd has something in mind for which he can only appeal to primary experience. If this is true, perhaps a lot of the ongoing perplexity on this point can be removed. I hope that my exploration of biblical texts can serve as a threefold test: (1) Can we recognize the human self in these texts as the reality which we know from experience?, (2) Does what we learn from being revealed to ourselves on the basis of these texts accord with what Dooyeweerd may be supposed to have had in mind, and (3) What can be learned from these texts about the necessary reformation of our thinking?

A3. Dooyeweerd's idea of the heart is not a theoretical idea

It is true, Dooyeweerd propounds his understanding of the human heart in the context of his theoretical analyses. But does that make it a theoretical idea?

What is a theoretical idea? In the strict Dooyeweerdian sense a theoretical idea is an idea that deals with modal structures, with individuality structures, and with the relation between them. Secondly, in a much looser sense, Dooyeweerd's critique of theoretical thought itself may be considered to be some sort of theory. He compares and confronts the attitude of theoretical analysis with the everyday ("naïve") pre-theoretical attitude (NC1: 3, 41). Such comparison requires distancing from both attitudes. And distancing ("opposing") is the core characteristic of the theoretical attitude.

But Dooyeweerd emphasizes throughout that theory is dependent on what is not theoretical. Among the non-theoretical is the human ego. With regard to the human ego it is as with regard to time. We have a "deeper layer" of time-awareness. This awareness is not accessible to theory (PhR1940: 160)²⁸. For theory cannot be real except in processes of abstractive activity, at the base of which is the temporal activity of the ego. Theory, in its concrete reality, is always

dependent upon the self, upon the continuous concrete time of the self, and upon the self's primary experience of reality. Without a live abstractor there can be no abstraction.

Therefore, the I is in the same boat with time. It is equally a condition for theory. Like time, it is not accessible for theoretical analysis. The human ego transcends the modal diversity as well as the concrete coherence of time. This transcendence characterizes its supra-temporality.

Nevertheless, some thinkers have been searching for an understanding of Dooyeweerd's meaning as though he had some mysterious entity in mind. Foremost among them was D.H.T. Vollenhoven. He thought that the human heart has to be understood as both temporal and pre-functional. But Dooyeweerd's response to this is telling: "Within the horizon of *cosmic* time we have *no single experience* [the latter italics are mine] of something 'pre-functional', i.e. of anything that would transcend the modal diversity of the aspects ... This, however, is not to say that the religious centre of human existence is found in a rigid and static immobility. That is a metaphysical-Greek idea of supra-temporality."

The ego's "supra-temporality" is dynamic. Therefore, we have to be very critical with regard to "conceptions of the 'supra-temporal'" (NC1: 31-32). For the reality of the ego we must look *among our temporal experience*.

Another writer who found difficulty with Dooyeweerd's description of the inner man is H.G. Geertsema. He is of the opinion that we may possibly have to think of some kind of "homunculus" if we are to understand Dooyeweerd, and he thinks that there seems to be a deep ambiguity involved in Dooyeweerd's conception (PhR2009: 122)²⁹.

A third example is Henk Hart. He thinks that perhaps the supra-temporality of the human heart is characterized by non-temporality (PhR1973: 34, 36,38).

It is true, there is a "mystery" about the human heart (PhR1961: 37; Twilight 181). The ego recedes like an intangible phantom if we try to search for it (NC2: 115; Twilight 181). But it is equally true that the reality of the human heart remains a mystery *only* insofar as man tries to live outside of the central relation with the Origin of his meaning (Twilight 184; italics mine). Then, indeed, we experience ourselves as a mystery, existentially as well as philosophically. That is why we have to be "revealed to ourselves" (Twilight 189).

This presupposes that our self is an experiential reality, since otherwise we would not be able to recognize ourselves in revelation. We have to be discovered *to ourselves* as lacking in the fullness of the relativity of our meaning. But once we are in communion with the Origin of our meaning, we may be said to really know ourselves. Indeed, the whole problem of self-knowledge is a matter of communion, of relating, rather than a problem of theoretical distancing, which turns it into a mysterious entity as such.

A4. The transcendence of the human heart

Dooyeweerd explains on several occasions that as a result of identifying ourselves with our logical function (“reason”), philosophy is forced to look for the self amid the diversity of its functions. But this cannot be. The self then becomes “the rational soul,” a metaphysical abstraction, which remains “caught up” in the diversity of temporal functions. Rather, it is to be taken as “simple” (PhR1940: 180), that is to say, as above the diversity of its functions. It is not to be taken as a unity *in* a diversity, but as a unity *above* the temporal diversity: “*supra-temporal, transcendent*” (179).

It is here that a lot of perplexity can arise. What is this “above”? In what sense can we speak of the I or the heart being “above” its functions? How are we to understand such transcendence? How can the diversity of functions be the diversity of *its* functions if the ego is to be thought of as *above* its functions? If its functions are to be *its* functions, the ego must at least be related to them, and vice versa. But does the ego, by being related to its functions, not become entangled, or maybe even “caught,” in the diversity of its functions?

The ego’s transcendence has to be taken in a definitely qualified sense. There cannot be any ego apart from its functions. An ego without any activity of function would be a dead ego: no ego at all. Mekkes was no doubt right when he wrote that “our heart lives exclusively in its life structures,” and that it “does not have a valid place within an abstraction ... There is no way for man to transcend his dynamic temporal existence; its dynamics is merely transcending *towards* the horizon of time” (1971, 121-122). There must have been a reason for him to write these lines. It is not far-fetched to think that this reason is to be found in the attempts to solve the “mystery” by resorting to metaphysical speculation, and by attributing such speculation to Dooyeweerd.³⁰

A closer look at Dooyeweerd’s argumentation in 1940 shows him writing that the ego actively *functions in all aspects* of reality, and

that it is “at the same time the individual *concentration-point* of all these aspects of man’s temporal existence.” This concentration point is “*supra-temporal, transcendent*” (179). It follows that the ego is equally “above” time as it functions “within” time. While it is the *supra-temporal* focus of all aspects, it functions at the same time *in* all these aspects. This may appear to be a contradiction and might be taken as a reason to look for a being of the ego apart from its functioning. Many interpreters were of the opinion that Dooyeweerd entangles himself in a dualism or in a dialectical unity about the self, especially if the supra-temporality is to be taken as timelessness or non-temporality.³¹

We must fear that an ego supposedly real apart from its functioning leads onto the road towards a metaphysical “ultra-transcendence.” A “point” of concentration, conceived as real apart from its functioning, as a center without a circumference, becomes even more of a metaphysical abstraction than the *anima rationalis*, and even less of a point than the point of a needle.

But then, we should also ask, what we are to understand by the statement that the ego should not be “caught up” in the diversity of temporal functions. Clearly, what Dooyeweerd means on pages 179-180, is, to begin with, that the ego should not be identified with transcendental-logical unity. For such unity is never more than unity *in* logical diversity. It cannot be transcendent. For the ego to be transcendent, it has to be the concentration “of *all* its temporal modal functions *simultaneously*” (PhR1940: 179-180), not merely of some of them, such as the logical and the psychic.

This transcendence only makes sense if we take the “concentration-point” as *subjective*. It is the “subjective totality” of the self, of *me*. “I ... remain the central point of reference [...] of my temporal existence.” (NC1: 5). I am indeed transcendent with respect to *all my functions*; and I am transcendent *with respect to* all my functions. This is not mysterious at all. This is about concrete personal identity. I remain “the deeper unity above ...” I am a “*full concrete unity of ... awareness*” (PhR1939: 204). This seems to exclude the possibility that Dooyeweerd has fallen into the trap of making up entities.

It cannot be denied that in many instances Dooyeweerd’s formulations present us with ambiguities. At the same time, it seems clear that here (PhR1940, 170-180), as in other passages, he is not in need of a stronger sense of transcendence than I just indicated, the sense of personal identity. So the question becomes: does he for some

other purpose, in other passages, need a stronger sense of transcendence than here described? This is indeed the case, and has been emphasized from more than one side.³² It is a tricky question that deserves separate attention. I can here only deal with it in a few lines.

Whatever stronger sense we are to read in Dooyeweerd's conception must be balanced against his exclamation "I wish to cut off at the root the interference of speculative metaphysics in the affairs of the Christian religion" (NC1: 93). Metaphysics circumvents the human heart. By contrast, "the Scriptures ... appeal to the heart of man in the language of naïve experience" (NC2: 52-53).

But difficulties about the heart arise indeed when we read that it has a relation to "eternity," especially when eternity is taken as referring to timelessness. Early on the impression had arisen that Dooyeweerd conceived of the human "soul" as "eternal" (probably for fear of possible misunderstanding about the term "soul" he had resorted to the term "aevum," but this led to more misunderstanding. Soon after 1940 he dropped that Latin label altogether).

Dooyeweerd's discussion of this difficulty can already be found in 1939 (*Philosophia Reformata*, pp. 2ff). An important clue can be found on p. 2. He there speaks of the "supra-temporal concentration point *in self-awareness*" (my emphasis). This agrees with my remarks above, that we must start from our experience of subjectivity.

Another clue can be found in his discussion of Kuyper's "personal focus" (PhR1940: 181-182). It is most telling, according to me.³³ The "heart," or the "soul," or the "inner man," is the "*religious root* of human existence" (181). As Kuyper put it, it is "the point *in our consciousness* (italics mine), where our life is still undivided and where it is still bound together in its unity." Kuyper writes that this concentration-point "cannot be found anywhere but in the antithesis between all that is *finite* in our human life and the *infinite* that lies beyond it."

A few final remarks by way of suggestion for further investigation. The term "eternity" is probably used by Dooyeweerd in a naïve sense, without any distinction between eternity as timelessness and eternity as time-without-end. However, the problems here are not easily solved, for Dooyeweerd posits that evolution's pre-cosmic time, the "voortijd," as he calls time before it came to show itself to man as cosmic, was nothing else than the development of *finished* creation within time's order (PhR1959: 115; italics mine). It would then seem that "the order of time" implies an

opposition to creation, and hence with eternity. And indeed, that seems to be Dooyeweerd's meaning, for we read that he cannot assume that (Van Peursen is of the opinion that) God himself is temporal (PhR1960: 140). Looking at Dooyeweerd's formulation, it seems that clarification of the difficulties involved here require that the difference between faith and theory be taken into account. Dooyeweerd writes that the "eternal being" of God should never be understood in terms of the religious relation of man to his Creator (PhR1960: 140). In this sentence the difference between (speculative) theory ("eeuwig zijn") and biblical faith-language ("the religious relation of man to his Creator") seems to play a role. This points to the necessity of a critical distinction between the two, not only here but at similar places in Dooyeweerd's writings as well.

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¹ Scripture is rendered according to KJV, RSV, E.H. Peterson's *The Message*, or directly from the original text.

² The KJV even speaks of "the bowels of Jesus Christ." In Philippians 1:8 we read "greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ." However, to speak of the "bowels of God," as in Luke 1:78, was a bridge too far.

³ Other verses are Acts 1:18; Philippians 2:1; Philemon 7, 12, 20; 1 John 3:17.

⁴ Matthew 6:4: "So that your alms may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you." The added gloss "openly" ("shall reward thee openly") is a complete reversal of the thrust of this saying and its context. It is a contradiction to Matthew 6:18: "your Father who is in secret."

⁵ Leviticus 19:17: "You shall not hate your brother in your heart." Deuteronomy 6:5: "You shall love JHWH your God with all your heart."

⁶ *The Message* renders the meaning of this verse and its context admirably well: "It's who you are, not what you say and do, that counts. Your true being brims over into true words and deeds."

⁷ Adam "knew" Eve, and she bore a son: Genesis 4:1.

⁸ The verbs for waiting and hoping occur 87 times in the old testament; 53 times they refer to JHWH himself as the One expected.

⁹ In 2 Corinthians 3:17, as in other places, there are several good reasons to read “JHWH” for Paul’s “kurios” (lord); if only that here there is an allusion to Exodus 34:34.

¹⁰ There is a point in referring to this and other Hebrew forms. It will be made clear in section 13 below.

¹¹ Matthew 18:35: “So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.” Like the giving of alms, forgiving my brother occurs in my heart or not at all.

¹² Wolff 1984, 47.

¹³ Wolff 1984, 57-67.

¹⁴ Wolff 1984, 82, 84-85.

¹⁵ Wolff 1984, 27.

¹⁶ Wolff 1984, 29.

¹⁷ Wolff 1984, 47.

¹⁸ Wolff 1984, 31.

¹⁹ Wolff 1984, 33.

²⁰ For example, Micah 7:1: “There is no fig which my *nephesh* desires”; Deuteronomy 12:15: “eat flesh whatsoever thy *nephesh* lusteth after.”

²¹ Wolff 1984, 33-34.

²² Wolff 1984, 35.

²³ Wolff 1984, 37.

²⁴ Wolff 1984, 41, 44.

²⁵ Faith (*emunah*) is directed towards God (1 Thessalonians 1:8), not towards teachings related to Him.

²⁶ The word “religion” is a bit obsolete. Besides, it is easily taken as referring either to religiosity, or to the supernatural, or to both. It may be have to be replaced by a word that is close in meaning to the “existential” existence of man. Which word that could be, I don’t know.

²⁷ It is important to realize that the proper name of the biblical God is JHWH. This is made clear to Moses in the desert (Exodus 3). Indeed, it is a most fitting proper name. Its tenor is “the One who proves himself reliable against all odds, even against Pharaoh, the desert, or against whatever adversary circumstances.” He is the One who “in everything works for good to those who love Him” (Romans 8:28). It is a generally well-known fact that its translation as “Lord” stems from the old tradition to read “Adonai” (my Lord) for JHWH’s name. But JHWH himself makes it plain that he does not want to be called “Lord” (“Baäl,” Hosea 2:16).

²⁸ “It is undeniable that we have an awareness of time. However, the question at issue is whether this awareness is not rooted in a deeper layer of our experience than the layer which is accessible for theoretical concepts.” (“Dat wij besef van den tijd hebben is niet voor tegenspraak vatbaar. Maar het is juist de vraag, of dit besef niet in een diepere laag van onze ervaring wortelt dan die, welke voor het theoretisch begrip toegankelijk is”).

²⁹ Over the course of the years H.G. Geertsema’s contribution to the discussion of these matters has been very extensive. Geertsema suspects that there is a left-over from neo-Platonic speculation in the back of Dooyeweerd’s mind. I am not convinced, but I can see that there may be some ground for this suspicion.

³⁰ J.P.A. Mekkes is one of the very reliable interpreters of Dooyeweerd, together with A. Troost. Whereas Troost was a theologian, and took great pains to explain the theoretical and logical relations in Dooyeweerd's thought, Mekkes was a lawyer, and was clearly existentially ("religiously") very much in accord with Dooyeweerd.

³¹ For example Henk Hart, PhR1973: 34, 36, 38.

³² Recently most forcefully by J.G. Friesen.

³³ Gerrit Glas, PhR2010: 172n48, characterizes this passage in Kuyper as "almost infamous." I can't see why. Also, his characterization "well-known" gave me pause to think. It certainly is not generally known. Neither is Dooyeweerd's quotation of it.