

Review Essay

The Philosophical Foundations of Bavinck and Dooyeweerd*

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Herman Bavinck (1845–1921) and Herman Dooyeweerd (1894–1977) were Reformed thinkers—in particular, Dutch “neo-Calvinists”—both professors at the Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, in the last century; the former a systematic theologian, the latter a philosopher. The term *neo-Calvinist* refers to a revivalist movement within the Reformed tradition that stems from the nineteenth-century Dutch educator, theologian, church leader, and politician, Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920). Of the two books in review, one is a biography of Bavinck written by pastor and theologian Ron Gleason; the other is a critical, but sympathetic, study of the philosophical foundations of Dooyeweerd’s thought on law, politics, and society, written by social and political theorist, Jonathan Chaplin.

Bavinck’s Biography

As the title indicates, Gleason’s biography focuses on the most significant roles that Bavinck assumed in his life: pastor, churchman, statesman, and theologian. This book, sweeping in its scope, is chronologically organized around significant periods in Bavinck’s life: from his youth to his studies at Leiden, going on to his first and only pastorate in Franeker, his professorships at the theological seminary

* Ron Gleason, *Herman Bavinck: Pastor, Churchman, Statesman, and Theologian*, Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 2010 (511 pages); Jonathan Chaplin, *Herman Dooyeweerd: Christian Philosopher of State and Civil Society*, Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011 (452 pages).

in Kampen—during which time he wrote his four-volume *magnum opus*, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* (1896–1901)—and at the Free University where he assumed the chair in dogmatics as Kuyper’s successor. It covers his complicated friendship with Kuyper over the years; his cultural and political activity during his time in Amsterdam; and finally, the events surrounding his death. There are several appendices (D–F), three in which Gleason summarizes several of Bavinck’s key addresses on the nature of theology, the Christian worldview, and the conflict between modernism and orthodoxy.

Gleason’s book is the first English-language biography of the life of this imposing and multifaceted Dutch theologian. Hopefully this informative book, which I recommend, will spur the reader on to Bavinck’s own writings, many of which are now in English translation. The writings of this master of theological thought are enduringly original—filled with a spiritual vitality—a wide-ranging, deep, and intellectually rigorous synthesis of theological and philosophical thought in the Reformed tradition.

A significant shortcoming of Gleason’s book, however, is that it merely chronologically organizes Bavinck’s thought around the outstanding roles in his life rather than presenting both a systematically structured account of his fundamental theological and philosophical framework and the roots of that framework in a “comprehensive biblical life and worldview.”¹ Here and there, Gleason does helpfully give us glimpses of that framework. Still, after reading Gleason’s book, I felt dissatisfied because Bavinck’s thought, overall, had been neither adequately introduced nor critically engaged. For example, Gleason uncritically accepts Bavinck’s understanding and criticism of Catholicism’s theology of nature and grace.² Furthermore, his summaries of Bavinck’s key addresses, though helpful, should have been integrated into the main text. In particular, Gleason should have integrated two aspects he touches on regarding Bavinck’s life and worldview: (1) the catholicity of the Christian faith,³ culture,⁴ and nature and grace; and (2) the necessary philosophical presuppositions, both epistemological and metaphysical, to illuminate faith’s truth claims.⁵

Pared down for my purpose here, I shall attend to Bavinck’s philosophical presuppositions in order to show, first, that there is a basic philosophical difference between Bavinck and Dooyeweerd on metaphysics and epistemology, which I shall evaluate particularly from Bavinck’s Thomistic standpoint. Second, I shall outline Dooyeweerd’s normative institutional pluralism and its foundational social ontology and then examine Chaplin’s rebuttal of the charge of essentialism against Dooyeweerd—that societal structures, such as marriage, family, the state, and business corporations, though humanly established, have unchanging ontological identities. Chaplin’s discussion of essentialism is timely. It would

be no exaggeration to state that the current American political controversy over the institution of marriage is, chiefly though not exclusively, about essentialism. The question at issue is whether marriage, or any institution, has essential properties. Would marriage be nothing “more than a social construct, malleable enough to include whatever sorts of unions, sealed by whatever sorts of acts, we deem most socially desirable,” if “*nothing* could be a necessary feature of marriage”?⁶ Alternatively, is there a way between social constructivism and institutional essentialism?

Philosophical Presuppositions

In his 1998 encyclical letter, *Fides et Ratio*, John Paul II identified three “indispensable requirements” for a philosophy that is “consonant with the Word of God.” These three requirements are (1) a sapiential dimension to all intellectual inquiry; (2) an epistemological realism and, correspondingly, a realist view of truth; and (3) a metaphysical dimension.⁷ Bavinck fulfills all these requirements in the epistemological and metaphysical reflections of his *Reformed Dogmatics*.

First, Bavinck’s understanding of intellectual inquiry presupposes that all such investigation has a sapiential dimension: a starting point in first principles from which all intellectual inquiry proceeds and to which all such inquiry is ordered to converge on true wisdom. Bavinck identifies three fundamental principles that provide a definitive and unitive framework for such inquiry: *principium essendi*, *principium cognoscendi externum*, and the *principium cognoscendi internum*. First, God is the essential foundation of all existence and knowledge (*principium essendi*) because he is “the first principle of being.” Bavinck adds, “present in his [God’s] mind are the ideas of all things; all things are based on thoughts and are created by the word.” Second, “the world is an embodiment of the thoughts of God; it is ‘a beautiful book in which all creatures, great and small, are as letters to make us ponder the invisible things of God’ (art. 2, Belgic Confession)... Accordingly, the created world is the external foundation of knowledge (*principium cognoscendi externum*) for all science.” Third, what grounds the power of the human mind that enables man, at the very moment of perceiving things, to form the basic concepts and principles that would guide him further in all perception and reflection? Bavinck answers: “The Logos who shines in the world must also let his light shine in our consciousness. That is the light of reason, the intellect, which, itself originating in the Logos, discovers and recognizes the Logos in things. It is the internal foundation of knowledge (*principium cognoscendi internum*).”⁸

Second, Bavinck is an epistemological realist. He affirms man's capacity to know the truth about objective reality, namely, the objective truth about God, good and evil, right and wrong, and about social structures, such as marriage, family, and the state.⁹ Bavinck also presupposes a realist notion of truth (*adaequatio rei et intellectus*): A proposition is true if and only if what that proposition asserts is in fact the case about objective reality; otherwise, the proposition is false. For a realist, it is the world or objective reality that is the external foundation of knowledge. Bavinck writes, "The truth is antecedent to and independent of the human spirit; it rests within itself, in the Logos, in which all things have their existence."¹⁰

Third, metaphysics buttresses the realistic epistemology that explains how it is that man's mind is fit to grasp the reality of things as they really are. In short, there is a correspondence between subject and object, knower and known, as a consequence of the Logos (Col. 1:16), the Word of God, through whom all things were created (John 1:3). The Logos is the foundation of all knowledge. The human mind's capacity for knowing the structures of reality, discovering and recognizing the Logos in things, including social structures, is grounded in "the same Logos who created both the reality outside of us and the laws of thought within us and who produced an organic connection and correspondence between the two."¹¹ In addition, Bavinck affirms, in company with Saint Augustine and Saint Thomas, the doctrine of divine ideas: the archetypal ideas or forms in God that are the exemplary causes according to which things are created.¹² "According to the Scripture," says Bavinck, "these ideas have no objective, metaphysical existence independently of God, but only in his divine Being; they do not contain only the general notions, the types and form of the things, but the thoughts of God regarding everything that will come into existence without the smallest exception in its time."¹³ This doctrine avoids, as Robert Sokolowski explains, "the alternative between natures arbitrarily constructed and natures determined independently of God." He adds,

"What things are" retains its necessity because the essences of things are the ways *esse* [existence] can be determined, but *esse* subsists only in God, so the basis for the determination of things is not distinct from him: it is his own existence. The potentiality for there to be various kinds of things is to be placed, not in any material or foundation distinct from God, but in God himself.¹⁴

In this connection, Gleason's summary of the four characteristics of a Christian life and worldview, as Bavinck understands it, adds to the metaphysical and epistemological structure sketched above. This life and worldview

1. Acknowledges both the unity and the diversity in the created order.
2. It teaches that the entirety precedes the parts; the unity precedes the diversity.
3. It proceeds from the notion that it is the idea that the organism animates and dominates the distinct parts. Bavinck elucidates this thought with the help of a “Christian philosophy that has transformed the Platonic-Aristotelian doctrine of the idea.”
4. Finally, and this is very crucial for Bavinck’s theology, the primary characteristic of the organic approach is its “teleological definiteness” of thinking that allows both for development and a purpose order.¹⁵

Bavinck elaborates on point 4 above regarding the integration of order and development, linking it to an account of the dynamic unfolding of created existents. He writes in *Christelijke Wereldbeschouwing* in a way that anticipates aspects of Dooyeweerd’s philosophy of cultural development:

The organic world view is, therefore, in the final analysis thoroughly teleological.... The teleological is not in conflict with the causal world view, but with the mechanical, for the latter does not know any nature other than the bodily, no other substance than the material, no other power than the physical, and therefore no other cause than the mechanical.... *But the organic world view accepts the creation, as it presents itself, in its endless diversity of substances, powers, causes, and laws* (italics added).¹⁶

This last sentence expresses the crux of Bavinck’s thought regarding a dynamic order of divinely created existents, each fitted to unfold in accord with its own divinely established ends. As he puts it,

whoever says development says plan and law, direction and goal.... Development is ... an organic, teleological concept. For that reason it can only receive its full due on the basis of creation, which grants the world its being and which at bottom and in principle is what it has to become. Aristotle already understood that becoming exists for the sake of being, not the reverse. There is *becoming* only if and because there is *being*.¹⁷

Bavinck’s teleological account of the unfolding of divinely created existents within the structures of their irreducible natures adumbrates Dooyeweerd’s thought, as does Bavinck’s notion of a cultural mandate, which is humanity’s historical calling grounded in Genesis 1.¹⁸ This conclusion is an appropriate segue into Dooyeweerd’s normative institutional pluralism.

Dooyeweerd: Normative Institutional Pluralism

Jonathan Chaplin offers us a thorough, lucid, widely accessible, and reliable guide (critical but deeply sympathetic), to the philosophy of Herman Dooyeweerd, especially his philosophy of law, society, and politics in a way that should surely bring illumination to the uninitiated and perplexed reader of this undoubtedly important but neglected Christian (Reformed Protestant) thinker of the twentieth century. He patiently gives us in the first seven chapters (5–155) the whole picture of Dooyeweerd’s thought on the philosophical foundations of normative institutional pluralism as chiefly found in Dooyeweerd’s four-volume *magnum opus*, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* (1953–1958). Beginning with the central principle of Abraham Kuyper’s social thought, namely, the “‘sphere sovereignty’ of many distinct social institutions, each expressing a certain facet of a dynamic order of divinely created possibilities,” Chaplin shows that the foundation of Dooyeweerd’s normative institutional pluralism involves the development of this central Kuyperian principle to explain ontologically the “distinctive identities of the institutions of civil society and to frame a conception of the role of the state capable of doing justice to those identities and their interrelationships” (1; see also, 20–35). “Sphere sovereignty” was also affirmed by Bavinck. He writes,

The various walks of life—family, society, the state, occupation, business, agriculture, industry, commerce, science, art, and so forth—each have a certain measure of independence, which they owe to the will of God *as it manifests itself in their own nature*. In time, by God’s providence, *they develop and are changed in accordance with their nature*.¹⁹

The italicized phrases not only refer to the ontologically distinct natures of the various walks of life as Bavinck calls them but also to the fact that the development and changes of these realities are made in accord with their irreducible natures. As we shall see below, this is Dooyeweerd’s view too.

Chaplin follows his exposition of the Kuyperian roots of Dooyeweerd’s normative institutional pluralism with an explanation of his defense of the idea that all philosophical activity, not just Christian philosophizing, occurs in the context of religious presuppositions; therefore, there is no such thing as a religiously neutral interpretation of reality. Dooyeweerd’s interpretation of reality—his ontology—works with three fundamental philosophical ideas: meaning, time, and law (55–70). “Meaning,” says Dooyeweerd, “is the being of all that has been created.” Chaplin explains, “Meaning here denotes the *radically dependent nature of created reality*.... As meaning, reality points towards its Origin, the Creator, without whom the creature sinks into nothingness” (51). “Time” is

fundamental in Dooyeweerd's ontology inasmuch as the disclosure of the meaning of creation—of the unfolding of divinely created possibilities—involves a dynamic historical process, expressly, a normative opening process. A corollary of this theory of disclosure is the notion of a cultural vocation for man, which is “a divine calling to bring forth new possibilities from the creation order” (76). Dooyeweerd develops a corresponding notion of cultural development that is governed by the norms of “differentiation,” “individualization,” and “integration.” According to Dooyeweerd,

Without the process of cultural differentiation and integration there can be no question of a free unfolding of the structures of individuality in human society. As long as culture remains in an undifferentiated condition there is no room for a state, a church, a free industrial or trade-life, free associations, a free unfolding of fine arts, a scientific community, etc. (80).

In addition, Chaplin says, “It is the process of differentiation that creates the space for this flourishing of individuality while the process of integration allows each person, group, or structure to make its complementary contribution to the cultural development of humanity as a whole” (80).

Furthermore, created reality in its totality is, says Chaplin, “governed by a divine order of law holding for every kind of phenomenon” (52). In sum, in the words of Johan van der Hoeven, “If ‘meaning’ is the most basic and most comprehensive characteristic of the ‘being of all that has been created,’ and ‘time’ indicates the ‘course’ through which meaning is disclosed, then ‘law’ stands for the *structuration* of that course and, as far as human beings are concerned, the *signs* to be followed in order to keep *direction*” (52–53). Law, in Dooyeweerd's ontology, is an indissoluble correlate to everything that within creation exists, establishing its necessary framework, including societal structures. The laws of such structures Dooyeweerd calls “internal structural principles.” Such structural principles are founded in the creation order, and, hence, they are universally valid, invariant, and enduring (see 64).

Although Dooyeweerd does hold that “before the foundation of the world this order of the creation was present in God's plan,” he decisively rejects the unique metaphysical ground and justification in Thomist thought. In Thomist thought, which Bavinck holds, the “law” is a “form, or permanent and immutable type of thing.” As Augustine says, “Thus they [‘laws’] are eternal, and existing always in the same manner, as being contained in the divine intelligence.”²⁰ Significantly for Dooyeweerd, law is “trans-subjective,” but “it does not stand outside or above reality” in a transcendent sphere. He does not regard law as an expression of divine ideas or forms in God, existing in reality in God himself. Alternatively put,

he rejects the Thomistic notion that man's knowledge of the creation order is a human participation in the eternal law of God that is founded in divine reason. "[T]he Divine principles of the creation," in other words, are not "the *universalia ante rem* (in Divine reason) and *in re* (in temporal things)."²¹ This is Bavinck's view.²² Dooyeweerd rejects this way of grounding the order of creation and our knowledge of it as the "speculative ideas of a realistic metaphysics." According to Dooyeweerd, it is speculative, because thought attempts to transcend the boundaries of man's creatureliness by grounding "law" in the Being of God as "eternal law." Indeed, as early as 1939, he had rejected the moderate realism of Bavinck's philosophical thought as being in the "scholastic line" rather than the "reformational line" of Calvinism.²³ "Realism," writes Bavinck,

was doubtlessly correct in assuming the reality of universal concepts, not in a Platonic or ontological sense prior to the thing itself (*ante rem*), but in an Aristotelian sense in the thing itself (*in re*) and therefore also in the human mind subsequent to the thing itself (*in mente hominis post rem*). The universality we express in a concept does not exist as such, as a universal, apart from us. In every specimen of a genus, particularly individualized and specialized, however, it has its basis in things and is abstracted from it and expressed in a concept by the activity of the intellect. So, in entertaining concepts we are not distancing ourselves from reality but we increasingly approximate it.²⁴

Furthermore, adds Bavinck, "the universals are *in re*, because they are *ante rem* in the divine consciousness"; as such, these universals are an embodiment of the thoughts of God in the world and, in the light of the Logos, the human mind has the capacity for grasping them.²⁵

By contrast, for Dooyeweerd, "Law does not transcend reality, but *frames it from within*" (italics added). In other words, "laws are 'principles of temporal potentiality or possibility.'"²⁶ These creational principles are transcendental conditions that govern the totality of temporal existence, but they are actualized within time, and known, says Chaplin, by analysis of "the typical behavior patterns, persisting boundaries to possible variety, or continually recurring patterns of relationship seen within them."²⁷

Now, according to Dooyeweerd, the law-ordered structuration of reality is three-dimensional: (1) modal aspects, (2) typical law, and (3) enkaptic interlacement. First, then, the existing entities of created reality—things, events, social relationships, human beings—display a multiplicity of modal aspects: numerical, spatial, kinematic, physical, biotic, psychic, logical, historical, lingual, social, economic, aesthetic, juridical, moral or ethical, confessional or pistical (from the Greek New Testament word for faith, *pistis*). These are aspects of concrete

existents and can only be experienced in typical individuality structures: “Aspects do not themselves function; only things, events, and relationships function” (57). Significantly, “the logical and post-logical aspects can only be implemented by means of the responsible choices of active human subjects” (63). These aspects, then, have normative principles that are invariant and universally valid, and consequently the norms for language, aesthetics, economics, ethics, legal reality, and faith, *“do not change, only the human responses to them”* (63, italics original).

Second, in addition to modal aspects, there are the structures of individuality; namely, internal structural laws, as Dooyeweerd calls them, or an “inner typical law” (as Maritain similarly says).²⁸ Dooyeweerd argues that these laws are principles having an invariant transcendental character, thus establishing “various types of things, events, or relationships, governed by ‘typical structures.’” Chaplin explains: “each existent belongs to a specific type, all the members of which are subject to the same typical structural laws, and which therefore exhibit certain common characteristics” (66). Dooyeweerd is an institutional essentialist because institutions have some essential features. For example, an essentialist view of marriage argues that “sexual complementarity (among other things) is necessary for marriage, but fertility (among other things) is not.” That is, “it is sexual complementarity that makes possible the consummation of marriage as a true bodily union.” Furthermore, “the union of spouses in coitus ... [is] deeply related to the marital union’s widely recognized comprehensiveness [being a multidimensional union of persons] and inherent orientation to children—facts without which norms such as permanence and monogamy cannot be accounted for.”²⁹ As we shall see, this, too, is Dooyeweerd’s view. Furthermore, Chaplin adds,

Each structural type also displays a series of further intra-typical differentiations, an ‘inner articulation’ that can be highly intricate. This articulation terminates at a certain point; beyond that point the differences between existents are not determined by structural laws at all but reflect the uniqueness characteristic of their subjective individuality (66).

This “intra-typical differentiation” is distinguished by Dooyeweerd into three ontological types: (1) radical types; (2) genotypes; and (3) phenotypical, or variability, types. First, radical types determine the distinctive identity of a societal structure, such as the state, which is a juridically qualified institution, or marriage, which is a morally qualified institution, or economically qualified structures such as business corporations and industrial organizations. Second, genotype is a further differentiation of a radical type, which can be “accounted for in terms of the different configurations of modal functions within an individual existent” (65). In other words, while all concrete existents, such as marriage, function in

each of the modal aspects, “there are always *two* aspects in particular that play an essential role in determining their discrete identity, distinguishing them from the identity of others” (88).

These two aspects make the thing what it is and determine its very existence, which accounts for the different configurations of modal aspects within an existent, such as the state or marriage. “These two functions are the ‘qualifying’ or ‘leading’ function and the ‘foundational’ or ‘founding’ function.” For instance, says Dooyeweerd, “marriage is ... intrinsically qualified as a moral community of love for the duration of the common life-span of two persons of different sex.” The moral aspect of this love relationship (its qualifying or leading function), shows an individuality type that “refers back to ... the organic life-aspect of the conjugal relation, namely, the lasting sexual biotic bond between husband and wife.” Strictly speaking, “The moral individuality-type of the conjugal love-community is typically founded in the sexual-biotic function of marriage.”³⁰ According to Dooyeweerd’s ontology, complementary sexual differentiation is a necessary condition for marriage in order to effect the “one flesh” union of marriage. Thus, marriage is a moral community founded in a one-flesh union of sexually complementary persons that is ordered to mutual love and procreation with its irreducible identity being inherently and exclusively heterosexual. In short, marriage is the only kind of union whose essential feature is founded in organic bodily unity so that it can only exist between opposite-sex individuals.

In sum, then an

[internal] structural principle ... is the entire constellation of modal functions of a thing, event, or social relationship, characterized by its qualifying and founding functions. All structures of individuality are governed by a certain structural principle that constitutes their identity. A structural principle is an internally coherent configuration of laws—typical laws—for a thing, event, or social relationship (64).

These first two ontological types are given with the invariant internal structural principles of societal institutions. The internal structural principles are invariant, universally valid, or enduring because they are grounded in the order of creation.

Furthermore, there is a third kind of intratypical differentiation, not given with an internal structural principle, which Dooyeweerd calls phenotypical or variability type. This phenotypical classification arises from the stage of cultural development at which a particular social structure appears, whether undifferentiated or differentiated, from the influence of local cultural characteristics; enkapitic interlacements with other, differently qualified, structures; and subjective individuality, making, for example, my marriage or family uniquely different from

others. By way of example, the variability of societal forms may be culturally shaped and arise from the individualism of our modern Western culture. “The unwillingness of children in Western societies to care for elderly parents or of parents to protect their unborn children might be cited as illegitimate expressions of humanistic individualism, while the freedom to choose one’s spouse or one’s occupation without parental consent are, arguably, cases of legitimate individualism” (94). In its historical actualization, the instantiation of the internal structural principle of marriage changes, thus displaying an immense amount of variability because of the particular rules, customs, and standards of a culture. Notwithstanding this variety, Dooyeweerd is not a social constructivist: the variability is not expansive to the point that unions of whatever sort—“open marriages,” “plural marriages,” “same-sex marriages”—socially desired could be included, and “sealed by whatever sorts of acts.”³¹ By contrast, as an institutional essentialist, Dooyeweerd would agree with Germain Grisez that

marriage is rooted so deeply in human nature that it is found in every age and culture. Anthropologists studying a culture do not ask whether its members marry but what special characteristics marriage has in that society. In doing so, they refer to something recognizable in any society by its constant characteristics: It is the more or less stable heterosexual relationship recognized by society as the community in which it is appropriate for a man and a woman to engage regularly in sexual intercourse, and to beget and raise children.³²

Earlier I said that Dooyeweerd’s ontology had three dimensions. We have outlined the dimension of modal aspects and typical law and the internal structure principle with all its intratypical differentiations. We now turn briefly to the last dimension of Dooyeweerd’s ontology: enkaptic interlacement. The point here is that the individuality of existents, particularly of a societal structural principle that governs the internal functioning of individuality structures, is coupled with a theory of their interrelationships that Dooyeweerd calls “enkaptic interlacements.” This dimension of his social ontology explains “how individuality structures cohere amid their differences” (68). This aspect of Dooyeweerd is rich with potential to overcome the dilemma between individualism and collectivism. As one interpreter of Dooyeweerd has succinctly put it: “Both theories are wrong . . . because individuals and social communities exist in a mutual correlation in which neither can exist without the other: *neither is ‘basic’ to the other because neither was ever the source of the other, as both were created simultaneously by God.*”³³

In light of Dooyeweerd’s ontology, Chaplin develops in chapters 8–10 (156–270) Dooyeweerd’s theory of the distinctive, irreducible identity of the state, the manner in which it discharges its distinctive task of advancing public justice,

and its corresponding interrelationship with other irreducibly distinct social institutions, such as marriage, family, schools, markets, and so forth. In short, Chaplin shows how Dooyeweerd's philosophy can help to clarify three problems in contemporary legal, social, and political philosophy. These problems are: (1) What is the nature and extent of the concept of civil society? (2) What is the relationship between the plural institutions of civil society—marriage, family, educational institutions, the church, market, business corporations, voluntary associations—to the state? (3) What is the role—protective, integrative, or transformative—of civil society for social critique (271–305)?

Additionally, Chaplin addresses the question regarding the legitimacy as well as the importance of religious discourse in state and civil society, and, in turn, the contribution that Dooyeweerd's philosophy can make in contemporary debates (306–10). Chaplin does an exemplary job of addressing these problems in light of Dooyeweerd's theory of normative institutional pluralism. I strongly recommend his book.

Dooyeweerd's Social Ontology and Essentialism

Of particular importance, and most problematic, according to Chaplin, in Dooyeweerd's theory of normative institutional pluralism is the ontological claim that all social structures are subject to internal structural principles that are invariant, being rooted in the creation order. "While they are in every case established by human initiative, they are governed by 'invariant' (or 'enduring,' or 'constant,' or 'immutable'), universally valid, typical structural principles that condition, and indeed make possible, their factual existence" (86). The fundamental objection to Dooyeweerd's theory that Chaplin considers is whether it is guilty of essentialism.

Unfortunately, Chaplin has no discussion of essentialism as such. Still, his working definition seems to include any theory that assumes that societal structures have stable ontological identities. In other words, essentialism is the view that some things have some essential features, namely, "features that a thing *must* have to be what it is." Essentialism would exclude "features that the same thing may but *need not* have to be what it is."³⁴ Consider, for example, the essentialist claim "that marriage is inherently (not just incidentally) a sexual partnership sealed in coitus, which completes marital union to include every aspect of the spouses' beings, including their bodies." On this view, "sexual complementarity (among other things) is necessary for marriage, but fertility [actual procreation] (among other things) is not."³⁵ Essentialism is taken by many contemporary social theorists to be wrong because it is "untenable in the light of evidence of continual

social flux and variation.” Accordingly, says Chaplin, Dooyeweerd’s ontology is accused of essentialism because its principles are too rigidly prescriptive, thus closing off historical and social variety, squeezing out historical contingency and human freedom, and this is so despite the fact that phenotypicity and subjective individuality can vary immensely.

Does Chaplin agree with this charge? Not entirely; he attempts to save Dooyeweerd’s social ontology by arguing that it does not close off historical and social variety. I return to this point later. Does Chaplin reject Dooyeweerd’s claim that societal structures have stable ontological identities by virtue of invariant structural principles grounded in the order of creation? Yes, he does. Yet, he does so primarily because he thinks Dooyeweerd’s social ontology suffers from an internal inconsistency. Its internal structural principles seem to resemble Platonic forms, existing apart from their realization in factual social structures. However, Dooyeweerd decisively rejects any version of Platonism—for example, Bavinck’s Thomistic view—grounding his social ontology (96). Therefore, Chaplin thinks the normative foundation of social structures needs a critical reformulation more consistent with Dooyeweerd’s anti-Platonism. In addition, Chaplin seems, after all, to accept the claim that we need a social philosophy, unlike Dooyeweerd’s, that is open to what he calls “ontic structural novelty,” radical innovation, as it were, and not merely the historical unfolding of “inner typical laws” given with the original order of creation. Bavinck’s ontology of creation, of being and becoming, is like Dooyeweerd’s, but it does not suffer from the same internal inconsistency. Bavinck’s ontology epistemologically grounds the structural principles in the Logos and metaphysically in the divine ideas in God himself. Having rejected the unique metaphysical ground and justification posited by Thomist thought, how, then, does Chaplin account for the irreducible identity of institutions, such as marriage? How would he avoid the cultural slide into same-sex marriage or even plural marriages?

On the one hand, then, Chaplin tries to save Dooyeweerd from the charge of essentialism. The internal structural principles of societal structures are instantiated, or positivized, in a dynamic historical process of cultural development in which variability in social structures arises given phenotypicity and subjective individuality. Questions arise. First, “how much room for subjective individuality is actually left for a social structure once we have pinned down its radical-typical, genotypical, and phenotypical properties” (90)? One has the freedom to form the factually existing structure of, for instance, marriage in varied ways so long as this societal form embodies the intrinsic good of marriage. This actualization is done with the aim of bringing out its full reality in light of its internal structural principle—marriage is a moral community founded in a one-flesh union of

sexually complementary spouses ordered to mutual love and procreation. These are the human goods of human sexuality, and the moral norms of fidelity, exclusivity, and indissolubility are indispensable requirements for realizing the good of marriage. This claim raises a second question.

“How is the boundary between typicality and individual uniqueness to be readily identified” (90)? Chaplin answers this question by stating that this line is “often very difficult to draw, and this makes Dooyeweerd’s project of identifying invariant structural principles truly daunting” (94; see also, 93, 96). Accomplishing this project puts a significant but not unbearable burden on the would-be social theorist who seeks to carry it out. Significantly, Chaplin says it is often, though not always, very difficult to discern the normative boundary between invariant structure and variable positive form so as to argue that some variable states are not properly formed states.

This project is precisely what Catholic social and political theorists, such as Robert George, and Catholic ethicists, such as Germain Grisez, John Finnis, and Patrick Lee, are doing in their defense of the conjugal view of marriage. Dooyeweerd clearly shares their view, and it is philosophically justified by his social ontology, namely, distinguishing real marriage from counterfeits like “same-sex marriage.”³⁶ This is so because Dooyeweerd, like all these Catholic thinkers, argues that the internal structural principle (“inner typical law”) of the marital love-communion, the ethical aspect being its qualifying function, may not be detached from (in Dooyeweerd’s words) “its biotic foundation in the organic difference between the sexes.”³⁷ In other words, Dooyeweerd upholds the conjugal view in which two people who unite in marriage, must, in addition to other things, unite organically, meaning thereby in the bodily dimension of their being. In short, only a sexual union of male and female persons makes bodies in any real sense “one flesh” (Gen. 2:24), with the latter organic bodily union being a necessary condition for the existence of marriage—its founding function (in Dooyeweerd’s terms).

However, Chaplin claims that there is a need, for the reasons I gave above, to give a critical reformulation of Dooyeweerd’s argument supporting the normative structures of social institutions. He does not abandon social structural principles that are normative. Rather, he rejects Dooyeweerd’s thesis that social structures have stable and irreducible ontological identities. This means that he abandons the claim that such principles are *invariant*, being grounded in the creation order. Thus, Chaplin does accept the charge of essentialism against Dooyeweerd. For Dooyeweerd, “structural principles are not themselves subject to historical change. There is dynamic historical disclosure of structural law but not ontic innovation. What is disclosed is what is already given ‘in principle’” (97). Because the law

is *not* transcendent (sustaining its validity “in principle” in the original order of creation as present in God’s plan, as Dooyeweerd puts it) makes it seem as if it is a Platonic form, albeit transformed into a divine idea, but that is inconsistent with Dooyeweerd’s ontology.

Rather than follow Chaplin, however, and reject the invariance of internal structural principles guaranteeing irreducible identity of institutions and grounded in the order of creation, this inconsistency can be removed by embracing a unique metaphysical ground and justification posited in Thomist thought. As Aquinas puts it,

There cannot be an idea of any whole, [including the creation] unless particular ideas are had of those parts of which the whole is made; just as a builder cannot conceive the idea of a house unless he has the idea of each of its parts. So, then, it must be that in the divine mind there are the proper ideas of all things. Hence, Augustine says, ‘that each thing was created by God according to the idea proper to it’, from which it follows that in the divine mind ideas are many.³⁸

On the matter, then, of the transcendent validity of invariant, internal structural principles in Dooyeweerd’s social ontology, I rely on Bavinck’s Thomistic metaphysical and epistemological structure—doctrine of divine ideas and Logos—against Dooyeweerd and Chaplin.

What, then, does Chaplin make of the claim that, though there is immense complexity, variety, and unpredictability, given phenotypicality and subjective individuality, there is no “ontic structural novelty?” What more could he want than immense complexity and so forth? One can only assume that he wants a social ontology that keeps the door open to such ontic novelty rather than “any essentialist straightjacketing of social structures” (109). In all fairness, Chaplin is not a social constructivist. He seems to think that there is a way beyond constructivism and essentialism? Is he right?

Chaplin sketches an argument in which he distinguishes between the claims that there exists (1) “a universally valid correlation between particular functions and particular structures” (98) and (2) that this “universally valid correlation is invariant” (99). Thus, it is one thing “to say that an institution would not be a state if it did not perform the function of administering justice,” which is “in effect to acknowledge that states always and everywhere must perform the function of administering justice; that there is, after all, a universal correlation between this function and the structure we call the state” (99). Chaplin supports this claim with an argument purporting to show that norms for social structures, given a particular historical context, arise “out of the functional capacities of a complexly articulated human nature.” In other words,

Fully developed persons have capacities, given in their created nature, to engage in a diversity of variously qualified, mutually presupposing, and equivalently valuable core activities or functions: biological survival, emotional integration, social integration, productive labor, political participation, aesthetic and linguistic expression, religious worship, and so on (106).

It is not clear whether Chaplin thinks that each of these core activities or multiple irreducible human functions have ends, a telos, or basic goods, to which they are creationally ordered. For instance, on Chaplin's view, is human sexuality creationally ordered to the ends or goods of interpersonal unity and procreation? Christian anthropology, as its biblical root (Gen 1:27; 2:24; Matt 19:4–6; Mark 10:6–9), grounds the realization of these ends in the male-female prerequisite that the "twoness" of the sexes ordained by God at creation is necessary for the reality of becoming "one flesh" in marriage. Consider also the natural inclination of biological survival. It is arguably grounded in the basic good of human life with bodily integrity, good health, and procreative fruitfulness being the telos (or end) of that natural inclination. Therefore, this good, and the goods of human sexuality can only be brought to human fulfillment in correlation with a normative social structure that is designed in a certain way; otherwise, "if this design is distorted, human fulfillment is curtailed" (106). Consider an example Chaplin gives: "The structural purpose of a school, established to promote the formation of knowledge, character, and skill among children, is seriously twisted if it becomes a mere conduit for political propaganda or exclusively a preparation for employment" (273). Thus, the structural design of a social structure derives its requirement from "being necessary for particular kinds of social human flourishing" (108).

It is another thing to claim, and Chaplin rejects this claim, that this normative correlation between structure and function rests on an invariant structural principle derived from the order of creation. Rather, Chaplin purports to derive the normativity of this universally valid correlation between structure and function by reconceptualizing them "as inescapable imperatives rooted in [created human nature] and guided by the deeper norm of promoting human flourishing." This deeper norm is man's overall end, which Chaplin calls the fullness of human life. Thus, "the normative design of social structures emerges out of a *normative conception of the human person*" (106).

What is this normative conception? Although we get glimpses of his description of those core activities or functions, Chaplin never gives us the full picture of the human good. However, we cannot have a normative conception of man's end apart from knowledge of the "created imperatives of human nature itself." Furthermore, Chaplin is vague about whether each of these core activities or

multiple irreducible human functions have a corresponding end. Moreover, we cannot have a normative conception of man's end apart from an understanding of the fullness of human life. Man's ultimate end must mean for Chaplin, and surely for any committed Christian, a final end superior to, though inclusive of, the immanent good of social flourishing. This supreme good Dooyeweerd describes as follows: "Christ as the fullness of God's Revelation is the Truth. Standing in the Truth, as the sharing in the fullness of meaning of the cosmos in Christ, is the indispensable pre-requisite for the insight into the full horizon of our experience."³⁹

Elsewhere Chaplin refers to this concept as inclusive of "normative imperatives grounded in and directed to this given, stable, but dynamically unfolding, created structure of the human person" (106–7), in short, "the created imperatives of human nature itself" (273). Again, I ask: Do each of these irreducible human functions have an end, a telos, which can only be fulfilled in this and not that kind of structure (see p. 106)? For example, says Chaplin,

The case of marriage involves not only an assertion about human capacities in general (in this case especially moral, sexual, and emotional capacities) but also about the design of the institution or relationship most conducive to the flourishing of such capacities. Can the sexual and emotional capacities of two persons of the same sex adequately flourish if they enter the institution we have come to call "marriage," or is that institution conducive to such flourishing only between persons of the opposite sex (109)?

I would argue the latter. So, too, would Chaplin, but he leaves the question open in this book. The conjugal view of marriage is more conducive to human flourishing because it is more consonant with the sexual complementarity of human nature. In other words, the created imperative of human nature itself that "they become one flesh" (Gen. 2:24) is fulfilled in the kind of marital structure, and no other, in which the male-female prerequisite is the foundation for establishing a real bodily union.

Put differently, whatever else a same-sex relationship is, it cannot be the foundation of real marriage because the marital love-communion may not be detached from (in Dooyeweerd's words) "its biotic foundation in the organic difference between the sexes." In short, real marriage is, and only is, the bodily union of husband and wife. This is Dooyeweerd's view, as well as that of historic Catholic teaching. Indeed, it is the truth about marriage that was, until recently, the culturally dominant view. We are now being encouraged by cultural forces "to see marriage as an essentially emotional union that has no principled connection to organic bodily union or procreation," that is, without complementary

sexual differentiation. Accordingly, “marital norms (e.g., permanence, exclusivity, monogamy) will increasingly be treated as optional at best, and groundlessly restrictive at worst—at great cost to children and society generally.”⁴⁰

Finally, if Chaplin was seeking to abandon the idea of an invariant structure as the foundation of normativity, then he has not succeeded. He grounds the normative design of social structures in the objective structures of human nature, that is, human nature in its basic possibilities of fulfillment, “possibilities or potentials given with the created structure of the human person” (106), and which is the same ontological structure common to all humanity. From this invariant structure, he purports to root the normative structure of an institution. This is essentialism. No wonder Chaplin asks at the conclusion of his critical reformulation of Dooyeweerd’s social ontology whether he has avoided essentialism altogether given his normative concept of the human person (108). He has not.

Conclusion

Christian scholars, both Catholic and Protestant, will profit from Dooyeweerd’s normative institutional pluralism and its foundational social ontology. *Pace* Chaplin, the weakness in Dooyeweerd’s social ontology is not in his attempt to ground the irreducible identity of social structures in invariant, internal structural principles based on the order of creation. Rather, its weakness, which threatens to unravel the consistency in his account of the ontological irreducibility of social structures, is his rejection of a unique metaphysical ground and justification posited in Thomist thought. The explanatory power of Dooyeweerd’s social ontology, particularly in its account of invariant structural principles, will be strengthened if his students, like Chaplin, embrace Bavinck’s version of Thomism.

Notes

1. Ron Gleason, *Herman Bavinck* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2010), 161–62, 164–65.
2. *Ibid.*, 324. Without a word of critical analysis, Gleason simply mentions in passing that Bavinck’s “‘occasional’ writings and various addresses outline fundamental problems and fallacies in Thomism.” What problems? Which fallacies? For a Catholic ecumenical theological engagement of representative thinkers (Bavinck, G. C. Berkouwer, and Dooyeweerd) in Dutch neo-Calvinism, see my book, *Dialogue of Love, Confessions of an Evangelical Catholic Ecumenist* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2010).
3. Herman Bavinck, “The Catholicity of Christianity and the Church,” trans. John Bolt, *Calvin Theological Journal* 27 (1992): 220–51. Original Dutch version on line: <http://www.neocalvinisme.nl/hb/broch/hbkath.html>.
4. Gleason, *Herman Bavinck*, 226, 369.
5. *Ibid.*, 481–83.
6. Sherif Girgis, Robert P. George, and Ryan T. Anderson, “What Is Marriage?,” *Harvard Journal of Law and Public Policy* 34, no. 1 (Winter 2010): 245–87, http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1722155.
7. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio* (September 15, 1998), nos. 76, 81–83, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_15101998_fides-et-ratio_en.html.
8. All the quotes in this paragraph are from Herman Bavinck, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, 1 (1895; repr., Kampen: Kok, 1967), 183–86, 205–7. ET: *Reformed Dogmatics, Prolegomena*, 1, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 210–14, 231–33.
9. Herman Bavinck, *Christelijke Wereldbeschouwing* [Christian Worldview] (Kampen: Kok: 1913), 102, <http://www.archive.org/details/christelijkewere1913bavi>.
10. Bavinck, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, 1:556 [ET: 587].
11. *Ibid.*, 205 [ET: 231].
12. Bavinck, *Christelijke Wereldbeschouwing*, 57.
13. *Ibid.*, 56.
14. Robert Sokolowski, *The God of Faith and Reason* (1982; repr., Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1995), 45. See also, Bavinck, *Christelijke Wereldbeschouwing*, 56–57.

15. Bavinck, *Christelijke Wereldbeschouwing*, 55, 65, 66–67. As cited in Gleason, *Herman Bavinck*, 481, with some slight changes made by me in the citation from Bavinck.
16. *Ibid.*, 65–66.
17. Herman Bavinck, “Evolution,” in *Essays on Religion, Science, and Society*, ed. John Bolt, trans. H. Boonstra and G. Sheers (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 105–18, and for this quote, 118.
18. Herman Bavinck, “Christian Principles and Social Relationships,” in *Essays on Religion, Science, and Society*, 119–43, and for this quote, 143: “While conservatism closes its eyes to changes in society, and radicalism fails to have a solid standpoint in the stream of events, a reformation that proceeds from a Christian principle combines both: being and becoming, the absolute and the relative, the unity of the divine will and the wonderful leading of his providence.”
19. *Ibid.*, 142–43, italics added.
20. Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 1, q. 15, a. 2.
21. Herman Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, vol. 2, trans. David H. Freeman, et al. (1936; repr., Philadelphia: P&R, 1955), 559.
22. Bavinck, *Christelijke Wereldbeschouwing*, 28.
23. Herman Dooyeweerd, “Kuyper’s Wetenschapsleer,” *Philosophia Reformata* 4 (1939): 193–232.
24. Bavinck, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, 1, 204–5 (ET: 231).
25. Bavinck, *Christelijke Wereldbeschouwing*, 28.
26. Jonathan Chaplin, “Dooyeweerd’s Notion of Societal Structural Principle,” *Philosophia Reformata* 60 (1995): 16–36, and for this quote, 19.
27. *Ibid.*, 17.
28. Jacques Maritain, *Man and the State*, trans. Doris C. Anson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 86.
29. Sherif Girgis, Ryan T. Anderson, and Robert P. George, “Does Marriage, or Anything, Have Essential Properties?,” *Public Discourse* (January 12, 2011), <http://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2011/01/2350>.
30. Herman Dooyeweerd, “Sociology of Law and Its Philosophical Foundations,” in *Essays in Legal, Social, and Political Philosophy* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1996), 83. This essay was originally published in 1964 and is available at http://www.reformationalpublishingproject.com/pdf_books/Scanned_Books_PDF/SociologyofLawanditsPhilosophicalFoundations.pdf.

31. Girgis, George, and Anderson, “Does Marriage, or Anything, Have Essential Properties?”
32. Germain Grisez, *The Way of the Lord Jesus*, vol. 2, *Living a Christian Life* (Quincy, IL: Franciscan Press, 1993), 555.
33. Roy A. Clouser, *The Myth of Religious Neutrality*, rev. ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 282.
34. Girgis, Anderson, and George, “Does Marriage, or Anything, Have Essential Properties?”
35. Ibid.
36. I examine Dooyeweerd’s view of marriage as well as of those of the Catholic thinkers mentioned above in my book, *“In the Beginning” ... A Theology of the Body* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 259–69. See also, Girgis, Anderson, and George, “What Is Marriage?”
37. Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, 3:320.
38. Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 1, q. 15, a. 2.
39. Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, 2:564.
40. Girgis, Anderson, and George, “Does Marriage, or Anything, Have Essential Properties?”