Afrikaner nationalism, apartheid and the perversion of critique

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In this article I investigate the relationship between Afrikaner nationalism, apartheid and philosophy in the context of the intellectual history of the University of the Free State. I show how two philosophers that were respectively associated with the Department of Political Science and the Department of Philosophy, H J Strauss (1912-1995) and E A Venter (1914-1968), drew on the philosophy of Herman Dooyeweerd to justify separate development. I argue that their interpretation does not simply amount to a wilful misunderstanding of Dooyeweerd, but rather that the foundational moment of Dooyeweerd's philosophy involves an interpretive violence that accommodates this interpretation.

B etween 1929 and 1994, several philosophers affiliated with the Department of Philosophy at the University of the Free State (hereafter UFS)[1] articulated a social metaphysics that, to a greater or lesser degree, reflected the concerns of the Afrikaner nationalist movement that took shape during the first half of the twentieth century.[2] In its more extreme manifestations, this social philosophy explicitly supported and justified the politics of racial segregation and white supremacy that characterised the South African political landscape for most of the twentieth century.

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1   The University of the Free State is located in the city of Bloemfontein, South Africa. It was founded in 1904 as the Grey University College and underwent several name changes until it finally became the University of the Free State in 2001 (The University of the Free State 2006).
2   Moodie (1975: 298) uses the term 'social metaphysics' to describe a consistent conceptual theme that attempts to describe the nature of social and political reality.

In this article, I argue that the political framework provided by apartheid cannot simply be regarded as an external factor that encroached upon, and, in some instances, corrupted philosophical institutions. Instead, I will attempt to explain the relationship between apartheid politics and philosophy at the UFS with reference to what Derrida calls "the institutional presupposition" (Derrida 2002: 5). Derrida argues that philosophical institutions are *founded*. This means that the foundation of a philosophical institution cannot be understood purely in terms of the logic of that which it founds. Put differently, the foundation of a philosophical institution can never be a purely philosophical event: it bears within it a relation to the non-philosophical. I attempt to show that, between 1950 and 1968, the politics of apartheid in some sense became indispensable to the identity of the Department of Philosophy at the UFS.

The neo-Calvinist philosophy of the Dutch philosopher, Herman Dooyeweerd (1894-1977), is a central point of reference in the intellectual history of the Department of Philosophy at the UFS.[3] The philosophers I will discuss, namely H J Strauss (1912-1995) and E A Venter (1914-1968), both drew extensively on Dooyeweerd in their political and social thought, and specifically in their articulation of a radical distinction between white and black people in the context of South African politics.[4] Furthermore, Dooyeweerd claimed a special critical status for his philosophy that allowed the UFS philosophers to dismiss criticism coming from certain other positions as the manifestation of a dogmatic humanism. I do not contend that Venter and Strauss's racist politics follow by necessity from Dooyeweerd's philosophy. Rather, I try to show that Dooyeweerd's philosophy exposes, or evokes, the border between philosophy and its outside in a way that provides a point of entry for the politics of apartheid.

This article diverges somewhat from the theme of this special issue in as far as it is not directly concerned with law as a discipline. It does, however, bring into view the relationship between the apartheid legal order and a particular tradition of institutionalised philosophy. More than this, however, philosophy is not unrelated to a certain figure of law. Derrida notes that philosophy is marked by a "hyperjuridicism" (Derrida 2002: 58); he relates this phenomenon to the Kantian critical project that attempts to institute philosophy as a court of final appeal in all matters related to reason. Derrida (2002: 59) remarks:

3   See Strauss (2013).
4   H J Strauss began his career at the UFS as a lecturer in the Department in Philosophy in 1942; he became the head of a newly created Department of Political Science in 1947. Although not strictly associated with the Department of Philosophy, he was a prominent and influential proponent of neo-Calvinist philosophy within the university (see Strauss 2013).

> [...] philosophy is not only a mode or a moment of right, or a particular legitimacy authorizing particular legitimacies, one power of legitimation among others: it is the discourse of the law, the absolute source of all legitimation, the right of right as such and the justice of justice as such, in the reflexive forms of self-representation.

Dooyeweerd explicitly positions his philosophy as a response to Kant's critical philosophy, and he follows Kant in arguing that philosophy, as "transcendental critique of theoretical thought", occupies a privileged position in relation to the various special sciences (Dooyeweerd 1984). As Wolters (1985) points out, Dooyeweerd adheres to the neo-Calvinist tenet that all of creation is subject to God's law. However, philosophy, as Dooyeweerd understands it, retains a privileged status in as far as it seems to be the discipline that comprehends the relationship between creation and God's law, as well as the structural relation that holds between the different aspects of God's creation. Dooyeweerd writes: "Philosophical thought in its proper character, never to be disregarded with impunity, is theoretical thought directed to the *totality of meaning* of our temporal cosmos (Dooyeweerd 1984: 4). In some sense, we may say that Dooyeweerd, like Kant, conceives of philosophy as the law of law.[5] As will be observed later, this notion of philosophy as representing a more radical instance of law is not absent from the UFS philosophers' defence of the apartheid legal order. Understanding the transformative potential and the political limits of law as a humanities discipline will also require an interrogation of the relationship between philosophy and law.

This article is structured as follows. I first introduce Derrida's notion of the "institutional presupposition" as developed in the two-part work *The right to philosophy* (Derrida 2002, 2004), and explain how I attempt to bring it to bear on the history of philosophy at the UFS. Next, I provide a brief overview of the social and intellectual context that forms the immediate backdrop to the development of Dooyeweerd's thought, namely the emergence of Kuyperian neo-Calvinism in The Netherlands during the nineteenth century, and trace some aspects of neo-Calvinism's reception in South Africa during the rise of the Afrikaner nationalist movement in the first half of the twentieth century. I then introduce, in more detail, those aspects of Dooyeweerd's thought that I believe are pertinent to understanding certain arguments in the work of Venter and Strauss. Finally, through a reading of selected texts by Strauss and Venter, I attempt to show how the politics of apartheid find a point of entry into their thought through

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5   D F M Strauss, another UFS philosopher (he is the son of H J Strauss) and a prominent exponent of Dooyeweerd's thought, refers to Dooyeweerd's theory of modal aspects as "the discipline of the disciplines" (Strauss 2009).

what one might call, in reference to Derrida, the "mystical foundation" of Dooyeweerd's philosophy.

1. The "institutional presupposition"

From the point of view of the historiography of Afrikaner nationalism, there is nothing especially remarkable about the relationship between South African politics and academic philosophy at the UFS as introduced above. The role played by universities and intellectuals in the growth of Afrikaner nationalism has been extensively documented and commented upon.[6] Furthermore, it is well known that the historically white Afrikaans-medium universities provided many of apartheid's ideological engineers and trained the political and bureaucratic elite of the apartheid state (Hugo 1998, Bunting 2006). Several authors have also specifically paid attention to the influence of the neo-Calvinist philosophy of Abraham Kuyper in the mobilisation of Afrikaner nationalism.[7] On the whole, there is arguably nothing especially novel in the suggestion that academic philosophy was a significant element in that configuration through which Afrikaans universities allowed themselves to be "harnessed as agencies of socialization and mobilization" in the service of Afrikaner nationalism and apartheid (Welsh 1975: 59).

This picture does not sit comfortably with our cherished ideas about philosophy. Critchley (1999: 122-3) argues that the trial of Socrates founds the vocation of the philosopher as *critique*, that is, as an individual interrogation and questioning of the evidence of tradition through an appeal to universal form. Even if we are willing to acknowledge that all thought is embedded in a political and social context, a number of factors might lead us to conclude that the intellectual history of the UFS presents us with an extreme case of philosophy's corruption by the particular, the communal and the traditional. First, during the period in question, the UFS itself was very obviously conditioned by the narrow concerns of a nationalist movement. This aspect is exemplified by the institution's characterisation of itself as a *volksuniversiteit*. H vdM Scholtz, Rector of the UFS from 1946 to 1958, was unequivocal about the aims of such a university:

> The University belongs to the *volk* and must therefore be *from* the volk, *of* the volk and *for* the *volk*, a *volks* university, anchored in the traditions of the *volk* and fired by the aspirations to serve that *volk* in accordance with its conception of life and the world,

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6   See Bloomberg 1989, Moodie 1975, Dubow 1995, O'Meara 1983, Hexham 1983, Van der Merwe & Welsh 1972, Gordon 1991, Mouton 2004.

7   See Dubow 1995, Moodie 1975, Hexham 1981, Schutte 1987.

>   therefore on a Christian-National basis (quoted in Van der Merwe
>   & Welsh 1972: 21).

Secondly, in the national context, philosophy was seemingly not the only discipline to be affected. Sociology, psychology, *volkekunde*[8] and history have all been investigated in terms of their complicity with Afrikaner nationalism and apartheid.[9] This seems to support the argument that a pernicious macro-sociological factor was primarily responsible for the disciplines' corruption. Finally, it could also be pointed out that in the case of the UFS, the philosophers in question, and the neo-Calvinist tradition to which they belong, are marginal at best; that the UFS itself, with its colonial origins, stands at a comparatively great distance to the centres of philosophical thought, and that socially, politically and geographically, Bloemfontein is situated at the margins of the great Western philosophical tradition.[10] All of this would potentially allow us to dismiss the morally dubious aspects of this intellectual history as a perversion, an accident that befalls philosophy from the outside; in other words, as a problem that has no intrinsic relation to philosophy. At the most extreme, one could even take the position that what is called "philosophy", in the context of the UFS, should be considered somehow parasitical on, or derivative of philosophy proper, as something that came to be labelled philosophy only because of some historic and linguistic perversion.

Drawing on Derrida's deconstruction of the metaphysics of presence, one could argue that the apparent validity of these points derives from an assumption that views philosophy's inscription into history via institutions as non-essential. In other words, philosophy is considered to be universal and, in principle, unaffected by the various institutions (linguistic, pedagogical or otherwise) through which it is communicated in particular contexts. Whenever philosophy seems to go astray, this is considered a non-essential accident, attributable to the means of transfer (see Culler 1982: 91-93). The logic at work, in this instance, entails the notion that some form of *mediation* is responsible for the complicity, for example, the mediating effect of philosophy's institutionalisation in State-sponsored educational institutions. Philosophy's inscription into history, in the form of disciplinarity and institutionalisation, is always responsible for the worst kinds of complicity – philosophy *itself* is not to blame.

In this article, I attempt to analyse the case of academic philosophy at the UFS from the perspective of what Derrida (2002: 5) calls the "institutional

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8   *Volkekunde* was the designation of an essentialist brand of cultural anthropology taught at Afrikaans universities (Gordon 1991).

9   See Jansen 1991, Mouton 2004, Sharp 1981.

10 Bloemfontein is geographically situated in the centre of South Africa. Since its founding in 1904, the institution has mostly served the needs of an agrarian based economy.

presupposition". The essays in Derrida's (2002, 2004) two-part work *The right to philosophy* all proceed from a perspective that places philosophy's inscription into historical institutions at the centre of the question regarding philosophy's identity, that is, Derrida questions the very notion of something like philosophy *itself*, divorced from institutional conditions of possibility. Instead, Derrida (2002) argues that philosophy is always already implicated in institutional structures – beginning with language – that are indispensable to the legitimation of philosophical discourse.

The essential point here is that institutions are *founded*, that is, they are not natural. The logic of foundation entails that whatever is to be founded cannot derive its legitimacy from that which it founds, since whatever this may be does not yet exist. In other words, the moment of foundation by necessity invokes something exterior to itself. For Derrida, this means that philosophy does not first exist in some pure form, later to be corrupted by institutional and political forces exterior to it, but rather that this "corruption", or contamination, is part and parcel of a philosophical discourse's founding moment. As Derrida (2004: 109-10) puts it, "[a]lthough nothing appears more philosophical than the foundation of a philosophical institution – be it the University, or a school or department of philosophy – the foundation of the philosophical institution as such cannot be *already strictly* philosophical". In 'The university without condition', Derrida (2001) describes this foundational moment as the border between the inside and the outside, and goes on to state: "this limit […] is the place where the university is exposed to reality, to the forces from without (be they cultural, ideological, political, economic, or other)" (Derrida 2001: 55). "The institutional presupposition" thus entails that philosophy is always already 'corrupted' by the particular, the communal and the traditional. Another way of putting this would be to say that the moment of foundation is characterised by complexity.

There is, however, a further dimension to Derrida's argument. He notes that this foundational complexity does not present itself as such. The act of foundation involves an interpretive violence that hides this complexity. Derrida formulates this argument with reference to the founding of states (see Derrida 1986), as well as in relation to the moment of legal decision; in the latter case, he refers to this interpretive violence as "the mystical foundation of authority" (Derrida 1992). The law conceals the obscurity of its origins by incorporating into itself the narrative of its foundation. As Motha explains, "[t]he narrative or fiction of the law takes the place of an uncertain origin that must be placed beyond scrutiny" (Motha 2013: 96). According to Derrida, something similar is true of academic institutions, and of philosophy in particular (Derrida 2002: 5). If philosophy is to be the 'law of law', it cannot allow the non-philosophical a place in its founding moment, since this would pose a question to its authority.

I argue below that an interpretive violence of this kind is also present in the foundational moment of Dooyeweerd's philosophy. I further argue that the politics of apartheid, as it enters into the work of the UFS philosophers, is accommodated precisely by this interpretive violence as it appears in Dooyeweerd's philosophy. I argue that the "institutional presupposition", as Derrida understands it, prevents us from dismissing the intellectual history of the UFS as an 'accident', largely to be blamed on the massive influence of apartheid ideology on South African society. Rather, Derrida draws our attention to the way in which philosophy depends on this contamination to begin with. Philosophy's openness to contamination by the political is a condition of its possibility. In the next section, I begin by briefly tracing the reception of neo-Calvinism in South Africa.

2.   The reception of neo-Calvinism in South Africa

Abraham Kuyper was a Dutch theologian and statesman, and a leading figure in the neo-Calvinist movement that arose in The Netherlands during the late nineteenth century in reaction to the perceived anti-Christian, secular humanism of the Enlightenment. Kuyper's neo-Calvinism propagated a reformation of society, wherein a uniquely Calvinist world view would come to inform all aspects of society, including science and politics (Chaplin 2011: 20-2). To further this vision, Kuyper assumed a leading role in the founding of the Free University of Amsterdam in 1880, which was to be dedicated to providing an education that acknowledged, as its point of departure, God's sovereign authority over all aspects of life. Kuyper was clear about the significance of higher education for the neo-Calvinist cause:

> If university life and its broad influence remain exclusively in the hands of unbelievers, public opinion – also on moral and religious matters – will one day go wholesale in this direction and work to the great detriment of our Christian circles. There is only one way to parry this, and that is for Christian thinkers to found a university that will unfold another world of seeing and thinking; to transmit this among those who pursue higher education; and so to raise a circle of educated, influential people who can turn the public way of thinking [...] (Bratt 1998: 475).

Kuyperian neo-Calvinism was introduced to South African politics as early as the late nineteenth century, mainly through the efforts of J D du Toit, a minister in the Cape Colony and prominent figure in the earliest stirrings of Afrikaner nationalist sentiments. As Du Toit (1985) notes, this early reception of neo-Calvinism was of no real significance. However, a number of sources show that Kuyper's neo-Calvinism did find fertile ground with certain Afrikaner intellectuals at the forefront of the nationalist movement that took shape in the 1930s (Federation of the Calvinist

Student Associations of South Africa 1935, Hexham 1981, Dubow 1995). As Dubow (1995: 248) points out, the nationalist movement was, to a large degree, animated by the traumatic experience of the South African War (1899-1902), and Kuyper's antipathy towards modernism and secular humanism resonated with a nationalist movement that readily associated liberalism with British imperialism. Many Afrikaner students were drawn to Kuyper's Free University, and consequently, this institution became an important conduit for the introduction of neo-Calvinist ideas into South Africa (Dubow 1995: 260, Schutte 2005).

The significance of neo-Calvinism for Afrikaner nationalist intellectuals is apparent from the publication of a series of collected works under the title *Koers in die krisis* (1935, 1940). Literally translated as "Direction in the crisis", the title announced the predicament of Afrikaner nationalism and the possibility of a way out. The contributions came from a number of Afrikaner academics who explicitly identified themselves with the Calvinist tradition, and engaged social, political, cultural and theological subjects from this perspective. The editor of the collection was H G Stoker (1899-1993), professor of philosophy at the Potchefstroom University College (1919) for Christian Higher Education, and also the person to introduce Dooyeweerd's philosophy in South Africa. In the editor's preface, Stoker describes the purpose of the collection as follows:

> This collected work will help to erect a wall against the foreign currents that pull at us, by pointing towards the course that God's Word reveals to us. An organised action is necessary to free our volk, by means of knowledge, from the exile of modernism, liberalism, humanism, evolutionism and other alien rulers (Stoker & Potgieter 1935: vii).[11]

This passage invokes an intimate link between the political identity of the *volk* and a particular kind of *knowledge*. Knowledge, informed by a particular religious perspective (neo-Calvinism), is called upon to be instrumental to the organised movement that is necessary to liberate the Afrikaners from the "*exile* of modernism, liberalism, humanism, evolutionism and other alien rulers" [my emphasis, RE]. Intellectual currents such as humanism and evolutionism are named as oppressive political enemies. If the latter impose "exile" on the Afrikaner, then it would seem that this other "knowledge", which is called upon to liberate the *volk*, is associated with a sense of belonging. It would appear that his "knowledge" coincides with what is proper to the Afrikaner *volk*.

This link between knowledge, religion and the political identity of the *volk* reappears in the work of the UFS philosophers I discuss in this article. The political context of their work is different, however, in as far as it coincides with the period after the

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11   Translations are the author's from the original Afrikaans.

coming into power of the National Party in 1948. This period saw the entrenchment of apartheid policy through legislation. As will be seen later, for them it is not a question of knowledge's liberating power; rather, it is about knowledge justifying the political order that comes into being after 1948. Here, Dooyeweerd's philosophy proved to be accommodating. Both Venter and Strauss argued that the political questions that face South Africa are determined by "religious" difference. The concept of "religion" they use, however, has a very specific meaning, which they derived from Dooyeweerd's philosophy. In addition, drawing on Dooyeweerd, both Venter and Strauss link the notion of religion to a concept of civilisation. I now proceed to a brief introduction of Dooyeweerd's philosophy.

3.   The "true starting point of philosophy"

Herman Dooyeweerd was arguably Kuyper's most influential intellectual successor and he took up the task to "unfold another world of seeing and thinking" that Kuyper calls for in a most comprehensive way. Dooyeweerd studied and ultimately taught law at the Free University and, commensurate with Kuyper's vision of Christian scholarship, Dooyeweerd sought an understanding of law that was rooted in the Calvinist world view. As Chaplin (2011: 28-9) notes, Dooyeweerd came to the conclusion early in his career that an adequate Calvinist theory of law was dependent on a systematic Calvinist *philosophy*. Dooyeweerd accordingly set himself the task of responding to this need. This resulted in his major work, *De wijsbegeerte der wetsidee,* which was published in 1935-1936.[12] An English translation was published between 1953 and 1958 as *A new critique of theoretical thought.* In English, this philosophical system has generally come to be known as the "philosophy of the cosmonomic idea".

Dooyeweerd was a prolific philosopher and, during the course of 50 years, his thought kept evolving. By no means do I attempt to provide a comprehensive overview of his thought, and much less a critique. My aim is only to bring into view what I consider to be the foundational gesture of his philosophy, which is also crucial for understanding the positions of Venter and Strauss which I discuss in this article. This concerns Dooyeweerd's contention that the "true starting point" of a philosophy is a "common spirit, which [...] as a motive force, dominates the centre of our existence" (Dooyeweerd 1948: 59-60), and more specifically, his contention that his own philosophy is the expression of a particular common spirit, or motive force, for which Dooyeweerd claims the distinction of being the "true religion of Revelation" (Dooyeweerd 1948: 61). Dooyeweerd's insight into the "true starting point" of philosophy is reached as a result of what he calls a

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12   The literal translation of the title is "The philosophy of the idea of law".

"transcendental critique of theoretical thought" (Dooyeweerd 1948). I will now attempt to explain how he arrives at this insight.

Dooyeweerd's transcendental critique begins by observing a fundamental distinction between theoretical thought and pre-scientific thought. Theoretical thought, argues Dooyeweerd, represents reality by separating and putting over against each other its constituent modes of being, or modal aspects. This breaking up of reality into its different aspects is, according to Dooyeweerd, a purely theoretic *abstraction*, since the different aspects are in truth indissolubly linked by time. The pre-theoretic attitude, on the other hand, is characterised by the concrete experience of reality in its indissoluble coherence (Dooyeweerd 1948: 29-31). According to Dooyeweerd, the challenge for philosophy, as a theoretical enterprise, is to provide an adequate theoretical conception of the integral coherence of reality as encountered in pre-theoretic experience. To put this is in slightly more technical terms, the theoretic attitude abstracts the different modal aspects from the continuity of time, positing an antithetical relationship between the different aspects; the task of philosophy is to provide a synthetic view of the diverse aspects that are opposed to another in the antithetical relation. The question that now arises is: From what starting point is this possible?[13]

At this point, it is necessary to elaborate on the diverse aspects of reality as contemplated by theoretical thought. In Dooyeweerd's (1984: 24) conception, the cosmos reveals its aspects as number, extension, movement, organic life, feeling, rational distinction, history, language, social intercourse, economics, aesthetics, law, morality and faith. The aspects display a hierarchical structure, and each corresponds to a special science. For Dooyeweerd, no single aspect of reality can accomplish the synthetic view referred to above without fundamentally skewing our picture of the totality. Philosophy should, therefore, unveil the formal structure, the architectonic plan, that ties all the different aspects of reality together (Dooyeweerd 1984: 45-6, 1948: 41). Unveiling this principle of order, and avoiding the limited and skewed perspective of a single modal aspect is precisely the achievement Dooyeweerd claims for the philosophy of the cosmonomic

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13 The notion that the antithetical relation abstracts the diverse aspects from the continuity of time is remarkable. One could fruitfully relate this to a certain understanding of complex systems. The argument from complexity entails that our theoretical descriptions of reality necessarily reduce complexity in as far as they cannot incorporate their own historical situatedness into the description. In other words, it acknowledges that there is an element of fiction to conceptual distinctions. Dooyeweerd's insight that theoretical thought abstracts from the continuity of time implicitly recognises that theoretical thought entails a simplification of reality. Dooyeweerd also explicitly states that the antithetical relation is the product of an artificial abstraction (Dooyeweerd 1948: 34). Complexity theory, however, is sceptical of the possibility of a synthetic view that can, as it were, theoretically reconstruct what is broken apart.

idea, in distinction from all others. According to Dooyeweerd, this achievement rests on the particular starting point this philosophy chooses. We will shortly see what this is.

Dooyeweerd comes to the realisation that the *self* presents us with a central point where the diverse aspects of empirical reality converge in a radical unity, or as he puts it, "theoretical thought by its own intrinsic structure postulates a transcendent point in our consciousness from which the synthesis can be executed (Dooyeweerd 1948: 49, 54). The *self* is not the starting point which Dooyeweerd seeks, but it presents, as it were, a vantage point from which a true starting point might come into view; knowledge of the self becomes the pre-condition for knowledge of cosmic totality (Dooyeweerd 1984: 51, 1948: 49-52).

The question immediately arises for Dooyeweerd as to how knowledge of the self is possible. As we have noted, knowledge of the self cannot proceed from one aspect of reality, since the self transcends all aspects of reality. Dooyeweerd then argues that the self, despite its transcending nature, still refers to something beyond itself, and this is God. In the last instance, self-knowledge is, therefore, dependent on God. This self-knowledge is not of a theoretical nature; Dooyeweerd (1984: 55) terms it a "supra-theoretical" knowledge, a "central" and religious knowledge rooted in man's *heart*. As Dooyeweerd (1948: 54) explains: "The Self is thus the religious centre, 'the heart', as Holy Scripture says, of the whole of our temporal existence. It is also the hidden player playing on the keyboard of theoretical though". As Conradie notes, the idea of religion is here,used in a purely formal way and it is stripped of all particular experience, it solely has the function of "relating the theoretical diversity of modal aspects to a central and radical unity and to an origin" (Dooyeweerd 1984: 57). To quote Dooyeweerd (1984: 57) again: "Religion is the innate impulse of human selfhood to direct itself towards the true or pretended absolute origin of all temporal diversity of meaning, which it finds focussed concentrically in itself". For Dooyeweerd, the heart represents the inner point of contact between thought and religion. The religious position taken up by the self in turn infiltrates and extends its influence over the entire contents of one's thought.

Finally, Dooyeweerd argues that, although the religious pre-suppositions operate through the self, this self is not individual. The self can only exist in a religious community, and philosophy is not an individual activity, but a social task involving a tradition of thought. As Dooyeweerd (1984: 60) puts it, the self "lives in the spiritual community of the *we*". According to him, such a religious community shares a common spirit, which, as shared and accepted by the individual self, constitutes the true starting point of philosophy. This is what Dooyeweerd calls a *religious a priori* or religious ground motive (Conradie 1960: 51).

Dooyeweerd argues that, fundamentally, two such basic religious motives have appeared in the history of humankind. The first is the Christian motive of *Creation, fall, and redemption in Jesus Christ in the communion of the Holy Ghost.* According to this motive, the whole of mankind, as well as the entire temporal cosmos has fallen into sin. In Christ, mankind is again re-directed towards its true origin. Dooyeweerd presents the philosophy of the cosmonomic idea as an expression of the Christian ground motive in as far as this philosophy recognises God as the integral Origin of all relative existence, and attempts to give an account of reality that is true to its integral character. The second basic motive is that of the spirit of apostasy from the true God. This motive may come to expression in many forms, but, in essence, it involves the absolutisation of some immanent aspect of created reality. In this motive, the religious impulse of the self is turned towards an idolatrous god. For Dooyeweerd, the Enlightenment belief in the autonomy and neutrality of reason is a prime example of a philosophy that is moved by an apostate ground motive, especially in as far as it fails to acknowledge its own "dogmatic" point of departure (Dooyeweerd 1984: 61).

For Dooyeweerd, these ground motives are not only the true starting points for philosophy; they are also the starting points for the whole of human culture and social activity. In other words, one may expect a different form of culture and knowledge from a given society depending on which ground motive directs it.

4.   Dooyeweerd's "institutional presupposition"

I remarked earlier that the "institutional presupposition" and the interpretive violence that necessarily accompanies it, is also present in the foundational moment of Dooyeweerd's philosophy. We are now in a position to discover what this is. Dooyeweerd argues that the "true starting point" of a philosophy is a "common spirit", or fundamental motive. He further claims a particular motive as the starting point for his own philosophy, and moreover, claims a privileged status for this starting point. At his point we may recall Derrida's argument concerning the interpretive violence through which the law founds its own authority. Something similar is at work in Dooyeweerd's attempt to furnish a "starting point" for his philosophy. In some sense, we can see that this "starting point", this "common spirit", is an *invention* of the very philosophy it is supposed to found. Dooyeweerd's philosophy becomes at one and the same time the expression of, as well as that which expresses a particular "starting point". Bennington (2007: 232) describes this movement well:

> Simple, present origins are always in fact projected (or, rather,
> retro-jected) on the basis of a situation in which they are already
> lost: retro-jecting them *as* origins is an attempt to overlook or

> avoid the fact they never really come first, but are only said to come first from a situation that precedes that retro-jective saying or naming of that origin.

In other words, the philosophy of the cosmonomic idea "retro-jects" its own origin, and, in one and the same move, establishes the foundation of its authority. Put differently, it founds itself by inventing a beginning capable of giving birth to itself. Could a philosophy that proposes to discover the 'true' starting point of philosophy ever conceive itself to be anything but an expression of that very same starting point? It is worth noting at this stage that, historically speaking, the "starting point" of Dooyeweerd's philosophy presents a much more complex story. We know, for instance, that Dooyeweerd becomes convinced of the need for Calvinist philosophy as result of his studies in law (see Chaplin 2011: 24) – is this early exposure to legal thinking to be discounted in trying to account for the origins of his philosophy? We also know that Dooyeweerd's interest in a Calvinist system of philosophy was influenced by his work at the Kuyper Institute, the research center of Kuyper's Anti-Revolutionary Party (Kalsbeek 19-21). However, in his "transcendental critique of theoretical thought", these complex origins are left out of consideration and instead we find the appeal to a particular "motive force" as the starting point of his philosophy, a motive force, which, according to this very same philosophy is unadulterated by other, apostate forces. In other words, we clearly see the "retro-jection" of a simple, present origin.

This interpretive violence in Dooyeweerd's transcendental critique is of significance for the reception of his philosophy in South Africa in general and the UFS, in particular, in as far as it relates the invention of a "spiritual community of the *we*" with the foundation of a philosophical discourse and culture that lays claim to a privileged status (Dooyeweerd 1984: 60). I argue that the historical context in which Dooyeweerd's philosophy was received in South Africa disclosed further interpretive possibilities for the particular relationship it sets up between religion, philosophy and culture.

At this point, we may recall the text quoted earlier from *Koers in die krisis*, particularly the reference to the "*exile* of modernism, liberalism, humanism, evolutionism and other alien rulers" [my emphasis, RE], and the accompanying invocation of another, different, knowledge that would be able to liberate the *volk*. This other knowledge, invoked as a counterpoint to the exile of alien rulers, would seem to be the expression of a particular "spiritual community of the we". However, in this instance, the emphasis seems to have changed to a "*political* community of the we".

In the next section, I turn to a discussion of the UFS philosophers, E A Venter and H J Strauss, in order to show how the politics of apartheid is accommodated

by Dooyeweerd's foundational moment. I will also show how Dooyeweerd's understanding of the heart as the religious centre of temporal existence is able to transform the interpretive violence of his philosophy into the political violence of apartheid politics.

5.   The heart of the black man

Strauss and Venter appropriated Dooyeweerd's notion of the heart and the closely related idea of religious ground motives to justify apartheid policy and to defend their own philosophical position and the politics that derived from it as more "critical" than that of their alleged "humanist" detractors. H J Strauss, an alumnus of the Grey University College, as the UFS was known at the time, was the first lecturer affiliated with the Department of Philosophy to adhere to the neo-Calvinist tradition; he was introduced to it through a Calvinist student organisation while studying in the early 1930s. Strauss later pursued further studies at the Free University in Amsterdam, where Dooyeweerd was one of his lecturers (Strauss 2013). Strauss was appointed as a lecturer in the Department of Philosophy in 1942 and, in 1947, he was promoted to the position of senior lecturer and head of the newly created Department of Political Science. He also served as Dean of the Faculty of Arts from 1968 to 1977. The editorial preface of a Festschrift presented to Strauss in 1975 by his former students recalls some of the themes encountered in *Koers in die krisis*:

> From platform and lectern, in small town and in city, Strauss inspired audiences and delivered in the language of the twentieth century the age old message of the Kingship of Jesus Christ in all fields of life – especially where the need was greatest: In science, where neutrality and humanistic idolatry and absolutisation had left the *volk* and its youth perplexed (Wessels 1975: vii)[14]

Erasmus Venter, a Dutch Reformed minister, and a proponent of Dooyeweerd's philosophy, became head of the Department of Philosophy in 1952. From that point onwards until 1994, the Department focused exclusively on Dooyeweerd's systematic philosophy as well as the interpretation of the history of ideas that was implied by it, or as Venter once put it in a published article, Christian philosophy was taught "without reserve" (Venter 1955).

Both Venter and Strauss invoke Dooyeweerd's conception of the link between religion, philosophy and culture in their respective appraisals of Afrikaner politics. In 1950, Strauss delivered a paper, entitled 'The civilisational and political status of

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14   Translated by the author from the original Afrikaans.

the native in South Africa', at the Calvinist congress in Bloemfontein. Introducing his argument, Strauss (1950: 3) states the following:

> [...] the political status of the native can never be viewed in isolation from our political confession of faith, our Christian concept of the State. Every concept of the State is in fact rooted in a particular life and world view, a religious conviction – true or false – and accordingly it attributes to man a particular political status.[15]

The notion that a certain concept of the State issues from a particular religious conviction is, of course, taken from Dooyeweerd. Here we see how Strauss elaborates on this idea by presenting it as the basis for determining the political status of the "native".

In his inaugural lecture as professor of Philosophy at the UFS, Venter is even more explicit about the link between the Afrikaners' spiritual heritage and the policy of separate development. In the lecture, entitled "The crisis of Western civilisation", Venter (1971) argues that Western civilisation is in a crisis, because it has put its faith in Enlightenment ideals, which, according to him, entails the wilful destruction of the God-given differences between nations and civilisations. He then has the following to say about separate development:

> Seen against the backdrop of [...] overwhelming cosmic forces [Venter is referring to the struggle between the Christian and apostate ground motives], our own struggle for separate development in South Africa takes on a truly heroic character. It becomes a struggle, in the name of the historical Christian Western civilisation, against the engulfing of singular identity into wholesale drab-grey uniformity (Venter 1971: 100).

Venter's argument entails that separate development is nothing less than an expression of the Christian ground motive, that is, the philosophical justification of separate development is consistent with a philosophy rooted in the Christian ground motive. Of course, this is not Dooyeweerd's inference, but the notion of a ground motive as force which serves as the starting point for a particular philosophy and culture, and particularly the interpretive move through which Dooyeweerd is able to typify his own philosophy as an expression of the Christian ground motive is clearly present in Venter's argument. Once Venter has established that his own starting point is the Christian ground motive, a unique and superior civilisational force, it follows that his justification of separate development must be justified.

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15   Citations of Strauss and Venter were translated by the author from the original Afrikaans.

The idea of ground motives and the notion of the heart as religious centre of man's temporal existence ultimately allow Venter and Strauss to articulate a fundamental difference between black and white people. We find Venter's most explicit formulation of this difference in an essay entitled 'On route to a philosophy of civilisation'. In this piece, Venter appeals once more to the idea that the nature of a civilisation is fundamentally determined by the religious root from which it grows:

> As soon as the all-controlling significance of the religious root is overlooked, we descend into all manner of confusion. In humanist circles civilisation is primarily identified with a certain culture or way of life. A Black man who has cultivated a civilised way of life and who has progressed quite far intellectually is then considered to be a civilised human being. [...] We should reject this train of thought. Culture is fundamentally different from civilisation. [...] a person may very well acquire the culture of another *volk*, but you can never acquire its civilisation. Civilisations cannot be substituted. *As long as the Bantu is still ruled in the deepest level of his heart by a natural religion* [my emphasis] (and in his upper layers by a humanist religion), no amount of education or economic power in the world can allow him to acquire membership of our Christian civilisation (Venter 1971: 55-6).

Strauss formulates a similar relationship between the religious motive that has taken hold of the heart and a particular level of civilisation. His formulation of this can be found in a number of public lectures he delivered between 1968 and 1977. I quote from a published paper entitled 'Our race question in religious perspective' (Strauss 1968: 7-8):

> Afrikanerdom is in its core a Protestant-Christian *volk* – in its Protestant history, its Protestant civilisational development, and its civilisational character [...]. The slight civilisational heritage of the *bantu* is caught in the grip of the primitive natural religion of his ancestors; 'n type of religion that is incapable of leading any community to civilisational emancipation,and self-sufficiency,[16] because it binds man in his heart to nature's gods and so deprives him of any civilisational potency.

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16   Strauss uses the Afrikaans terms *Beskawingsmondigeid en -selfstandigheid* which is difficult to translate. *Mondigheid* generally refers to the legally emancipated status of a person after they reach a certain age. *Beskawingsmondigheid* would here literally mean being emancipated to the status of being civilised, as determined by the Christian Protestant standard.

Strauss also holds that the *Bantu's* heart is bound to a "primitive" natural religion, a religious commitment that prevents him from developing any significant cultural heritage. This state of affairs bars the Black man from entry into the cultural heritage of white, protestant civilisation, which includes the state. In a 1973 lecture hosted by the Institute for Contemporary History at the UFS, Strauss (1973: 9) justifies the policy of separate development as a necessary measure taken by the government to maintain "balance and harmony" in the face of civilizational inequality and religious differences between different "communities" in South Africa. According to Strauss, these differences creates a situation in which

> identical civil rights and political co-determination cannot be guaranteed for the entire national population. In this, we are accused of discrimination, whereas it is nothing more than – in all respects realistic – juridical compliance with the different *volks*-communities' respective states of civilisation. [Separate development] is aimed at providing each community a form of government that suits its state of civilisation and where it can be served by a public legal order that can cater to the unique needs of its civilisational interests (Strauss 1973: 9).

In these texts, we notice how philosophy, understood as a discipline concerned with the ultimate root and origin of meaning, a discipline understood as the "law of law", allows Venter and Strauss to exclude black people at the same moment that they elaborate a discourse on the right to philosophy, culture and civilisation. The exclusion of black people becomes part and parcel of the discourse that founds the 'law of law'. Moreover, this discourse also founds the Afrikaner people as a people with privileged access to this law. In other words, the interpretive violence that allows Dooyeweerd to legitimise the foundation of his philosophical system is extended by Venter and Strauss to justify the philosophy and policy of separate development.

6.   Concluding remarks

In this article, I tried to show that the philosophical justification of apartheid by two UFS philosophers cannot simply be viewed as the illegitimate intrusion of politics on philosophy. Drawing on Derrida's notion of the "institutional presupposition", I have attempted to show that Dooyeweerd's philosophy legitimises itself by *inventing* the "starting point" from which it draw its authority. For Derrida, this moment of interpretive violence is essential to the discourse that founds the 'law of law'; it is also the moment at which philosophy is exposed to the political. In the reception of Dooyeweerd's philosophy in the Free State, one sees how the politics of apartheid enters philosophy as an extension of the

interpretive violence that founds it. The foundation of an Afrikaner identity, and the foundation of philosophy become intimately linked. We also note how the possibility of an Afrikaner philosophical community and the possibility of an Afrikaner identity becomes inseparable from the exclusion of black people from the politico-philosophical realm. The political violence implied does not intrude on philosophy from the outside; it is accommodated by the mystical foundation of its authority.

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