

**“Serving the *volk* at His feet”: an intellectual history  
of neo-Calvinist philosophy at the University of the  
Free State, 1942–1968**

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This thesis has been submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the faculty of The Humanities, for the Department of Philosophy and Classics, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein.

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## Declaration

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## Abstract

Starting in the early 1940s a particular strand of neo-Calvinist philosophy became institutionalised at the department of philosophy and the department of political philosophy at what was successively known as the University College of the Orange Free State, the University of the Orange Free State and the University of the Free State. The neo-Calvinist philosophy in question, also referred to as “Reformational” philosophy and “Christian” philosophy, was the comprehensive philosophical system of the Dutch legal philosopher, Herman Dooyeweerd, which he called “the philosophy of the cosmonomic idea”. By 1958, this philosophical orientation had come to determine the teaching of philosophy and political philosophy at the institution to the exclusion of other philosophical orientations. During the same time, the founding figures of this Bloemfontein neo-Calvinism, H.J. Strauss and E.A. Venter wrote a number of texts in which they justified the apartheid regime that was coming into being under the National Party. Their justification of apartheid was elaborated with explicit reference to the philosophy of the cosmonomic idea.

The aim of this study is to investigate how and why Dooyeweerd’s neo-Calvinist philosophy became institutionalized at the University of the Free State and how this philosophy was able to accommodate a justification of the racial ideology propagated by the National Party. I do this by situating the reception of neo-Calvinism within the development of Afrikaner nationalism in the mid-1930s, and with specific reference to the figure of H.J. Strauss. I relate the reception of neo-Calvinism to two factors: first, what Aletta Norval has described as the “dislocation of identity” experienced by Afrikaners due to the uneven development of capitalism; and second, to the attempts of nationalist intellectuals to meet the cultural claims of British Imperialism with a philosophical position that could affirm Afrikaners’ relationship to “Western civilization”, while at the same time distancing Afrikaner culture from the perceived enemies of liberalism, humanism and communism to point out an alternative course of modernisation. Finally, I investigate how this paradigm was used to allow a justification of apartheid ideology in the 1950s.

## Opsomming

Beginnende in die vroeë 1940s het ’n bepaalde weergawe van neo-Calvinistiese filosofie gevestig geraak in die departement van filosofie en die departement van politieke filosofie by wat in opeenvolging bekend gestaan het as die Universiteits College van die Oranje-Vrystaat, die Universiteit van die Oranje-Vrystaat en die Universiteit van die Vrystaat. Die betrokke neo-Calvinistiese filosofie, wat ook bekend staan as “Reformatoriese” filosofie en “Christelike” filosofie, was die omvattende filosofiese sisteem van die Nederlandse regsfilosoof, Herman Dooyeweerd, wat daarna verwys het as die “wysbegeerte van die wetsidee”. Teen 1958 het hierdie filosofiese benadering die onderrig van filosofie en politieke filosofie by hierdie instellings bepaal met uitsluiting van ander filosofiese benaderings. Gedurende dieselfde tyd het die stigtersfigure van hierdie Bloemfonteinse neo-Calvinisme, H.J. Strauss en E.A. Venter, ’n aantal tekste geskryf waarin hulle die apartheidsbestel wat besig was om tot stand te kom onder die Nasionale Party, geregtig het. Hulle regverdiging is ontwikkel met spesifieke verwysing na die wysbegeerte van die wetsidee.

Die doel van hierdie studie is om te ondersoek hoe en hoekom Dooyeweerd se neo-Calvinistiese filosofie gevestig geraak het by die Universiteit van die Vrystaat en hoe hierdie filosofie ontvanklik kon word vir 'n regverdiging van die rasse-ideologie wat uitgedra is deur die Nasionale Party. Ek doen dit deur die ontvangs van neo-Calvinisme te plaas binne die ontwikkeling van Afrikaner-nasionalisme in die middel 1930s, met spesifieke verwysing na die figuur van H.J. Strauss. Ek verbind die ontvangs van neo-Calvinisme met twee faktore: eerstens, na wat Aletta Norval beskryf het as die “verplasing van identiteit” soos ervaar deur Afrikaners vanweë die oneweredige ontwikkeling van kapitalisme; en tweedens, met pogings deur nasionalistiese intellektuele om die kulturele aansprake van Britse Imperialisme te weerstaan met 'n filosofiese posisie wat Afrikaners se verhouding met die “Westerse beskawing” kon bevestig, terwyl dit terselfdertyd 'n afstand kon skep tussen Afrikanerkultuur en die gewaande vyande, liberalisme, humanisme en kommunisme, en daarmee 'n alternatiewe weg tot modernisering aandui. Laastens ondersoek ek hoe hierdie paradigma in die 1950s aangewend word om 'n regverdiging vir apartheid te verwoord.

## Acknowledgements

This thesis has taken far too long to complete. I am immensely grateful to everyone who has supported me in one or the other way. I need to single out a few people here. First of all, I need to mention Lis Lange, who stirred my interest in South African intellectual history and played a key role in the initial conceptualization of the study. My supervisor, Johann Rossouw, enabled me to pick up this study after long neglect and his enthusiasm for the project was essential to its completion. I want to thank Karin van Marle for introducing me to the philosophers I most admire and for hours of patient listening as I rambled on about the arcane mysteries of Calvinist philosophy. Towards the end of this study, Nicol Faasen, with the help of Hester Faasen, took on the immense task of copy-editing the text. I am eternally grateful to him not only for his technical expertise, but also for the benefit of his broad knowledge and sharp eye with regard to unclear formulations and countless other details, which have undoubtedly improved the text. My father, Philip and late mother, Cecile, I thank for their unconditional support and cultivating a love of the world. Finally, and most of all, thank you to Anna Eloff and Cornelia Faasen for your endless patience, encouragement and love – this would have been impossible without you.

## List of abbreviations

<b>AB</b>	<i>Afrikaner Broederbond</i>
<b>ANS</b>	<i>Afrikaanse Nasionale Studentebond</i>
<b>DRC</b>	Dutch Reformed Church
<b>FAK</b>	<i>Federasie van Afrikaner Kultuurverenigings</i>
<b>GUC</b>	Grey University College
<b>OB</b>	<i>Ossewa Brandwag</i>
<b>GNP</b>	<i>Gesuiwerde Nasionale Party</i>
<b>NP</b>	National Party
<b>PUC</b>	Potchefstroom University College
<b>SAP</b>	South African Party
<b>UCOFS</b>	University College of the Orange Free State
<b>UFS</b>	University of the Free State
<b>UOFS</b>	University of the Orange Free State
<b>UNISA</b>	University of South Africa
<b>UP</b>	United Party
<b>VCHO</b>	<i>Vereniging vir Christelike Hoër Ondernys</i>

## Introduction

For the greater part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, South African society was marked by the discriminatory and oppressive state policies of segregation and apartheid as implemented and enforced by a small white minority over a black majority. Throughout this period the political ruling class, stemming from European settlement since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, explicitly linked white supremacy and the concomitant subjugation of the indigenous population to the assumed superiority of Western culture and civilization. The racial order that had gradually been established since the arrival of the first colonists became increasingly entrenched and formalised as the country modernised and industrialised in response to the mineral discoveries on the Highveld in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. This process culminated in the 20<sup>th</sup> century with the successive state policies of segregation and apartheid. Between 1948 and 1994 South Africa came to be defined by apartheid, the racist ideology that emerged in Afrikaner nationalist circles in the 1930s and 1940s, and which served as the foundation for an ambitious legislative framework that reified a hierarchy of racial differences and institutionalised the disenfranchisement and exploitation of black people.

The pervasiveness of notions of racial difference in South African history and politics has led to a sustained scholarly interest in the role played by science and the academic disciplines in the conceptualisation of race. This study examines the place of academic philosophy in the constellation of discourses that contributed to the development of Afrikaner nationalism and apartheid through an investigation of the intellectual and institutional history of academic philosophy at the University of the Orange Free State (hereafter University of the Free State, UFS)<sup>1</sup> between 1942–1968.

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<sup>1</sup> The University of the Free State was founded in 1904 as the Grey University College (GUC). The institution was renamed to the University College of the Orange Free State (UCOVS) in 1935. The

The UFS is located in Bloemfontein, the largest city in the Free State province of South Africa and former capital of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Boer republic of the Orange Free State.<sup>2</sup> The university's origins can be traced to the founding of Grey College in 1855, a tertiary institution intended as a "theological school" which received its initial funding through the initiative of the Governor of the Cape Colony, Sir George Grey (UFS 2006: 8). In 1904, shortly after the South African War, the new colonial administration provided for the establishment of university colleges, which would henceforth receive public funding to teach university disciplines; degrees were to be conferred by an umbrella institution, the University of South Africa (University of the Free State 2006: 12–13). Thus, the Grey University College (GUC) became a separate tertiary institution and the first incarnation of the present-day UFS.

The institution's future entanglement with the Afrikaner nationalist movement was foreshadowed by President M.T. Steyn, the last leader of the Orange Free State, who already expressed the desire for a Dutch-language university in the Free State in 1899 (University of the Free State 2006: 9). This ambition was frustrated by the outbreak of the war, but the sentiment was to be revived in a different guise with the rise of Afrikaner nationalism in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. From the late 1920s the GUC senate and council counted several prominent nationalist intellectuals among its members who mobilised for the nationalist movement by means of a struggle for Afrikaans-language instruction (Steyn 1993), and by appointing lecturers that were sympathetic to the cause.<sup>3</sup>

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institution became an independent university in 1950 and was renamed to the University of the Orange Free State (UOFS). It finally became the University of the Free State in 2001 (University of the Free State 2006). Throughout the thesis, I use the name appropriate to the period in question.

<sup>2</sup> The Orange Free State was defeated by and incorporated into the British Empire during the South African War (1899–1902).

<sup>3</sup> A prominent example was the appointment of Nicolaas Diederichs as head of the department of philosophy in 1933. I discuss this episode more fully in Chapter 3. In this regard should also be mentioned

In this study, I focus on the articulation between Afrikaner nationalist ideology and the department of philosophy and the department of political philosophy<sup>4</sup> during the period 1942-1968. This period witnessed the political victory of Afrikaner nationalism with the election of the National Party in 1948; the consolidation of the National Party's power during the 1950s, and the entrenchment of "grand apartheid" with the proclamation of the Bantu Group Areas Act of 1959. During this period several teaching philosophers, in various institutional contexts and with varying degrees of explicitness, expounded philosophical arguments that implicitly named the Afrikaners as the privileged inheritors of Western Christian civilization; characterized black people as lacking in culture and civilization; argued for the necessity of protecting white, Western civilization from the threat of black domination, and justified apartheid as a divinely ordained response to what they described as radical "civilizational differences".<sup>5</sup>

This study intersects with four, often overlapping areas of scholarly literature: first, studies that deal with the origin of the racial order in South Africa; secondly, studies that deal with the intellectual history of racist discourse in South Africa; thirdly, studies on the rise and evolution of Afrikaner nationalism, and finally, studies dealing with the intellectual history of philosophy as a discipline.

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the names of D.F. Malherbe, N.J. van der Merwe and C.R. Swart. As rector of the GUC from 1929 to 1934, Malherbe fought for the extension for Afrikaans tuition (see Steyn 1993). Van der Merwe and Swart were prominent figures in the Free State branch of the National Party and both served on the GUC council during Malherbe's tenure as rector.

<sup>4</sup> Political philosophy was offered by the department of philosophy until 1947, when it became an independent department. The university yearbooks refer to the latter department as *staatsleer*, which can contextually be translated as "teaching on the state". I prefer to use "department of political philosophy" throughout this study in so far as Strauss placed great emphasis on the "philosophical" dimension of his discipline.

<sup>5</sup> I provide detailed support for these claims in Chapters 3, 4, 6 and 7.

Countless studies deal with the origins of the racial order in South Africa. Marxist scholarship since the 1970s located the genesis of segregation and apartheid in the mineral revolution of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the arising need for cheap black labour in the emerging mine industry. Harold Wolpe's analysis of migrant labour as cheap labour was a seminal contribution to this paradigm, as was the work of Martin Leggasick, who argued that segregation became more pronounced under the imperatives of capitalism and imperialism in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. More recent work has shown that white supremacy became part of the fabric of South African society in conjunction with the arrival of European colonists in the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Frederickson 1981; Giliomee & Elphick 1989; Keegan 1996). These studies depict a complex process through which an initial distinction between European, Christian and "civilized" on the one hand, and indigenous, "heathen" and "primitive" on the other, gradually settled into class distinctions which over time became racialised so as to "naturally" associate Christian and civilized with being white, and "primitive" and "heathen" with being black or coloured (Giliomee & Elphick 1989: 544). The import of this research for the present study is to affirm that the racial thought encountered in the writings of the Bloemfontein philosophers was to a significant degree rooted in South African social history.

Several studies deal more directly with the intellectual history of racist discourse in South Africa. In this regard, the work of Saul Dubow needs to be singled out. Dubow has linked racist discourse in South Africa with an overall increase in racist thought during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, notably in the United States and Britain, and shows how the elaboration of segregationist ideology in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century drew on the social Darwinist ideas that were prevalent during this time (Dubow 1987). Dubow's book-length study on scientific racism in modern South Africa (1995) explores the relationship between racism and science in the legitimation and institutionalisation of white supremacy in general and the

policies of segregation and apartheid in particular. Several studies focus on the contributions of particular disciplines, for example, *volkekunde*<sup>6</sup> (Sharp 1981; Gordon 1991; Jansen 1991) and sociology (Taylor 1989; Pavlich 2014). More recently, Jonathan Jansen has investigated the legacy of apartheid thought in university spaces, both academic and extra-curricular in the book *Knowledge in the Blood* (Jansen 2009). We also need to mention here J.M. Coetzee's essay (1991) on Geoffrey Cronjé, a sociologist who founded the department of sociology at the University of Pretoria and wrote extensively and obsessively on racial difference and the "dangers" of miscegenation. These studies all speak to the pervasiveness of racial thought in the South African academic institutions and the close articulation between academic disciplines and the apartheid political programme.

More pertinent to this study are the numerous socio-historical studies that investigate the social, economic and intellectual origins of Afrikaner nationalism, and its relation to the development of apartheid. Several of these studies have dealt in detail with the philosophical and theological underpinnings of Afrikaner nationalist thought (De Klerk 1975; Moodie 1975; O'Meara 1985; Du Toit 1983, 1985; Marx 2008, Giliomee 1983, 2003a, 2003b; Norval 1996; Sanders 2002; Dubow 1995, 2014). These studies trace the intellectual and political traditions that informed Afrikaner nationalist thought and demonstrate to what extent this discourse was self-consciously elaborated as political philosophy. These studies also reveal the extent to which Afrikaner intellectuals involved in the production of nationalist discourse were teaching philosophers at one or more of South Africa's fledgling higher education institutions (see also More 2005). Much of this scholarship traces Afrikaner intellectuals' thought to philosophical currents in Europe and explore its relation to the ideas and arguments put forward by other professional philosophers. Norval

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<sup>6</sup> As the discipline of anthropology used to be called in Afrikaans.

(1996) and Dubow (1995, 2014) trace the development of apartheid to Afrikaner nationalist discourse as it evolved during the 1930s and 1940s, and show how apartheid, conceived as a “philosophy of difference” emerged from a combination of theological, philosophical, historical and biological discourses operative within the broader nationalist milieu (Dubow 1995, 2014). Duvenage (2014) has offered an “interpretation” of Afrikaner intellectual history, in which he seeks to excavate a continuous tradition of civic republicanism in Afrikaner politics first emerging in the Cape Patriot movement of 1770 and coming to fruition in the Boer republics. Duvenage, however, does not elaborate in any detail on the relation between this republican, communitarian political philosophy and the racial discrimination that was already present in both Boer republics and forcefully pursued in successive union governments and finally entrenched as apartheid in the Republic of South Africa. This area of scholarship poses complex questions regarding the relationship between local and “imported” traditions, and the context of colonialism, imperialism and uneven capitalist development in which these traditions interact.

These studies, however pertinent, do not deal directly with the question of the relationship between philosophy as an academic discipline and the institutionalised racial order in South Africa. Before I briefly discuss the scholarship that does deal more directly with this question, it is first necessary to be more specific with regards to what is meant here by “philosophy as an academic discipline”.

The discipline of philosophy undergoes a transformation in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries when it became institutionalised as a separate discipline in the modern university (see Hochstrasser 2006). Jacques Derrida illustrates the transformation that philosophy undergoes during this time by contrasting the figures of Descartes and Kant: “Descartes ... while explaining himself and struggling with all sorts of institutional authorities, never

did so as a *teaching* philosopher, as *professor* and *civil servant* in a State university” (Derrida 2004: 42). Kant exemplifies the new configuration, where philosophy is organised by the State, and entrusted to teachers who are servants of the state (Derrida 2004: 43). Derrida interrogates this new configuration in two collections of essays in which Kant and Hegel recur as the central figures in a new relationship between philosophy as a discipline and the modern state (Derrida 2002, 2004). As Readings (1996) and Delanty (2001) point out, the modern university, exemplified by Humboldt University of Berlin (1810), drew its coherence from the idea of culture, and it was philosophy in the guise of German Idealism that was to provide a unifying foundation for culture and thus perform the role of midwife in the birth of a German citizenry.

Andrew Nash brings this line of thought to bear on the colonial context in his remarkable master’s thesis, *Colonialism and Philosophy* (1985). Here Nash explores what it meant to be a civil servant philosopher for the British Empire in the Cape Colony through an investigation of the experiences of Alfred Hoernlé (1880–1943), an Oxford-educated British philosopher who taught at the South African College in Cape Town from 1908–1911. Nash draws our attention to the ideological function of British Idealism in the British Imperial project as able to articulate the teaching of philosophy as a form of practical imperialism. Nash continued his work on the intellectual history of philosophy in South Africa with the study, *The Dialectical Tradition in South Africa* (2009), which traces the emergence of a distinctive philosophical tradition in Stellenbosch during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Here Nash shows how a tradition of dialectical thought that draws strongly on a certain Dutch reception of Socratic philosophy took shape in response to the contradictions arising from modernisation and capitalist development in traditional 19<sup>th</sup> century Cape colonial society. Nash investigates the political limits of this tradition in the works of its major representatives, which included the Dutch Reformed Church minister

Tobie Muller (1884–1918),<sup>7</sup> the poet and intellectual N.P. Van Wyk Louw (1906–1970) and several teachers and students affiliated with the University of Stellenbosch, notably, Daantjie Oosthuizen (1926–1969) and Johan Degenaar (1926–2015). Duvenage (2000, 2016) briefly addresses the complicity between philosophy as an institutionalised discipline and Afrikaner nationalism and More (2004) considers philosophy under apartheid, noting the complicity between the discipline and the apartheid state as mediated by the Afrikaans *volksuniversiteite* that arose at Stellenbosch, Pretoria, Potchefstroom and Bloemfontein (see Cloete et al. 2006).

More recently, the “decolonial turn” has led to a revitalised interest in the relationship between philosophy as a discipline and politics, as well as providing new conceptual schemes through which to investigate this relationship. Leonhard Praeg describes the contemporary discourse on decoloniality as being characterized by the attempt to “make visible” the strategies and techniques through which a discipline “discipline[s] its subject in order to contain thinking itself within the parameters of a certain political project”, for example, colonialism (Praeg 2019: 4). Praeg notes that academic philosophy in South Africa has over a long period come to explicitly incarnate in its teaching and research the Western philosophical canon, and implicitly inculcated in students the meaning of Western subjectivity. As Praeg puts it, “the philosophical curriculum had been structured as *Bildungsroman*, a coming-of-age story of the Western subject presented as the Subject of philosophy” (Praeg 2019: 3). Hence, Praeg notes, philosophy as a Subject becomes a site of contestation between included and excluded subjectivities. This study responds to the demand to “excavate the site of contestation that is philosophy” (Praeg 2019: 9) by

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<sup>7</sup> Müller declined the chair of philosophy at the Victoria College in 1916 and accepted the call to the ministry in Philippolis in the Orange Free State, where he died during the influenza epidemic of 1918.

investigating the relationship between academic philosophy, Afrikaner nationalism and apartheid at the UFS.

The idea for this study came from a realization that took place over the course of teaching a first year philosophy class, namely, that during my own graduate and post-graduate studies in philosophy, I had taken for granted that philosophy was a “critical” discipline and thus never considered the ramifications of the fact that I was receiving a philosophical education from a public university, which by its constitution was entangled with the South African state during a particular historical juncture. The *Bildungsroman* Praeg speaks of, inescapably beginning with Plato’s account of Socrates’s trial, from the start planted the seed that philosophy was concerned with questioning the legitimacy of received authority on the basis of reason.

As a first year student encountering academic philosophy for the first time, it did not occur to me at the time that Plato’s account of Socrates’s fate was a set piece, that there might be other interpretations of this event, that Plato may have had his own agenda, or that Socrates may have been appealing to another tradition and was not simply attacking traditional authority as the story is widely presented. I was easily interpellated by this narrative into the discourse of philosophy as *critique*, and therefore ironically, I did not question the conditions of possibility of philosophy as a discipline, taught at a historically white, Afrikaans university in post-apartheid South Africa.

Years later I read Hannah Arendt’s account of the trial of Socrates, who interprets this story as the opening of a cleavage within Western thought between philosophy and politics. Teaching a class of first year philosophy students I was struck by the realization that I did not know why philosophy was being taught at the institution in question, or what it was

supposed to inculcate beyond a superficial familiarity with the history of ideas and a vague notion of “critical thinking”. At present, Kant’s ambitious scheme for the organization of the faculties, with philosophy occupying the ultimate seat of judgement in all matters pertaining to reason, is perhaps a thing of the past. Philosophy’s erstwhile status as foundational discipline has been exposed to unremitting critique, and its complicity with the exploitative logic of Western modernity has become a recurring accusation. Nevertheless, philosophy is still a university subject and professional philosophers are still being trained at South African universities to teach it. The discipline’s link, since the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, with a discourse on the foundation of culture is also being rediscovered by decolonial philosophers. This suggests that the fraught relationship between philosophy and politics – in its Kantian guise – still reverberates.

In this study I investigate these questions with reference to a particular history of philosophy in its relation to politics, namely the history of philosophy at the University of the Free State in its relation to Afrikaner nationalism and apartheid from 1942 to 1968. The rationale behind this is to investigate how the articulation between philosophy and the state, incarnated in philosophy as an academic discipline, was appropriated to respond to the political questions of the period. In question is also how the purported “critical” character of philosophy was leveraged in a context characterized by a close articulation between universities and the prerogatives of an authoritarian racial state. I argue that intellectual histories of this nature are indispensable with a view to understanding what we are doing, or what it might be possible to do when we teach philosophy. Any appeal to philosophy as a “critical” discipline, as a discipline capable of reflecting upon its own conditions of possibility, and any attempt to “decolonize” philosophy, will have to come to terms with what Derrida calls the “institutional presupposition”, that is, since Kant, the discipline’s quasi-judicial status as a court of final appeal in all matters pertaining to reason,

and since Hegel, philosophy when it “begins to entail, more or less obviously, but essentially, indispensably, a pedagogical systematics governed by the necessity of entrusting the teaching of philosophy to state structures and civil servants” (Derrida 2002: 137).

The pioneering work of Andrew Nash in particular has shown that intellectual histories of this kind require nuance and careful attention to local conditions in addition to more general concerns. Broad, generalizing accounts of the complicity of “Western philosophy” in colonialism, imperialism and racism, while necessary, will not be sufficient for radical critical engagement in the context of specific departments, located in specific regions, determined by specific economic and social conditions and establishing varying relationships with local and international intellectual currents. I have tried to follow this course in the present study. Before I unpack the research focus and conceptual framework that inform this study, it is first necessary to briefly sketch the intellectual and historical context.

### **1. The rise of Afrikaner nationalism and the teaching of philosophy in South Africa**

Since more or less the 1930s philosophy departments at the oldest universities in South Africa were characterized by their orientation towards largely Western philosophical concerns.<sup>8</sup> In the earliest years of these institutions, the contents of academic philosophy strongly reflected their British imperial origins. During the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the philosophical school known as British Idealism, which was strongly influenced by the idealist philosophy of Hegel, was gaining stature in British universities; as Nash explains, this development was intrinsically connected to the imperial project itself – British Idealism was able to furnish a task for the colonial philosopher. I explain this relationship in more

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<sup>8</sup> I am here referring to the present-day University of Cape Town, Stellenbosch University, North-West University, University of Pretoria and University of the Free State.

detail in Chapter 3; for now, it is sufficient to note that as the British imperial project receded, and Afrikaner nationalism came into ascendance, the intellectual orientation at the historically Afrikaans universities changed. Stellenbosch became home to the “dialectical tradition” in South Africa (see Nash 2009). The University of Pretoria was similarly broadly oriented towards phenomenology and existentialism.

At the University of the Free State and the North-West University,<sup>9</sup> a tradition of philosophy was established that explicitly distinguished itself from philosophy as taught at these other institutions. In Bloemfontein and Potchefstroom academic philosophy would eventually come to be characterized by what is variously called “neo-Calvinist”, “Reformational” or “Christian” philosophy. This tradition of thought is traced back to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century neo-Calvinist cultural and political movement led by the Dutch theologian and statesman, Abraham Kuyper. I briefly introduce the outlines of this philosophy later in this chapter. For the moment it is sufficient to note that “Christian philosophy” was institutionalized at the University of the Free State (as it is currently known) between 1942 and 1952, and thereafter remained the encompassing framework for the teaching of philosophy at these two institutions until at least 1994. I argue in the chapters that follow that these diverging intellectual trajectories of academic philosophy in South Africa can be understood with reference to the particular evolution of Afrikaner nationalism as conditioned by social and economic differences between the former Cape Colony and the northern provinces that came into being after Union in 1910, namely, the Free State and the Transvaal.

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<sup>9</sup> The North-West University came into being in 2004 after a merger between the Potchefstroom University of Christian Higher Education PU for CHE and the University of the North West. The PU for CHE developed out of the Potchefstroom University College (PUC), which in turn had its origins in the Theological Seminary of the Reformed Churches in South Africa, which was founded in Burgersdorp in 1869.

O'Meara's (1985) class analysis of Afrikaner nationalism is instructive in accounting for these diverging intellectual trajectories. As O'Meara shows, in the more developed Cape Colony, organic Afrikaner intellectuals had long been allied with an established Afrikaner capitalist class. As Nash argues, this produced a productive tension between the conflicting demands of modernity and tradition, which were conducive to the development of an intellectual tradition capable of reflecting on its conditions of possibility. In the northern provinces, capitalist development in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century proceeded unevenly due to, first, the mineral revolution on the Witwatersrand, and later the destruction of the agricultural economy during the South African War. Here the interests of a rising Afrikaner nationalism could not count on an established relationship with Afrikaner capital and consequently the emerging Afrikaner *petit bourgeoisie* had to rely on ideological mobilization to draw Afrikaner workers into a cross-class alliance. The absence of a robust Afrikaner capitalist class also meant that nationalist ideologues were less constrained by the need to seek a rapprochement with modernising forces, as was the case in Stellenbosch. It was under these circumstances that philosophy took a much different role at the University of the Free State. I present this argument in detail in Chapters 1 and 3.

Scholars of Afrikaner nationalism agree that the years 1933–1934 represented a turning point in the elaboration of Afrikaner nationalist discourse. The economic crisis of the early 1930s precipitated a rapprochement between J.B.M. Hertzog's National Party (NP) and Smuts's South African Party (SAP), the main political parties vying for Afrikaner political support at the time. Hertzog's NP had won the 1929 election on a platform of support for Afrikaner culture, assistance for agriculture, and labour protection for white workers. NP policy during the preceding years had strengthened the position of the small Afrikaner middle-class, but fusion with Smuts threatened these achievements. The National Party in

the Free State and the Transvaal overwhelmingly followed Hertzog into fusion, which left the fledgling Afrikaner intellectual class with limited formal political representation. Only a handful NP politicians in the Free State joined D.F. Malan of the Cape NP to form the *Gesuiwerde Nasionale Party* (GNP). It was in the wake of the formation of the United Party, and the dissolution of the northern NP, that organic Afrikaner intellectuals in the Free State and the Transvaal came to articulate a more radical cultural nationalist discourse. As Marx (2008) notes, the radicalization of nationalist discourse was coupled with a reorientation towards Afrikaners in the cities and – typical for modern nationalist movements – adopted the language of tradition in service of a modernising project.

The secret Afrikaner organization, the *Afrikaner Broederbond* (AB) was central to the redefinition of the nationalist project and recognised the strategic importance of educational institutions for nationalist mobilisation (Moodie 1975; O'Meara 1985; Marx 2008; Stals 2021). Several central figures in the Free State NP politics during this time had close ties with the GUC. This included C.R. Swart (1894–1982) and N.J. van der Merwe (1888–1940), leading figures in the post-fusion Free State GNP, who were both members of the GUC Council.

A more direct relationship between Afrikaner nationalism and academic philosophy at the GUC came into being when Nicolaas Diederichs (1903–1978) became head of the department of philosophy in 1934. Diederichs had recently returned from studies in Germany and the Netherlands and was poised to become a central figure in the radicalized cultural nationalist movement of the 1930s. In 1936 Diederichs published an influential tract with the title, *Nationalism as a worldview and its relationship to Internationalism* (Diederichs

1936).<sup>10</sup> This work has been described as “the first sustained statement of theologized politics to come from an Afrikaner” (De Klerk 1975). During his time as head of the department, Diederichs also served as chairman of the executive council of the AB (1938–1942). Diederichs served as head of the department until 1940, when he resigned to become chairman of the *Reddingsdaadbond* (RDB), an organisation that dedicated itself to the economic upliftment of the Afrikaner.<sup>11</sup> Diederichs did not lay the groundwork for a lasting philosophical orientation at the department of philosophy. He was succeeded by G.H.T. Malan in 1940. Malan previously had held a position at the University of Cape Town and was seemingly inclined to logical positivism. There is no indication that Malan was in any way involved in Afrikaner nationalist politics, but a continuity of sorts was maintained with the nationalist movement in the person of H.J. Strauss (1912–1995).

H.J. Strauss is the central figure in this study in as far as he was largely responsible for the institutionalisation of neo-Calvinist philosophy at the department of philosophy and the department of political philosophy at the University of the Free State. H.J. Strauss embarked on his academic career at the GUC in 1933 and soon became associated with the radical nationalist movement as it organised itself in the *Afrikaanse Nasionale Studentebond* (ANS). Initially under the influence of the ANS, he pursued postgraduate studies, first in Heidelberg, Germany, and later at the *Vrije Universiteit* (Free University) in Amsterdam. The central period of interest for this study begins with the date of H.J. Strauss’s first appointment in the department of philosophy in 1942 and ends with his appointment as dean of the faculty of humanities in 1968. It was during these years that

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<sup>10</sup> The Afrikaans title is *Nasionalisme as ’n Lewensbeskouing en sy Verbonding tot die Internasionalisme*.

<sup>11</sup> The *Reddingsdaadbond* (RDB) was founded in Bloemfontein in 1939 during the course of the *Ekonomiese Volkskongres*, an event organised by the AB-affiliated *Federasie vir Afrikaner Kultuurverenigings* (FAK) to raise awareness of and seek solutions to the “poor white problem”, a prominent concern of Afrikaner intellectuals at the time. The RDB was founded to work towards the development and support of Afrikaans businesses in a national context where English speakers still dominated the economy (see Fourie 2024: 41–43).

neo-Calvinist or Christian philosophy was firmly institutionalised at the institution. H.J. Strauss may thus be considered the founding figure of neo-Calvinist philosophy at the University of the Free State, and the main architect behind its institutional endurance over a period of at least 40 years.

The historical narrative of this study is accordingly largely constructed around Strauss's personal intellectual development and his relentless efforts to secure an institutional footing for "Christian science"<sup>12</sup> at the then University College of the Orange Free State. It is essential to note that philosophy and political philosophy were both taught in the department of philosophy until 1947, after which H.J. Strauss became the head of the newly created department of political philosophy [*staatsleer*]. This department would eventually offer courses in both political philosophy and state administration, but the heart of the department was always its *philosophical* focus. What I mean by this will become clearer once I have explained the contents of this philosophy in more detail.

The title of this thesis refers to "neo-Calvinist philosophy", which as mentioned above is also referred to as "Reformational" or "Christian" philosophy. More technically, the philosophical orientation that H.J. Strauss introduced to UCOFS is known as the "philosophy of the cosmomic idea". This term refers to an ambitious and totalising philosophical system first developed in the 1920s and 1930s by the Dutch legal scholar, Herman Dooyeweerd (1894–1977). This philosophy, in turn built upon the intellectual legacy of Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920), the Dutch theologian and politician who was the driving force behind an ambitious project of re-Christianisation in the Netherlands during

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<sup>12</sup> "Christian science" as used here is a translation of the Afrikaans term, "Christelike wetenskap", which should not be confused with the American First Church of Christ, Scientist, informally known as the Christian Science church. The meaning of "Christian science" as used here derives from the concept of "Christian philosophy", which forms a substantial focus of the present thesis and is discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This movement was based on Kuyper's understanding of Calvinism as a "life-system" and was characterised by its opposition to the secularising and modernising consequences of the Enlightenment. Kuyper's critics dubbed his movement "neo-Calvinism", and Kuyper willingly adopted the term.<sup>13</sup> Dooyeweerd's philosophy was an attempt to elaborate a systematic *Calvinist* philosophy based on Kuyper's culture-oriented theology.

Kuyperian neo-Calvinism was first introduced in South Africa by S.J. du Toit in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, but did not find purchase among the more pragmatic Afrikaners in the Cape Colony (Du Toit 1985). As André du Toit points out, it is only from the 1920s onward that a number of Afrikaner nationalists – moving in the orbit of the *Broederbond*, and mostly concentrated at the Potchefstroom University College (PUC) – initiated a sustained articulation between neo-Calvinism and Afrikaner nationalism (Du Toit 1985; Brümmer 2017). As several scholars have noted, neo-Calvinism was one of several mutually compatible ideological orientations within the nationalist movement (Dubow 1989). The literature on Afrikaner nationalism has variously referred to this group as "Kuyperians" (Moodie 1975), "Scripturalists" (Norval 1996) or "Calvinist fundamentalists" (Marx 2008). A notable contribution by this group of Afrikaner nationalist intellectuals to the development of nationalist discourse was the publication of a series of journals titled *Koers in die krisis* (1935).<sup>14</sup> This series offered self-consciously neo-Calvinist perspectives on cultural and political topics. The central figure in this group was H.G. Stoker, who introduced the philosophy of Dooyeweerd to a South African audience with the

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<sup>13</sup> I will throughout this study interchangeably refer to Dooyeweerd's philosophy as "neo-Calvinistic", "Calvinistic", "Reformational", or "Christian". Dooyeweerd himself in his later work preferred the term "Christian philosophy".

<sup>14</sup> In English: *Direction in the crisis*.

publication *Die nuwe nysbegeerte aan die Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam*<sup>15</sup> (Stoker 1933). Stoker, in dialogue with Dooyeweerd, elaborated his own variant of neo-Calvinist philosophy.

The adoption of the “philosophy of the cosmomic idea” at two departments at the UCOFS coincided more or less with the electoral victory of the HNP in 1948 and the concomitant transformation of this institution into a *volksuniversiteit*. In 1950, during the rectorship of H. Van der Merwe Scholtz (1946–1958) the University College of the Orange Free State (UCOVS) completed a process that ended its status as a constituent college of the University of South Africa, and enabled it become the autonomous University of the Orange Free State, established on the basis of its own act of parliament. This meant that the institution now had greater freedom to determine its own intellectual and cultural character. Scholtz, who had been one of Diederichs’s allies during the language struggles of the 1930s and 1940s, was unequivocal in his views about the 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, therefore on a Christian-National basis (quoted in Van der Merwe & Welsh 1972: 21).

By 1947 H.J. Strauss had already made neo-Calvinist philosophy the focus of the department of political philosophy. Following the retirement of G.H.T. Malan in 1952, the university council directly intervened to appoint E.A. Venter in the “important position”

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<sup>15</sup>In English: *The new philosophy at the Free University, Amsterdam*.

of head of the department of philosophy.<sup>16</sup> Venter soon also adopted Dooyeweerd's neo-Calvinist philosophy as the department's overarching framework.<sup>17</sup>

Dooyeweerd's philosophy occupies a peculiar place in the history of 20<sup>th</sup> century thought in so far as it self-consciously and explicitly claimed to give systematic philosophical expression to what was claimed to be a *Calvinist* worldview as distinct from both secular humanist and Catholic philosophical traditions. Dooyeweerd claimed to have determined by means of a "transcendental critique" that all philosophy was ultimately bound to a particular religious outlook or "ground motive". The roots of the critique lay in Abraham Kuyper's notion of a fundamental religious conflict between believers and unbelievers, a conflict which produced two radically different, religiously determined worldviews. From this conflict issued two radically opposed conceptions of science and philosophy: a Calvinist science and an apostate science.

Dooyeweerd attempted to demonstrate the reality of this conflict by means of philosophical argument and proceeded to elaborate a systematic philosophy which he claimed to be an expression of the Christian "ground motive". Dooyeweerd argued that the resulting philosophical system – the philosophy of the cosmonomic idea – was uniquely able to account for the structure of reality. In other words, Dooyeweerd claimed that the religious commitment that informed his philosophy was an inseparable component of what he considered to be its systematic achievements. Philosophy that was grounded in an apostate ground motive, on the other hand, would unavoidably bring forth a distorted view of reality. Dooyeweerd's philosophy thus claimed a certain superiority not despite its religious commitment, but because of it. This was for Dooyeweerd the uniquely

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<sup>16</sup> Minutes of the council of the University of the Orange Free State, 18/09/1951.

<sup>17</sup> The details surrounding Venter's appointment are discussed and substantiated with reference to archival sources in Chapter 6.

*critical* aspect of his philosophy: he not only claimed to have unmasked the religious commitments that were foundational to all philosophy, he also implicitly claimed that his own commitment was uniquely able to furnish satisfactory answers to the perennial problems of the discipline. Evoking Kant's gesture in the *Conflict of the Faculties*, Dooyeweerd conceived of the philosophy of the cosmonomic idea as a foundational discipline that accounted for the conditions of possibility of the natural as well as the cultural sciences. Crucially, this conception entailed a philosophy of historical development, which allowed Dooyeweerd – and by extension the Bloemfontein neo-Calvinists – to bring normative judgments to bear on politics. As I will show in Chapters 6 and 7, it was this aspect in particular that allowed for an articulation between the philosophy of the cosmonomic idea and the politics of apartheid. I provide a detailed exposition of Dooyeweerd's systematic philosophy in Chapter 5. For the moment it is necessary to briefly sketch the extent to which "Christian philosophy" was hegemonic in the department of philosophy and the department of political philosophy.

The most salient principle of Dooyeweerd's philosophy, namely, that all thought and culture is based on religious presuppositions, and his resulting claim to have elaborated a philosophy that gives expression to the Christian religion, allowed the Bloemfontein neo-Calvinists to proclaim "Christian philosophy" as normative and to adopt it to the exclusion of what they considered to be apostate philosophy. Thus, E.A. Venter once indirectly described his department as teaching Christian philosophy "without reserve" (Venter 1955). During Venter's tenure (1952–1968) the curriculum was explicitly framed in terms of Dooyeweerd's claim that all philosophy was dependent on religious presuppositions and that the "Christian ground motive" engendered a systematic "Christian philosophy" that functioned as a "science of totality" (see Dooyeweerd 1984a: 133). Teaching Christian

philosophy “without reserve” meant taking a fundamental decision for Christian philosophy as opposed to apostate philosophy.

A similar state of affairs prevailed at the department of political philosophy under H.J. Strauss.<sup>18</sup> As a “science of totality”, Dooyeweerd’s system not only encapsulated all the special disciplines, it also encapsulated “the political”, in the sense that the fundamental structures of reality as elaborated by this philosophy were also the condition of possibility of all political phenomena. A “Christian philosophy” thus automatically implied a concomitant “Christian *political* philosophy”. Lecturers in both departments espoused Dooyeweerd’s philosophy in their published writings and produced textbooks that sought to present simplified versions of Dooyeweerd’s philosophy to students.<sup>19</sup> In addition, lecturers in both the departments supervised the completion of more than 60 MA and PhD theses that explicitly proceed from the perspective of neo-Calvinist philosophy (see Appendix A for details).<sup>20</sup>

I noted above that the notion of “Christian philosophy” automatically implied the notion of a “Christian *political* philosophy”. The department of political philosophy under Strauss incarnated this implication. This state of affairs not only resulted in reducing politics to philosophy, it also reduced philosophy to a particular politics. At the root of this confusion was Kuyper’s idea of a fundamental conflict between belief and unbelief, which

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<sup>18</sup>See *Yearbook of the University of the Orange Free State*, 1952–1968.

<sup>19</sup> See Spier 1972; Strauss 1978.

<sup>20</sup> An overview of theses completed between 1949 and 1987 reveals that a significant number bring the insights of Dooyeweerd’s philosophy to bear on other disciplines, for example, education, law, fine art, sociology, anthropology and linguistics. It thus appears that the department of philosophy was to some extent successful in the attempt to position “Christian philosophy” as foundational to all the disciplines and managed to attract students from other departments to pursue postgraduate studies within this framework.

unavoidably was read as a *political* conflict in the context of Afrikaner nationalism. I discuss the conceptual framework of this claim in the next section.

The philosophy of the cosmonomic idea purported to offer a normative framework for judging *all* aspects of culture – including politics. I explain Dooyeweerd’s normative conception of culture and politics in more detail in Chapter 5 and its appropriation by Strauss and Venter in Chapters 6 and 7. At present it is sufficient to note that both Strauss and Venter drew on this aspect of Dooyeweerd’s philosophy to elaborate positions on the “native question” and apartheid. Strauss accordingly devotes several published articles to the consideration of these issues between 1950 and 1969.<sup>21</sup> The question of apartheid is less pertinent in Venter’s work, but makes a notable appearance in his inaugural lecture of 1954 (Venter 1970a), reappears in his overview of the history of philosophy (Venter 1954), and is addressed more explicitly in an unpublished manuscript that was found after his death and published (with the assistance of H.J. Strauss) in 1970 (see Strauss 1970). In all of these texts both Strauss and Venter draw on the philosophy of the cosmonomic idea to develop arguments in support of policies that limit the political rights of black people in general, and arguments in support of racial segregation in particular. Similar arguments occur in a number of MA and PhD theses completed under the auspices of the department of political philosophy (see Wessels 1957; Van der Watt 1970).<sup>22</sup>

In this study, I set out to investigate how this articulation between apartheid and neo-Calvinist philosophy took shape in the work of the Bloemfontein neo-Calvinists. In the next section I elaborate the research focus and the conceptual framework that guides the investigation.

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<sup>21</sup> See Strauss 1950; 1952; 1954; 1957; 1967; 1968.

<sup>22</sup>Louis van der Watt later became an NP member of parliament and served as the last administrator of the Free State province before the democratic transition.

## 2. Research focus and conceptual framework

I take as my basic point of departure here Lucien Goldmann's (Goldmann 2011) contention that any attempt to study intellectual history must take into account the relations between thought and social conditions. According to Goldmann this does not necessarily imply the contradictory notion that truth is completely determined by social conditions, it only means that the "possibility of acquaintance with [truth] depends upon the social conditions in which a thinker lives" (Goldmann 2011: 32). To understand the intellectual history of academic philosophy at the University of the Free State, we thus need to situate it within prevailing social conditions. As I have suggested above, the most important social factor for the period in question was the development of Afrikaner nationalism in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century – specifically, the radicalisation of this movement from the mid-1930s onwards. The main protagonist of my account, H.J. Strauss, embarks on his academic career during this period and I argue that it played a crucial role in his personal intellectual development and the eventual institutionalisation of neo-Calvinist philosophy at the UFS.

Both Marx's (2008) and O'Meara's (1985) respective accounts of the "radicalisation" or "redefinition" of Afrikaner nationalism after the fusion of the South African Party and the National Party in 1934 offer possible interpretative frameworks for understanding H.J. Strauss's intellectual choices and the institutionalisation of neo-Calvinist philosophy at the institutional predecessors of the UFS. Drawing on Marx's argument, it is possible to read neo-Calvinism as an intellectual framework through which Strauss could mediate his confrontation with the modernising process; in O'Meara's account neo-Calvinism provides the ideological fodder that makes possible the class alliance between Afrikaner finance capital in the Cape, the *petty bourgeoisie* and Afrikaner workers. I draw on both these interpretative frameworks.

In order to understand Strauss's intellectual choices, Aletta Norval's (1996) account of Afrikaner nationalist discourse provides an important additional conceptual framework. Norval argues that faced with rapid urbanisation, proletarianization and impoverishment, organic Afrikaner intellectuals articulated a "dislocation of identity". The social order constituted by British Imperialism and segregation between "reconciliated" white, European civilization and the *natives* failed to suture the crisis of meaning faced by Afrikaners. This crisis of meaning provided the space in which organic intellectuals could begin to construct an exclusivist Afrikaner nationalist discourse: "... dislocation is the condition for the institution of a new myth" (Norval 1996: 62).

Norval emphasises that the new myth provides a negative construction of Afrikaner identity. In her reading of prominent nationalist intellectuals like Diederichs, Stoker, Cronjé and Meyer, Norval finds that across their varied attempts to define what is authentically Afrikaans, what most clearly joins them is how they relationally define Afrikaner identity through a series of oppositions: The *volkseie*<sup>23</sup> of the Afrikaner is characterised by the rejection of liberalism, internationalism, imperialism and communism, as well as a historically founded aversion to mixing with other races.

In the chapters that follow, I argue that the letters Strauss wrote to friends and family during his period of study in Europe testify to an experience of the "dislocation of identity" as theorised by Norval. The correspondence reveals that Strauss was deeply affected by the *volk*'s economic and political woes, and expressly looked upon his studies in Europe as an endeavour that would enable him to offer an intellectual contribution to the future of the Afrikaner people. The letters also reveal a conflict between his intellectual ambitions

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<sup>23</sup> The *volkseie* does not translate into an equivalent English concept, but broadly means, "that which can properly be considered the cultural and spiritual characteristics of the *volk*".

and deeply held convictions, which most clearly took the shape of a tension between the demands of modernity and a traditional religious upbringing. I attempt to show that the dynamic described by Norval, according to which a crisis of meaning creates the space for the constitution of a new order, also finds expression in Strauss's intellectual development; for Strauss, Dooyeweerd's philosophy of the cosmonomic idea, as he encountered it at the *Vrije Universiteit* in the late 1930s, allowed him to reconcile his internal conflicts within an alternative sense of order. As I explain further below, neo-Calvinist philosophy was able to mediate this process in a very specific way.

Ernst Gellner (1983) has argued that nationalist movements which enter a struggle for political self-determination against a dominant power are characterised by the attempt to establish a "counter high culture" to the high culture that mediates the political and the cultural in the dominant power. Afrikaner nationalism can be considered a typical instance of this dynamic in as far as it had to assert itself against the cultural claims of British Imperialism. As Marx (2008) notes, the Afrikaner nationalist movement was in many ways negatively determined by the British nationalism that it had to confront.

It can be argued that the neo-Calvinist orientation that became established first at Potchefstroom and later in Bloemfontein may be understood as offering a "counter high culture" in the sense explained by Gellner. Stoker's remarks in the preface to the first volume of *Koers in die krisis* (1935) are suggestive in this regard:

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; my translation from the Afrikaans).

The nationalist sentiment is here clearly brought into relation with an intellectual project: the liberation of the *volk* must be realised “by means of knowledge” and this “knowledge” stands in opposition to “alien rulers” that are also described in terms of intellectual traditions: modernism, liberalism, humanism and evolutionism. These “alien” intellectual traditions can in turn all be traced back to British Imperialism, the source par excellence of all things “foreign”.

The “knowledge” required to confront “alien rulers” and liberate the *volk* must fulfil at least two requirements. First, this knowledge must presumably be rooted in the traditions and history of the *volk*, and secondly, despite Stoker’s apparent objection to “modernism”, this knowledge must also be “modern”. It must be modern in the twofold sense that it should be able to mediate the Afrikaner’s confrontation with modernity and confront British Imperialism on its own terms, that is, it must be able to confirm the Afrikaners’ relationship to European civilization and legitimise its claim to political rule on equivalent grounds. At the same time, however, it must contain a principle that can convincingly differentiate it from the “modernism” it is opposed to. I will argue that neo-Calvinism was able to meet both these requirements.

At this point, we need to refer to Nash’s (1985) consideration of the place of British Idealism in the British Imperial programme. As briefly noted above, Nash argues that British Idealism was able to furnish British colonial philosophers with a real historical task, a task which derived from the Hegelian undercurrents in British Idealism. As we saw from Derrida’s remarks above, Hegelian philosophy marked a moment in which a philosophical

pedagogics becomes intrinsically linked to the objectives of the modern state. Nash argues that British Idealism was able to adapt this programme to the needs of the Imperial project in so far as Hegelian thought offered a powerful explanation for the experience of change that had in large part been brought on by the colonial project itself, and it was able to self-reflexively locate the British Empire as the agent of that change. Hegel's thought also offered to British Idealism a comprehensive account of the process of historical change, a particular vision of the relationship between state and civil society, and an emphasis on the importance of education. If, following Derrida, we view the age of Hegel as systematic philosophy "in the process of becoming philosophy of the State, of Reason as the State" (Derrida 2002: 137), then we might describe British Idealism as systematic philosophy in the process of becoming philosophy of colonial Reason as the State. Following Gellner, we could argue that it was this conception of philosophy that organic Afrikaner intellectuals had to confront and counter.

In the context of an Afrikaner nationalist movement that shifted its attention towards Afrikaners in the cities and adopted a modernising perspective, neo-Calvinist philosophy, and the philosophy of the cosmonomic idea in particular, offered one possible intellectual orientation that could meet the requirements set by the confrontation with British Imperialism. First, the characterisation of Kuyper and Dooyeweerd as "Calvinist" suggested an organic link with Afrikaner history. The Dutch Reformed Church had long been the most significant institution in Afrikaner society and the first public intellectual debates of the 19<sup>th</sup> century took place within the parameters of Dutch Protestant theology (see Nash 2009: 41). Second, Kuyperian neo-Calvinism as elaborated by Dooyeweerd, offered a conception of the historical process that was essentially compatible with the modern concept of history as development – a notion that also underpinned British Idealism; in addition, neo-Calvinism offered a comprehensive account of the state in its

relation to other spheres in society, and it also emphasised the necessity of an educational project. Very importantly, Dooyeweerd's transcendental critique was also self-reflexive: like Hegel, Dooyeweerd situated his own thought within the religious and historical dynamic he sought to describe. But crucially, this self-reflexivity was also relativising: Dooyeweerd's transcendental critique established the existence of different religious "ground motives" and posited the philosophy of the cosmonomic idea as the expression of a particular, superior, ground motive in radical opposition to other "ground motives".

In other words, this philosophy was not only able to provide its Afrikaner nationalist adherents with a historically self-reflexive intellectual orientation by means of which they could locate themselves in the historical process, it also provided them with a principle through which they could relate *and* differentiate themselves from the primary political enemy, British Imperialism. Afrikaner nationalism and British Imperialism had shared roots, namely, the European Reformation, but Britain had gradually capitulated to humanism, whereas the Afrikaners, according to this understanding, remained true to the roots of Christian civilization. To be sure, British Imperialism on this view too was a historical force, but it was the expression of idolatrous "humanism" and could therefore only be the agent of a distorted civilization.

During the 1940s, when the "native question" became the dominant issue in South African politics and Afrikaner nationalists came to articulate the notion of apartheid, neo-Calvinist philosophy once again proved expedient to changing political conditions. In both H.J. Strauss's and E.A. Venter's engagement with the *native* question, the self-reflexivity of Dooyeweerd's philosophy of history coupled with its account of cultural development allowed Strauss and Venter to establish the Afrikaners' "superior" civilizational status and provide them with terms on which rival positions could be confronted.

In the chapters that follow I elaborate the above argument through a reading of Strauss's personal correspondence as preserved at the Archive for Contemporary Affairs at the University of Free State, the published writings of Strauss and Venter, and selected publications of the philosophy of Herman Dooyeweerd. In doing so, I have been mindful of Saul Dubow's (2006) approach to South African intellectual history: in the work that follows, I have not been concerned with "original and great ideas"; instead, as is the case with Dubow, I have focused on "an intelligentsia whose ideas were frequently derived from elsewhere, and the institutions they built to sustain their authority" (Dubow 2006: vii). As Dubow notes, this involves an interest in "how ideas were selected and adapted to suit local conditions and contexts" (Dubow 2006: vii).<sup>24</sup>

### **3. Overview of the chapters**

This introductory chapter sets out the background of this study, briefly introduces the theoretical perspective and sets out the research focus and methodology of the study. Chapter One traces the radicalisation of Afrikaner nationalism in the 1930s and situates neo-Calvinism as an identifiable intellectual strand within this movement. The three chapters that follow shift the focus to H.J. Strauss and his relation to the radicalisation of Afrikaner nationalism. Chapter Two locates his family position within the economic transformations on the South African Highveld that would precipitate the rise of Afrikaner nationalism. Chapter Three focuses on H.J. Strauss's student years at the GUC during the 1930s and his initial encounter with leading Afrikaner nationalist intellectuals in that context. Chapter Four traces the further intellectual and political development of H.J. Strauss during his studies in Germany and the Netherlands through a reading of his

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<sup>24</sup> All translations of personal correspondence and published work by Strauss and Venter are my own, except where otherwise indicated.

personal correspondence. These letters situate Strauss within the nationalist milieu and provide an account of his intellectual “conversion” to neo-Calvinist philosophy.

Chapter Five provides a concise overview of the origins of neo-Calvinism in the Netherlands in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and then explores Dooyeweerd’s philosophy of the cosmonomic idea in more detail, with a particular emphasis on his transcendental critique and his philosophy of history. Both these aspects were crucial elements in the UCOFS and later UOFS philosophers’ appropriation of Dooyeweerd’s thought. Chapter Six offers a historical reconstruction of the institutionalisation of “Christian philosophy” at departments of philosophy and political science at the UCOFS and UOFS. Here I use archival sources to show how H.J. Strauss was at the forefront of a struggle to secure a place for “Christian philosophy” at these two departments.

Chapter Seven reconstructs two closely related arguments by H.J. Strauss and E.A. Venter that locate the justification of apartheid in a discourse about the relationship between philosophy and civilization. Both Strauss and Venter draw on Dooyeweerd’s philosophy to argue that particular religious ground motives are foundational to particular forms of civilization. I pay close attention to a 1950 article by H.J. Strauss that lays the groundwork for his views on the political rights of black people, which he revisited and refined in several subsequent articles. I also consider in detail E.A. Venter’s inaugural lecture, “The crisis of Western civilization” (1954), in which this crisis is depicted as the result of a widespread apostasy that finds expression in the dominance of “humanist” philosophy. Venter here depicts the policy of separate development as a heroic effort by Afrikaners to counter the “evil” forces of humanist philosophy that would destroy Western civilization as such. Throughout, I relate Strauss’s interpretation of Dooyeweerd, as well as Venter’s

to the broader concerns of Afrikaner nationalism and the ways in which Dooyeweerd's philosophy of history accommodated a philosophical interpretation of this project.

## Chapter 1

### The radicalisation of Afrikaner nationalism and neo-Calvinism

The struggle of the Boers in the Transvaal against one of the mightiest powers must often have reminded you of your own past. In what has been achieved at Majuba, and recently at the occasion of Jameson's raid, the heroism of old Calvinism was again brilliantly evident. If Calvinism had not been passed on from our fathers to their African descendants, no free republic would have arisen in the South of the Dark Continent.

– Abraham Kuyper, *The Stone Lectures*, p. 40.<sup>25</sup>

Only in this last-named, strictly scientific sense do I desire to speak to you on Calvinism as an independent general tendency, which from a mother-principle of its own, has developed an independent form both for our *life* and for our *thought* among the nations of Western Europe and North America, and at present even in South Africa.

– Abraham Kuyper, *The Stone Lectures*, p. 15.

The disciplines of philosophy and political philosophy as taught at the University of the Free State have been linked to the Afrikaner nationalist movement since the 1930s, primarily through the figure of Nico Diederichs, who served as head of the department from 1934–1940. As the scholarship shows, Diederichs was a prominent figure among a northern grouping of nationalist intellectuals whose philosophical leanings have been described as “neo-Fichtean” or more accurately, “*volks*nationalist” (see Dubow 1995: 261). Alongside this “*volks*nationalist” strain of thought, there also existed an explicitly “neo-Calvinist” grouping amongst the northern Afrikaner intellectuals. This group was centred at the Potchefstroom University College, and closely associated with the philosopher H.G.

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<sup>25</sup> These lectures were given upon invitation at the Theological Seminary of Princeton University in 1898.

Stoker and the political theorist, L.J. du Plessis. Shortly after Diederichs's departure in 1940, the department of philosophy and political philosophy at the University College of the Free State (UCOFS) was joined by a young academic named Hermanus Johannes Strauss, who had returned in 1939 from a period of study at the Free University in Amsterdam, and aligned himself with the neo-Calvinists centred at Potchefstroom.<sup>26</sup> As this study will show, Strauss would become the early driving force behind the institutionalisation of neo-Calvinist philosophy at UCOFS, and as such he also represented the continuation of the department's association with Afrikaner nationalism.

The purpose of Chapter 1 is to lay the foundations for understanding H.J. Strauss's intellectual trajectory and to shed light on the conditions under which neo-Calvinist philosophy could become institutionalised at the UOFS in the 1950s. I argue that to understand this intellectual and institutional history, one has to read Herman Strauss's life in the context of the uneven economic development of the former Boer republics and its impact on the evolution of Afrikaner nationalism in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The victory of the National Party in the 1948 election was the culmination of an Afrikaner nationalist movement the origins of which, according to some accounts, can be traced back to the First Language Movement in the Cape Colony of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (Giliomee 1987). This movement first took shape amongst a group of Dutch-Afrikaner clergy, teachers and professionals who felt their interests threatened by an encroaching English hegemony (Hofmeyr 1987). This movement gained in scope and geographical range in the aftermath of the South African War (1899–1902), when Afrikaner nationalist sentiment was galvanised by the defeat of the Boer republics, and the appeal to an Afrikaner culture

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<sup>26</sup> Strauss's relationship with Stoker is apparent from a letter written in March 1939, which concerned a contribution by Strauss to the neo-Calvinist journal *Koers in krisis* (PV337, 02/03/1939).

and the Afrikaans language became an enduring strand in South African politics as it developed after Union in 1910.

The nationalist movement gained an institutional base with the founding of the National Party in 1914. As scholars of Afrikaner nationalism have argued, this initial manifestation of the movement could be described as a “liberal nationalism” in the sense that the right to the Afrikaans culture and language was conceived as political in nature, rather than based in an organic, essentialist conception of culture (Moodie 1975; Giliomee 1987; Marx 2008). Due to a series of social, economic and political factors, the nature of the nationalist movement underwent a transformation from the late 1920s onwards. By the mid-1930s, Afrikaner nationalism had shed this “liberal” aspect and had developed into an exclusivist cultural nationalism, which attained a loose ideological coherence under the rubric of Christian-nationalism. This period of “radicalisation” (Marx 2008) between the late 1920s and 1930s, and the processes that precipitated it, are especially pertinent to the argument I develop in the chapters that follow.

As Dubow (1995) notes, Christian-nationalism consisted of a number of different ideological strands. The most characteristic common feature between these various ideological currents was the circular notion that the Afrikaner nation was created as such by God and ordained by God to assert this God-given national identity. The ideological leanings that constituted Christian-nationalism were all to some degree characterized by politico-theological notions, but one group in particular – a number of academics associated with the Potchefstroom University College – cast their nationalist ideology within the framework of what has been described as Calvinist fundamentalism (Marx 2008). The Calvinism associated with this group, whom Norval refers to as the “Scripturalists” (1996) could in turn be directly linked to the neo-Calvinist worldview

propagated by the Dutch theologian and politician, Abraham Kuyper. The institutionalisation of neo-Calvinist philosophy at the UCOFS under the patronage of H.J. Strauss should be investigated in the context of the radicalisation of Afrikaner nationalism in the 1930s, with a particular focus on the reception of the neo-Calvinist orientation. This chapter provides an overview of the emergence and characteristic features of a radical, exclusivist Afrikaner nationalist discourse as elaborated by earlier scholarship, and locates neo-Calvinism and neo-Calvinist philosophy more precisely within it. I focus on those aspects in the emergence of radicalised Afrikaner nationalism that have direct bearing on the intellectual history of the University of the Free State, for example, the role of the *petty bourgeoisie* and the *Afrikaner Broederbond* in the northern provinces. In addition, I suggest that it is possible to account for the conjunction between an exclusivist Afrikaner nationalist discourse and neo-Calvinist philosophy by drawing on Aletta Norval's (1996) analysis of Afrikaner nationalist discourse in terms of the "dislocation of identity", and the relational construction of identity.

The chapter consists of four sections: first, I briefly elaborate on the theoretical and historiographical parameters that guide my approach to Afrikaner nationalism, that is, a functionalist account of nationalism, and those historical accounts that identify a certain ideological shift, or "radicalisation" of the nationalist movement during the 1930s. Secondly, relying on the existing scholarship, I provide an overview of the socio-economic and political processes that brought about the above-mentioned radicalisation of Afrikaner nationalism in the 1930s. Thirdly, I introduce the discourse of Christian-nationalism and focus in particular on Norval's (1996) analysis of this discourse as expressing a "dislocation of identity" and providing a framework for the relational construction of Afrikaner identity in opposition to a series of "Others". Finally, I briefly situate neo-Calvinism within the broader context of an exclusivist nationalist discourse.

## **1. Theoretical parameters: inventing the nation**

Throughout this study, I broadly proceed from those perspectives in the scholarship on nationalism that conceptualise the nation as a contingent and artificial “invention” that occurs in response to a change in social relations brought on by industrialisation (Hofmeyr 1987).

In Ernst Gellner’s classic functionalist account, nationalism entails the coincidence of the political unit with the cultural unit, and this coincidence is a function of a modern industrialised economy (Gellner 1983). Gellner’s argument is, briefly, that industrialisation demands a high degree of occupational mobility, which in turn requires the state-controlled homogenisation of education. The state thus produces a homogenous high culture, enabling the coincidence of the cultural unit with the political unit. Nationalist intellectuals often present this high culture, which is in fact ideologically constructed, as an organic identity that “awakens” under the right conditions. The process of homogenisation may entail the suppression of several “wild cultures” to the end of establishing a particular high culture. A cultural grouping that fails to claim political power may mobilise into an opposing nationalist movement intent on seizing political power from the dominant grouping.

Marx (2008) and Giliomee (1987) broadly interpret Afrikaner nationalism in terms of Gellner’s functionalist account of nationalism. Both authors criticise the “primordialist” account of nationalism, which views ethnicity and nationalism as “anthropological universals”; according to Marx this position effectively makes any research into the origins of a nationalist movement redundant, since there is in a sense nothing to explain (Marx 2008: 88). Giliomee nevertheless makes a distinction between the emergence of a distinct Afrikaner ethnic identity by 1870, and the emergence of a fully-fledged nationalist

movement in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. By 1870, outsiders could recognise Afrikaners as a group that spoke varieties of the same language, intermarried and shared the same faith (Giliomee 1987: 142). It was however only by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century that political leaders were able to mobilise this ethnic identity on a mass scale by means of the representative institutions of the modern state. Giliomee locates the conditions for nationalist mobilisation in a series of disruptive social, economic and political movements that followed the mineral revolution on the Witwatersrand during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. These events enabled the idea of the nation to become a “basis for action in economic as well as political affairs” (Giliomee 1987: 142).

Scholars of Afrikaner nationalism largely agree that the ideological articulation of the movement undergoes a noticeable change between the late 1920s and the late 1930s. The gist of this argument is that this period sees the transformation of Afrikaner nationalism from a species of constitutional nationalism into a cultural nationalism. Marx notes that both Smuts and Hertzog, the central figures in opposing camps of Afrikaner politics between 1914 and 1939, propagated a form of constitutional nationalism, in terms of which the nation derives its identity from the historical act of founding a new political community. From this perspective, Hertzog’s nationalism can be described as a “liberal nationalism” in the sense that the individual’s right to a common language and culture is the product of a historically contingent political process. From the mid-1930s however, this constitutional nationalism is increasingly displaced by the idea of a unified, national identity founded on a common culture that is not historically contingent, but given as a part of the natural order of things (Marx 2008: 174–175).

The scholarship differs on how sharp the break was between this latter cultural nationalism and the initial stirrings of Afrikaner nationalism in the Cape Colony known as the First

Language Movement. Giliomee (1983) argues that developments in the 1930s were essentially continuous with the concerns of the earliest Afrikaner nationalists. Scholars such as Dan O'Meara and Christoph Marx argue for a sharper break with the past, and identify the fusion of the National Party and the South African Party in 1934 as the critical event that reshaped Afrikaner politics.

The nature of Christian-nationalism as it develops from the mid-1930 onwards has been theorised in a number of different ways. Dunbar Moodie (1975) develops an account of Afrikaner nationalism as “civil religion” – that is, “a sophisticated theological interpretation of God’s acts in Afrikaner history, with an explicitly republican eschatology”, and he identifies the 1930s as the period in which the Afrikaner “civil religion” comes to fruition (1975: 97); O'Meara (1985) interprets the ideological developments of the 1930s as the reflection of class antagonisms within the Afrikaans population, and describes this process as the “ideological redefinition” of Afrikaner nationalism into Christian-nationalism (O'Meara 1985: 67–77); Aletta Norval (1996) traces the emergence of an exclusivist Afrikaner nationalist discourse in response to a “dislocation of identity” brought on by social and economic displacement and investigates the manner in which this discourse institutes a certain vision of social and political reality; and, as we have seen, Christoph Marx (2008) describes the ideological shift of the 1930s in political theoretical terms as the “radicalisation” of Afrikaner nationalism from a particular kind of constitutional nationalism into cultural nationalism. Following Gellner’s functionalist theory of nationalism, Du Toit (1985) and Marx (2008) also emphasise the modernising forces underlying Afrikaner nationalist mobilisation. Their framework is augmented by Hobsbawm’s (2002) notion of “invented tradition” that describes the tendency of modern nationalist movements to present certain ideas, practices and beliefs that are expedient to the nationalist project as rooted in the age-old traditions of the *volk*. These diverse

perspectives do not necessarily exclude one another and in what follows I draw to a varying extent on several of them.

I rely especially on O'Meara's (1985) analysis of Afrikaner nationalism, since it pays particular attention to differing regional dynamics in the nationalist movement, and therefore provides the most illuminating account to understand ideological developments in the province of the Orange Free State (OFS) in particular, where H.J. Strauss's intellectual development must be located. I also draw substantially from Aletta Norval's study of Afrikaner nationalism and apartheid (Norval 1996), in so far as her account provides the most suitable framework for understanding the choices and the contradictions Strauss faced, the intellectual choices he finally made, as well as the broader framework in which neo-Calvinism could become meaningful to a certain Afrikaner intellectual elite.

## **2. The road to radical nationalism**

The South African War (1899–1902) and the concomitant demise of the two Boer Republics in the north was a powerful catalyst for the emergence of Afrikaner nationalist sentiment. However, the war itself, and the social processes that unfolded in its wake, must ultimately be traced back to the far-reaching transformations brought on by the mineral revolution on the Highveld in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Charles van Onselen provides a compelling description of what was at stake:

Envisage a frontier territory in which invaders had conquered but never entirely subdued the indigenous peoples who far outnumbered them, and whose existence was predicated almost entirely on a seasonal hunting and subsistence farming economy. Furthermore, imagine a loosely cohering 'state', one without the rudiments of a standing army, served by a skeleton civil

service, devoid of large urban markets or towns, and without an easily accessible or substantial tax base [...] Contemplate, then, the bemused, conservative and poorly educated rulers of such a 'state' discovering that their capital 'city' – a modest encrustation of churches, houses and stores – was less than 65 kilometres from the largest gold deposits on the planet and that it was the commodity that underwrote most of the world's trade and the international economy of what seemed like a distant universe. Then mentally activate the process of historical change. But, instead of running the tape past the mind's eye at normal pace, allowing for the normal real-time adjustments necessary for the emergence of a modern 19th century state over a few decades, or a century or more, set your mind-machine to 'fast forward' mode (Van Onselen 2017: 101).

The discovery of gold on the Witwatersrand foreshadowed a rapid and profound social disruption of the agrarian Boer republics. The economic transformation brought on by the mining industry created an avid new market for agricultural producers and this was to set in motion a far-reaching process of rural transformation. The commercialisation and capitalisation of agriculture disrupted the prevailing social structure of the Boer republics, leading to class formation and the large-scale dispossession of land, eventually forcing many unskilled Afrikaners to move to the cities (Keegan 1986). The large-scale proletarianization and urbanisation of Afrikaners followed.<sup>27</sup> This development brought to the fore what came to be called the "poor white problem" – over time, poverty among the white population was identified as a specific social problem (Lange 2003: 133).

The ideological construction of the poor white problem played a key role in the emergence of an exclusivist Afrikaner nationalism. As urbanisation forced people into new, alien and threatening environments, Afrikaner intellectuals, clergy and political leaders sought to

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<sup>27</sup> The white urban population grew from 36% to 75% between 1890 and 1946, with the most rapid increase occurring between 1890 and 1904 (Moodie 1975: 46).

blame this disruption on a series of foreign others. At first, British imperialism, was identified as the main culprit, but soon capitalists, communists, Jews and blacks also began to feature in this discourse of recrimination. As Norval (1996) argues, this process of “othering” would later prove crucial to the articulation of an exclusivist Afrikaner identity.

As Moodie (1975) and Marx (2008) point out, in its initial guise, Afrikaner nationalism could be described as a species of liberal nationalism, in so far as the right to cultural goods, for example, the Afrikaans language, was construed as an individual right, secured on the basis of a contingent political process. This liberal nationalism first emerged in conjunction with the Second Afrikaans Language Movement. In the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the traumatic memory of the war, along with the experience of social dislocation, provided the impetus for a literary movement that would play an important role in the articulation of Afrikaner history and identity. Authors such as Eugène Marais, Jan Celliers, J.D. du Toit (Totius) and Louis Leipoldt gave expression to the experience of the War in Afrikaans poetry, and herewith gained recognition for a literary quality that had previously been lacking. In Moodie’s analysis, the new Afrikaans literature, apart from effecting a spiritual transformation of individuals’ suffering, also enabled Afrikaners who were not directly involved in the war to share in the national grief: “By articulating and universalizing the Afrikaner fate, this new Afrikaans literature helped to formulate a clear consciousness of national identity” (Moodie 1975: 41-43).

As Moodie further notes, together with the literary innovation of the Second Language Movement, social and economic factors also played a key role in advancing the cause for the Afrikaans language. The rapid urbanisation of Afrikaners between 1890 and 1904 led to legitimate fears among Afrikaner leaders that the heretofore rural, Afrikaans-speaking community would anglicise as they moved into the English dominated cities. As a result,

voluntary associations were formed in the Transvaal, the Free State and the Cape which agitated for the recognition of Afrikaans as an official language. Dutch Reformed clergy, journalists and students were among the most committed leaders of this movement (Moodie 1975: 46-47). In 1908 Dr D.F. Malan made the case for Afrikaans before the Afrikaans Language Movement at Stellenbosch where he confirmed the link between Afrikaner nationalism and the movement for Afrikaans with the argument that a “healthy national feeling can only be rooted in an ethnic [*volks*] art and science, ethnic customs and character, ethnic language and ethnic religion and, not least, in ethnic literature” (Moodie 1975: 47). As Moodie notes, this language nationalism was liberal in so far as it emphasised “the importance of national ideals in the moral development of the individual and [stressed] the individual’s right to speak his own language and cherish his own cultural traditions” (Moodie 1975: 58).

The emerging liberal nationalist discourse did not immediately find an institutional base in the South African state. “Conciliation” between the two white “races”, the English-speaking population and the Dutch-Afrikaners, was prioritised in the political process that would culminate in the founding of the Union of South Africa in 1910. As Van der Westhuizen (2007: 14–18) notes, Union – “the first elite pact” – was essentially achieved by brokering a political accord among the white population on the basis of the political exclusion of the black majority. Karel Schoeman also points out that the white population was far more invested in a discourse about the threat of the black majority than the ideal of Union (Schoeman 2021). Around this time, Oliver Schreiner was a lone voice in pointing out that the inability or unwillingness on the part of the political elite to deal with aspirations of the black majority in a just manner would permanently jeopardise the future of the Union (Schreiner 1960; see also Nash 1985).

In the 1910 election the South African Party (SAP) came into power under the premiership of Louis Botha, with Jan Smuts serving in several key cabinet positions. Botha and Smuts emphasised the importance of fostering unity between the Afrikaans-speaking and English-speaking populations. This meant following an integrationist approach to the formation of a new, unified (white) South African nation that guaranteed equal rights to individuals regardless of ethnicity, but discouraged claims to group rights (Moodie 1975: 75). As Norval (1996) notes, segregation was a key component in the project for a unified South African nation in the sense that white unity was conditioned upon a stark distinction between the civilized, white European ‘races’ and the ‘uncivilized’ black majority. Smuts and Botha’s policy of “conciliation” soon led to conflict with General J.B.M. Hertzog from the Free State Colony, another veteran from the South African War, who insisted that the separate ethnic identities of the two groups needed to be maintained. Furthermore, Hertzog openly advocated for the autonomy of South Africa from the British Empire, a position that eventually made his continued membership of the SAP untenable. These internal tensions soon led to a schism in Afrikaner politics when Hertzog left the SAP to found the National Party (NP) in 1914.

The National Party provided an institutional base for the liberal nationalism that had emerged in the period following the South African War. The party would also play an important role in the formation of an Afrikaner *petty bourgeoisie*, which would eventually take the lead in the articulation of a more radical, exclusivist nationalism (O’Meara 1985). The role of the *petty bourgeoisie* in the northern provinces under the auspices of the *Afrikaner Broederbond* is of particular importance to the argument I develop in the chapters that follow.

O'Meara points out that the NP came into being on the basis of a loose and unstable alliance of interests, ideologically bound by a broad anti-imperialism (O'Meara 1985: 39). The nature of this alliance was reflected in its federal organisation, which allowed the different individual branches to cater to the demands of constituencies that differed in terms of their class basis. The party's anti-imperialism found expression in the principle of "South Africa first" and the so-called "two-stream policy". The latter entailed that unity between English and Afrikaans-speaking South Africans could only be achieved on the basis of equal cultural rights for both. This position reflected the concerns brought to the fore by the Second Language Movement, but as Marx points out, it did not amount to a fully-fledged cultural nationalism (Marx 2008). On this view the *nation* as such was not constituted by a particular ethnicity; it was a political construction within which the cultural rights of both the English and the Afrikaans population would be recognised.

The newly founded NP did not immediately attract broad support, but this changed in 1914 when the SAP majority in parliament voted to enter the First World War on the side of the British Empire. This led to the Afrikaner Rebellion of 1914 when several former generals of the Boer republics engaged in an ill-conceived plot to overthrow the Union Government. The rebellion was easily squashed by Union forces under Botha's leadership, but the affair increased support for Hertzog's NP, since the latter, although not actively supporting rebellion, opposed the Union's entry into the War and appeared sympathetic to the rebels' cause. Botha's death in 1919 further weakened the SAP's support. Smuts's rejection of overtures in 1920 to re-unite with Hertzog and heal the rift in Afrikaner politics, preferring fusion with the pro-Empire Unionist Party, added to Afrikaners' growing disaffection with Smuts. The government's violent suppression of the 1922 Rand Rebellion (miners' strike) amounted to nothing less than a small civil war and led to a considerable loss of life. This increased the existing perception that Smuts was beholden

to capitalist interests on the Rand. Under these circumstances the NP managed to form a pact with the Labour Party, which handed them victory in the 1924 election.

In O'Meara's analysis, the NP's first stint in power played an important role in the formation of an Afrikaner *petty bourgeoisie*, a development that would prove crucial for the subsequent evolution of Afrikaner nationalism. The Pact government was characterized by the contradictory attempt to forestall the proletarianization that followed the capitalisation of agriculture, while simultaneously trying to facilitate the further transition to capitalist agriculture (O'Meara 1985: 27). This period also witnessed the further politicisation of the "poor white problem". Newly urbanised, poorly educated and unskilled Afrikaners struggled to compete on the job-market with the better-educated and skilled English-speaking workers, as well as with significantly cheaper black labour. The position of white workers was bolstered by introducing the principle of "civilized labour" in terms of which white wages would be prevented from falling below a standard of living judged to be "tolerable from a European standpoint", while black wages for "uncivilized labour" would only be required to meet the "bare [...] necessities of life as understood among barbarous and undeveloped people" (Van der Westhuizen 2007: 21).

In 1925 Afrikaans was recognised as an official language, which led to the increased employment of Afrikaners in the civil service. These developments bolstered the formation of an Afrikaner *petty bourgeoisie*, that is, Dutch Reformed clergy, teachers, civil servants, attorneys, doctors and academics. According to O'Meara (1985: 55–56) it was this class that would feel most threatened by any future change in the status quo and come to constitute the core membership of the *Afrikaner Broederbond*.

By 1926 a number of developments began to threaten the alliance of interests that formed the basis of the NP. Some members, notably those who were also members of the *Broederbond*, held fast to the idea that the political freedom of the Afrikaner People could only be achieved with the founding of an independent republic. As Moodie (1975) points out, Hertzog was never really committed to this position. In 1926, the Balfour Declaration conferred the status of “autonomous community” on South Africa, which led Hertzog to declare that he had achieved his constitutional goal of an independent South Africa, and to abandon republicanism; this did not sit well with certain leading members of the NP (Moodie 1975). Soon thereafter, the Great Depression nullified Hertzog’s efforts to subsidise agriculture through mining tax. The combined effect of the economic depression and a severe drought set off a generalised sense of crisis. With the NP’s prospects in the 1934 election uncertain, and in the belief that co-operation was the only solution to the unfolding social and economic crisis, Hertzog entered into a coalition with the Smuts-led SAP in 1933. In 1934, the parties agreed to fusion and formed the United Party. O’Meara (1985) and Marx (2008) identify this event as a watershed moment in South African politics, leading to a significant realignment of the political landscape. Most importantly for the evolution of Afrikaner nationalism, it led to the virtual disintegration of the NP, as most of its members in the northern provinces followed Hertzog into fusion (the *Smelters*), while the Cape NP reconstituted itself as the Gesuiwerde (Purified) National Party (GNP) under D.F. Malan.

The split reflected the class differences in the support base and differences in political culture between the Cape and the northern branches of the National Party. In the northern provinces, most of the NP parliamentarians also followed Hertzog into fusion with Smuts. This development, which was labelled the pact between “gold and maize”, showed the extent to which the economic fate of Afrikaner agriculturists in the north was tied up to

the mining industry. The Cape Nationalist party, however, represented the interests of a modest Afrikaner capitalist class that had been taking shape since the latter part of the nineteenth century, and therefore rejected the alliance with the (British) mining interests represented by the SAP (O'Meara 1985). Marx argues that in contrast with the NP in the northern provinces, the Cape NP was characterized by a well-organised party structure and was less leader-oriented and dependent on relationship of clientage. These factors contributed to the Cape MPs' decision to vote against fusion with the SAP.

In the Transvaal the GNP lost most of its parliamentary representation, while the GNP also lost seats in the OFS. This left a rising Afrikaner *petty bourgeoisie* without a political home. O'Meara (1985) argues that this created the opportunity for extra-parliamentary organisations like the *Afrikaner Broederbond* to become the primary driving force behind the nationalist movement in the northern provinces. Hertzog's fusion with Smuts primarily served the interests of commercial farmers and the mining industry and threatened to roll back the advances made by the *Afrikaner petty bourgeoisie* under Hertzog's Pact government. As a result, in the years after fusion, the vote of the urbanised "poor whites" drew renewed attention from the Afrikaner intelligentsia.

At this point it is first necessary to elaborate briefly on the nature and role of the *Afrikaner Broederbond*. The organisation was founded in 1918 by a group of railway clerks, policemen and clergymen. As O'Meara points out, prior to 1927 the organisation had no clear conception of its role or function, and was described by one of its early secretaries as little more than a semi-religious organisation. As O'Meara concludes, during the first ten years of its existence, the organisation was an insignificant factor in Afrikaner cultural life and nationalist politics (O'Meara 1985: 60). This state of affairs changed during the latter half of the 1920s.

The combination of the worldwide economic depression and the drought intensified the poor white problem. In 1932 the Carnegie Commission made the first systematic attempt to research the extent of white poverty and concluded that there were 300 000 poor whites (17 percent of the white population). It was estimated that as many as 250 000 poor whites were of Afrikaans-speaking descent, roughly a fourth of the Afrikaner population. E.G. Malherbe, who wrote the report on education, estimated that 56% of white pupils came from homes that were unable to provide them with proper food or clothing (Giliomee 2003a: 347). This stark reality led to a far-reaching reorientation on the part of the Afrikaner nationalist intelligentsia. As Marx puts it:

The combination of urbanisation and impoverishment, which was perceived to be caused by imperialism, despite the conclusions of the Carnegie Report, together with the economic depression, triggered a sense of crisis that was widespread, particularly in academic circles and among the intelligentsia. It spawned various ideological remedies, all of which thrived on radical nationalism. (Marx 2008: 135).

To those nationalists who found fusion unacceptable, the urbanised poor whites now came to represent an unacceptable “ethnic loss”. Consequently, this contingent abandoned the idea that the poor could return to an earlier way of life, and instead reoriented their efforts towards Afrikaners in the cities. The GNP started to concentrate their efforts on the vote of the urban and poor Afrikaners, mobilising them for nationalism (Marx 2008: 134). This reorientation contributed to the radicalisation of the nationalist discourse. In the effort to capture the votes of the poor whites, nationalist politicians and intellectuals increasingly characterized political enemies in ideological terms. They adopted an ethnically framed rhetoric of the class struggle that branded the British and Jews as “foreigners” who exploited “the Afrikaner”. Anti-communism and anti-black racism were also easily

accommodated in this mould (Marx 2008: 136). This ideological characterization of political enemies was part and parcel of the emerging radical nationalist discourse that sought to construct an exclusivist Afrikaner identity on the basis of a common language and culture.

The articulation of nationalist ideology – exemplified by the fervent calls for the reconstitution of an Afrikaner republic – reached a highpoint in the late 1930s. This climax was dramatically illustrated by the centenary celebrations of the Great Trek in 1938, which took the form of a symbolic re-enactment of the Voortrekkers’ exodus from the Cape Colony around 1838. A procession of traditional *ossewaens* travelled across the country along several routes, the main route starting in Cape Town and ending in Pretoria, stirring Afrikaner nationalist sentiments as it passed through towns along the way, with events culminating in the laying of the foundation of the Voortrekker Monument on 16 December 1938 with as many as 100 000 people in attendance. The “*Trek*” and the ensuing celebrations gave physical shape to the mythical notion of a historically unchanging Afrikaner people, who by the grace of God had first overcome the obstacle of hostile indigenous tribes that threatened their settlement in the hinterland, and were now seemingly on the cusp of political independence from their British imperialist victors in the South African War (1899–1902). As chronicler of the *Ossewa Brandwag*, A.J.H. van der Walt put it in 1944, “in the oxwagon trek the volk recognised and experienced its own history” (Van der Walt 1944: 7). Norval notes that the symbolic *trek* “gradually took on the form of an extended re-enactment of the greatness of Afrikaner history, and was used to counter the Afrikaner sense of inadequacy, inferiority and loss experienced as a result of urbanization and proletarianization” (Norval 1996: 40). The symbolism of the *Ossewatrek* also left a mark on the physical landscape of the University College of the Orange Free

State, in the form of a commemorative monument still standing on the “*Rooiplein*” (Red Square) in front of the Main Building.

Before we turn to Norval’s argument concerning the relational construction of Afrikaner identity, it is first necessary to situate H.J. Strauss in the narrative presented above. As we have seen, O’Meara (1985) emphasises the role of the *petty bourgeoisie* in the post-fusion ideological construction of Afrikaner nationalism. In this analysis, the *petty bourgeoisie* was primarily organised through the *Afrikaner Broederbond*, and as he points out, this was mostly true for the Transvaal and the OFS. Specifically, “[i]t was academics at Pretoria, Potchefstroom and Bloemfontein Universities, teachers in the Transvaal and the OFS, organised through the *Broederbond*, who began the first tentative ideological redefinitions of Afrikaner nationalism following fusion” (O’Meara 1985: 56). H.J. Strauss began his academic career at the GUC during this period of ideological redefinition and pursued his studies in close proximity to university lecturers who had come to occupy leading positions in the *Broederbond*. One example was the prolific nationalist intellectual, Nico Diederichs, who was head of the department of philosophy from 1934–1940. As I show in Chapter 3, Strauss became actively involved in the student nationalist movement. I argue that his subsequent intellectual choices should be understood in the context of this encounter with the radicalised Afrikaner nationalism of the 1930s as presented by members of the Afrikaner intelligentsia who were active within the *Broederbond*.

Herman Giliomee (1983) is a notable sceptic of analyses that emphasise the role of the *Broederbond*, and Moodie (1975) has also warned against over-estimating the influence of this organisation in the nationalist movement as a whole. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to evaluate the opposing views on this issue; as I argue in Chapter 3, however, it seems beyond doubt that members of the *Broederbond* were actively involved in propagating

a radicalised Afrikaner nationalism in their capacity as lecturers at the Grey University College during the 1930s. In other words, even if Giliomee is correct to suggest that the *Broederbond* was not hugely influential in the nationalist project as a whole, it nevertheless seems certain that this organisation left its mark on the intellectual history of the University of the Free State (and its institutional predecessors). In the next section I consider Norval's (1996) attempt to account for the specific nature of Afrikaner nationalist discourse as it took shape from the mid-1930s in more detail, since I argue it provides the most suitable framework for understanding the intellectual development of H.J. Strauss, and by extension, the intellectual history of the department of philosophy and the department of political philosophy at the university of the Free State.

### **3. Christian-nationalism and the “dislocation of identity”**

In contrast with the liberal nationalism that characterized Afrikaner nationalism in its early phase, the radicalised nationalism that emerged after fusion no longer conceived the identity of the nation as the product of a political process, but sought to define it in organic and essentialist terms: nationalist intellectuals henceforth increasingly conceptualised the Afrikaner people as the organic product of their historical experiences, in possession of a particular culture that was rooted in a unique spiritual identity. Nico Diederichs's 1936 publication, *Nasionalisme as 'n Lewensbeskouing en sy Verhouding to die Internasionalisme* was a paradigmatic example of this articulation. As Dubow (1995) points out, what eventually became known as Christian-nationalism was never monolithic: it was based on a “logically coherent – if contradictory – intellectual framework” and its “power as an ideology was related to the ability of its adherents to hold together contradictory ideas while maintaining an overall appearance of consistency” (Dubow 1995: 248).

The literature on Christian-national ideology has identified at least two more or less philosophically distinct discourses within the broad intellectual framework, namely, first, what is variously referred to as “neo-Fichteanism”, “*volks*nationalism”, “cultural nationalism” or “integral nationalism” (Moodie 1975; Dubow 1995; Norval 1996; Marx 2008), and secondly, what is referred to as “Kuyperianism” (Moodie 1975), “Scripturalism” (Norval 1996) or “Calvinist fundamentalism” (Marx 2008). Both of these streams of nationalist thought were represented within the *Broederbond*, and both intersected with the history of the department of philosophy and the department of political philosophy at the University of the Free State.

The *volks*nationalist current is strongly associated with Geoffrey Cronjé (professor of sociology at Pretoria), J. de W. Keyter (professor of sociology at Bloemfontein), Piet Meyer (*Broederbond* chairman from 1960 to 1972 and Chairman of the Board of Governors of the South African Broadcasting Corporation), and Nico Diederichs (head of the department of philosophy from 1934–1941). The central figures among the Kuyperians were H.G. Stoker and L.J. du Plessis, respectively professors in philosophy and political philosophy at Potchefstroom. H.J. Strauss, the key figure in this study, can be broadly located within the ranks of the Kuyperians.<sup>28</sup> Diederichs’s political philosophy will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3, and Kuyperianism as represented by H.J. Strauss will form the subject matter of much of the remaining chapters. I will therefore not discuss either of these articulations in detail here. More important at this stage, is the question why these currents

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<sup>28</sup>This group, although linked by a shared adherence to Kuyperian neo-Calvinism, also had its internal divisions. H.J. Strauss repeatedly clashed with H.G. Stoker in the context of both men’s involvement in Afrikaner student politics during the 1940s. This reflected the more general divisions in Afrikanerdom during the war-years as the pro-German and fascist extra-parliamentary *Ossena Brandwag* challenged the National Party in the bid to become the foremost representative of Afrikanerdom. Stoker was deeply involved with the *Ossena Brandwag*, an organisation which in Strauss’s view abandoned the principles of Calvinism in its support and adulation of Germany and National Socialism (see Schutte 2005: 318-324; Norval 1996: 48).

of thought were able to find traction at all, and how different conceptions were able to cohere in a broad intellectual framework of “Christian-nationalism”.

Kuyperians and *volks*nationalists were both characterized by the attempt to define the Afrikaner nation in pre-political terms, that is, not as the creation of a political process, but as the bearer of a unique culture upon the basis of which they formed a community that was entitled to political self-determination. As Norval notes, the object was to define the *volkseie*, that which was unique and essential to the Afrikaner. In both accounts we find the notion that different nations are willed into being by God, which is the source of the unique characteristics of the *volkseie* in the first and final instance; in both accounts, the latter element of God’s role also leads to the circular argument that adherence to the *volkseie* means essentially to accept the calling, by God, to be a nation.

Moodie (1975) gives an account of this discourse as being grounded in the Afrikaner “civil religion”. He explains this as a politico-theological understanding of the Afrikaner’s history, in which God takes an active interest in the coming into being of the Afrikaner people, as witnessed by the sufferings, but also the successes of, first the *Voortrekkers*, and later the Boer republics. Furthermore, the relationship between God and the Afrikaner people takes the form of a covenant, in terms of which the Afrikaner must stay true to its historical task as given by God, in return for which God offers (political) salvation. Moodie most notably uncovers the themes of the civil religion in the speeches of Paul Kruger, but also strikingly in the debates between Republican generals leading to the Peace Treaty at Verening. Moodie thus reads the radicalising discourse of the 1930s as resurgence of the “civil religion” in the face of the particular disruptions faced by Afrikaners during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For Moodie, the discourse of both the “neo-Fichteans” and the “Kuyperians” must thus be considered in this light.

As we have seen, O'Meara (1985) primarily reads nationalist ideology as the reflection of objective class interests. The attempt to define the *volksie* is aimed at ethnic mobilisation with the purpose of forming a cross-class alliance between Afrikaner capital, the Afrikaner *petty bourgeoisie* and Afrikaner workers. O'Meara's insightful class-based analysis explains why the ethnic mobilisation of Afrikaner nationalism in the Transvaal and the Orange Free State had to occur primarily through extra-parliamentary organizations like the *Broederbond*. In light of the powerful influence of the mining industry on the Witwatersrand, the majority of the NP in the Transvaal and the Orange Free State readily joined the pro-capitalist SAP with a view to the interests of its predominantly agricultural constituency. Ethnic mobilisation was thus left in the hands of the organic intellectuals, the recently established *petty bourgeoisie*, who, in O'Meara's analysis above were motivated by the desire to protect their newly gained class interests. Norval takes issue with O'Meara's analysis as not being able to account for the specific nature of the discourse on the *volksie* (Norval 1996: 7-8). Norval essentially argues that class interests were already interpreted through the lens of the *volksbeweging* (popular nationalist movement), and cannot serve as an unmediated "objective" reality from which to read off a nationalist ideological superstructure. Accordingly, Norval puts forward an alternative argument, in which she interprets the specific characteristics of the nationalist discourse as a response to a crisis of meaning.

Norval argues that the social dislocation experienced by the newly urbanized and proletarianized Afrikaners precipitated a "dislocation of identity". The rapid economic and social changes dating from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century had thrown Afrikaners into a situation in which their established "modes of identification" could no longer mediate their new social conditions. The dominant discourse of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, through which the attempted suture of this dislocation was intended to take place, was segregation. Segregationist

discourse was intended to structure the political field around a fundamental distinction between white “civilization” and the “native threat”; white unity therefore emerged as the essential socio-political category.

Norval argues, however, that the segregationists underestimated the extent of Afrikaners’ dislocation. The class divisions among Afrikaners, and between Afrikaners and predominantly English capital, as well as the perceived and real social ills that befell Afrikaners in the cities, belied the projection of white unity. The separation between white and *native* was thus not an adequate scaffolding on which to hang the reconstitution of the social order:

The dislocations of identity experienced at the time [...] called for the need to reflect on and reconstitute a form of representation which would be able, once again, to suture the dislocated identities and reinstitute a “normalized” or sedimented sense of order (Norval 1996: 53).

The Afrikaner political elite who had emerged around the time of unification – Smuts, Botha and later even Hertzog – were unable to provide the terms for a new sense of order. In this regard, argues Norval, a new generation of organic Afrikaner intellectuals – the teachers, academics, lawyers, and clergy, the *petty bourgeoisie* – were better placed to interpret this sense of crisis and to articulate a discourse through which Afrikaners could give meaning to their changed circumstances.

Of great importance was to disaggregate, at the level of discourse, the presumed unity of “white civilization”. This exclusivist discourse on Afrikaner nationalism that emerged in the 1930s, commonly known as Christian-nationalism, was therefore characterized by a

proliferation of “others”. In the wake of the dissolution of previous modes of identification, that is, in the absence of discourse that could give coherence to people’s experiences, the nationalist movement proceeded by identifying the *volkseie* in terms of everything that it was not. First and foremost, “the Afrikaner” was emphatically distinguished from its ancient enemy, British imperialism, but this discourse was supplemented with an increasing concern over natives, poor-whites, communists, Asians, and Jews, etc. As Norval notes, the significance of this proliferation of others is “to be found exactly in the fact that it is through their production and externalisation that the very thought of an exclusivist Afrikaner identity became possible” (Norval 1996: 54). Giliomee had already noted this aspect with reference to the earliest articulations of Afrikaner nationalism in remarking that “in articulating their own identity, Afrikaners were probably more conscious as to what they were not – namely, not British – than of what they actually were” (Giliomee 1987: 142). In Norval’s analysis, it is this relational determination of the *volkseie* that gives a measure of unity to the various articulations of the nation accommodated within Christian-nationalism.

Thus, for example, in Nico Diederichs’s tract *Nasionalisme as ’n Lewensbeskouing en sy Verbouing tot die Internasionalisme* (1936), widely viewed as a significant contribution to the articulation of cultural nationalism, the argument is structured around a distinction between nationalism and liberalism as two fundamentally different life-views. In Diederichs’s account, the “nationalist” life-view, distinct from liberalism, conceives of the *nation* as a cultural community which alone can give meaning to individual existence. Liberalism and cosmopolitanism view the individual’s freedom in isolation from their participation in a nation, and therefore can only constitute an impoverished existence. The implication is clearly that the *volkseie* can only come into its own through the spiritual community of the nation, and on this basis, we can distinguish between faithful, nationalist

Afrikaners and decadent, liberal Afrikaners, together with imperialists, communists, fascists, etc.

Even more pertinent for the arguments that I develop in the chapters that follow, is the position of the Kuypers at Potchefstroom. The views of Abraham Kuyper, leader of the neo-Calvinist movement in the Netherlands, will be discussed in detail later, but it needs to be mentioned at this point that this movement was characterized by its opposition to the spirit of “unbelief” that its adherents saw as the essence of the French Revolution. Kuyper presented his theology as a return to the pure tenets of Calvinism, first and foremost of which was the recognition of God’s unmediated sovereignty over all spheres of life. Kuyper thus explicitly presented this intervention as more than theological, that is, he aimed at propagating Calvinism as a “life-system” or *Weltanschauung* that would have implications for the church, but also for politics and, crucially, for education. Commentators such as Zuidervaat (2004) and Chaplin (2011) have however pointed out the ambivalence of Kuyper’s anti-modernism. They point out for example that in spite of his avowed rejection of modernism, as a statesman, his social policy was characterized by several distinctly modern interventions. Perhaps even more relevant in this context was the fact that Kuyper, in embracing wide-ranging consequences for his distinction between the “unbelieving” children of the Revolution and the “believing” Calvinists, introduced a radical principle of division or “antithesis”, which arguably facilitated a grafting of these ideas onto the South African context.

Stoker appropriated Kuyper’s notion that God created different nations and determined that humankind should honour the pluriformity of creation; liberalism, on this view, was characterized by the desire to level the God-given differences of creation. Calvinism and liberalism were thus presented as different principles of order [*ordes*]. Communism, fascism

and national socialism also emerged as principles of order, but as Norval notes, “it is clear that the prime enemy of Afrikanerdom was British liberalism, both in its imperialist and South African forms” (Norval 1996: 70). For Stoker, Calvinism is the only principle capable of doing justice to the history of the Afrikaner *volk* and to structuring the relation between nation and individual, and between human bonds, such as church, state and family, in a way that maintains the sovereignty of each in its own sphere while also allowing for their interlacement – this in contrast to the chaos of conflicting positions that characterizes liberal individualism (Norval 1996: 70-71). For Norval, the critical point is that in both Stoker and Diederichs “the identity of the Afrikanerdom was ... given insofar as it could be distinguished from and against a series of ‘others’” (Norval 1996: 70).

The following remarks by Stoker, which appeared in the preface to the first volume of *Koers in die krisis* (1935) and which I already quoted earlier, are exemplary:

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 foreign rulers (Stoker & Potgieter 1935: vii).

We thus see how this discourse proceeds by introducing divisions within the purported unity of “white civilization” and defines Afrikanerdom relationally in terms of these “foreign rulers”.

Another dimension, however, also comes to the fore in the above quote: the *volk* will be liberated “by means of *knowledge*” [my italicization]. This nationalist project is thus also

conceived as an epistemological project: the *volke* will be freed by means of knowledge from foreign rulers who are also characterized in broadly epistemological terms. This is significant in light of Gellner's (1983) argument that nationalist movements, as modernising movements, are characterized by the effort to institute a homogenous epistemological framework, which serves as the basis for a "high culture". Nationalist movements which distinguish themselves from a dominant nationalist power, and seek to challenge the dominant power, typically seek to institute a counter "high culture".

The "knowledge" required to confront "foreign rulers" and liberate the *volke* must fulfil at least two requirements. It must be able to claim an organic link with the *volke*, but it must also be "modern", *pace* Stoker's avowed opposition to modernism. It must be "modern" in the sense that it should be able to mediate the Afrikaners' confrontation with modernity, but it must also be "modern" to the extent that it must be able to confront its primary enemy, British Imperialism on its own terms, that is, it should confirm the Afrikaners' relationship to European civilization and legitimise its claim to political rule on equivalent grounds. At the same time, however, it must contain a principle that can convincingly differentiate it from the "modernism" it is opposed to. Kuyper's neo-Calvinism arguably allows precisely for this: it is opposed to "modernism" but is by no means simply a reactionary movement. Kuyper argues, in fact, that John Calvin and the Reformation is responsible for the liberation of science, and that the French Revolution and the Enlightenment should be seen as a perversion of principles established by Calvinism. As Kuyper puts it in the *Stone Lectures*:

Calvinism means the completed evolution of Protestantism, resulting in a both higher and richer stage of human development. Further, that the world-view of Modernism, with its

starting-point in the French Revolution, can claim no higher privilege than that of presenting an atheistic imitation of the brilliant ideal proclaimed by Calvinism [...] (Kuyper 1898: 41).

In other words, Calvinism as a principle of ordering and an epistemological tradition introduces a distinction between the decadent modernism associated with British imperialism and the “knowledge” capable of liberating the *volk*, and establishes an organic link with the history of the Afrikaner *volk* without sacrificing the relationship with European civilization.

The above forms the essential background for the further investigation into the intellectual history of the departments of philosophy and political philosophy at University of the Free State. As mentioned before, Nico Diederichs was head of the department of philosophy during the period in which an exclusivist nationalist discourse was taking shape; the eventual intellectual direction of the department was however distinctly neo-Calvinist, and here the central figure was H.J. Strauss. In the chapters that follow the focus shifts to the context of the University of the Free State, and the relation between Afrikaner nationalist discourse and the discipline of philosophy in particular. The “dislocation of identity” and the concomitant need to articulate a new principle of order, as well as the related question of the Afrikaners’ fraught encounter with modernity emerge as central points of reference. The next chapter, however, first offers a brief exploration of the world which H.J. Strauss came from – the highveld of the South-Eastern Free State.

## Chapter 2

### Rural transformations in the Eastern Free State: The De Wet and Strauss families

In 1933, as the politics of fusion and a renewed focus on the “poor white problem” was changing the nature of Afrikaner nationalism, H.J. Strauss came into an inheritance to the tune of £950. This was a substantial sum at the time, and it provided Strauss with opportunities that would distinguish him from most of his Afrikaner contemporaries. As the Carnegie Report made clear, poverty amongst Afrikaners was widespread, and attendant on this, their level of education was frequently low. Forty-four out of a hundred Afrikaners that started school left without passing the eighth year; only seventeen passed the tenth year, and as few as eight completed the twelfth or final year. Based on these statistics, H.J. Strauss would thus have been one of a very small number of Afrikaners that managed to progress to university (see Giliomee 2003a: 406).

Judging by Strauss’s substantial inheritance in 1933, it appears that his family by some means managed to avoid the most adverse effects of the economic processes that the Carnegie Report identified as the main causes of the poor-white problem. This chapter focuses on H.J. Strauss’s family story as a lens through which to read the development of Afrikaner nationalism until the beginning of the 1930s. It begins by bringing into view Strauss’s family position in the Eastern Orange Free State in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and concludes with the death of Strauss’s father in 1933, just as Herman Strauss was embarking on his academic career. I attempt to situate the Strauss family and their immediate ancestors within emerging class dynamics in the Eastern Free State during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century; I also consider the impact of the South African War on the Strauss family, and

situate them within nascent Afrikaner nationalism in the Orange River Colony. Finally, I consider the class position of Herman Strauss's parents in the 1920s, as the Afrikaner *petty bourgeoisie* were beginning to benefit from Hertzog's Pact government.

### **1. Early class formation in the Free State**

Herman Strauss's parents, David Jacobus Strauss (1864–1933) and Hester Jacoba Strauss (1869–1928) descended from Afrikaner-Dutch trekkers who left the Cape Colony in significant numbers between 1835 and 1845 in search of a life beyond Cape Colonial rule.<sup>29</sup> This mass emigration, which later became known as the Great Trek, eventually gave birth to tenuous political organisations in the form of the two Boer republics north of the Orange River, the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek (1852) and the Orange Free State (1854). The arrival of white settlers was to set in motion a profound transformation of the South African Highveld.

The earliest trekkers were for the most part livestock farmers and hunters, who eked out a living in the isolated, semi-arid interior of South Africa. The discovery of diamonds in the 1860s, and gold on the Witwatersrand in 1886 had far-reaching consequences for the Boer republics. These precarious states had up to that point been largely geared to the interests of the Boer agrarian elite but would soon have to adapt to the needs of a modern industrial economy. The mineral revolution opened up new internal markets for agricultural producers, and this development gradually set in motion processes of capitalisation and commercialisation in the agrarian heartland of the Boer republics. Less successful farmers lost their land and livelihoods in the process, a consequence that was later compounded by the destructive effects of the South African War (1899–1902). As

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<sup>29</sup> See Giliomee (2003: 144–153) for a concise discussion of the causes of the Great Trek.

Keegan (1986) points out, the process of agricultural transformation was uneven, starting earlier in the Cape Colony and differing widely on the Highveld depending on the quality of soil and frequency of adequate rainfall in different areas. In order to explain Herman Strauss's singular opportunities, we need to begin in the rich and water-abundant soil of the Caledon River Valley.

Hermanus Johannes Strauss was born in 1912 on the farm Tasmania, in the district of Wepener – a small town situated in the Caledon River Valley, in what is today the South-Eastern Free State.<sup>30</sup> This fertile area was the major bone of contention in the Basutho Wars that dragged on between the Orange Free State and the mountain Kingdom of Basutholand in the 1860s. These wars finally came to an end in 1868, with the Boer forces claiming the bulk of the land, with the exception of King Moshoeshoe's mountain stronghold, Thaba Bosiu. In 1869, the present-day border with Lesotho was established in terms of the Convention of Aliwal-North. The town of Wepener was one of three towns established by the Free State government in the so-called "conquered territory" with the strategic purpose of defending the newly established border (Eloff 1980).

The favourable agricultural conditions in the Caledon River Valley contributed to the emergence of class disparity in Boer society; as early as 1903 a Dutch sociologist described the formation of a wealthy class of farmers in this area. Eminent figures in Boer society such as General Christiaan de Wet and President M.T. Steyn hailed from this region (Visscher 1903: 34-35). While the earliest Dutch-Afrikaner *trekkers* were mostly livestock farmers, the good conditions in this area, coupled with the emerging new market on the Witwatersrand, soon led to extensive grain farming. As Timothy Keegan points out:

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<sup>30</sup> H.J. Strauss was a late child, born when his father and mother were respectively 48 and 43 years old. According to his son, D.F.M. Strauss he was told that his deeply religious grandmother dedicated his father's life to God at birth (E-mail, 29 August 2017).

[The] most dramatic impact of industrialization and urban growth on rural areas was felt in the Orange Free State grain districts. It was here that the productive base of the rural economy developed most quickly. It was here that conflict over access to rural resources and control over productive enterprise crystallized earliest. And it was here that the processes of class formation, capitalization and dispossession were initially most starkly manifested (Keegan 1986: xiii).

Judging from the available evidence, Herman Strauss was born into a family that managed to survive the disruptive effects of urban industrialisation on rural areas with their land intact, and even with a relative degree of prosperity. Strauss's grandmother on his mother's side, Jacoba Elizabeth du Toit, was the owner of a working grain and livestock farm until her death in 1917, with hardly any debts owed by her estate.<sup>31</sup> Strauss's grandfather on his father's side, also a farmer, owned land up until his death in 1905 and a small inheritance left to his son enabled Herman's father, David Strauss, to buy the farm Tasmania in 1905.<sup>32</sup> Herman Strauss's mother also inherited land in 1917.<sup>33</sup> In contrast to this, many other Afrikaner families lost their land in a process of accelerated class differentiation between 1870 and 1914. Many first became *bywoners*, the pejorative term that was used for white farmers who were forced to seek work and housing on the farms of others, only gradually

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<sup>31</sup> South Africa, Orange Free State, Probate Records from the Master of the Supreme Court, 1832–1989. Available at: <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:7FF7-K2MM> : Sun Mar 10 07:02:46 UTC 2024. Entry for Jacoba Elizabeth De Wet Du Toit, 1917.

<sup>32</sup> South Africa, Orange Free State, Probate Records from the Master of the Supreme Court, 1832–1989. Available at: <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:W5W7-D33Z> : Sat Mar 09 13:51:33 UTC 2024. Entry for David Jacobus Strauss, 1905.

<sup>33</sup> South Africa, Orange Free State, Probate Records from the Master of the Supreme Court, 1832–1989. Available at: <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:7FF7-K2MM> : Sun Mar 10 07:02:46 UTC 2024. Entry for Jacoba Elizabeth De Wet Du Toit, 1917.

to be replaced by cheaper and more effective black labour. Eventually *bywoners* had no choice but to go to the cities in search of work.

Before we proceed with a closer look at the relative economic prosperity of Strauss's immediate ancestors, it is first worth noting the family's connections to notable figures in Boer society. Herman Strauss's grandmother on his mother's side, Jacoba Elizabeth du Toit, was the daughter of Catherina Helena de Wet and Nicholaas Jacobus de Wet, wealthy farmers and Boer notables from the district of Aliwal-North (see Visagie 2005); Catherina Helena de Wet's brother, Johannes Marthinus de Wet, was the representative of the Lower Caledon Valley in the Orange Free State *Volksraad*. General Christiaan Rudolf de Wet, leader of the Orange Free State Republican forces during the South African War, was second cousin to Herman Strauss's mother. Somewhat later, another one of her cousins, the Cambridge-educated Nicholaas Jacobus de Wet (1873–1960) would serve as Minister of Justice in the Union Government. Herman Strauss's uncle, F.M.A. du Toit was the mayor of Wepener from 1926–1927, and during the symbolic oxwagon *trek* organised by the *Broederbond* in 1938 to commemorate the Great Trek, it may have been two of Herman Strauss's relatives, "Dottie" and "Fransie" Strauss that acted as leaders and drivers of the oxwagons as they passed through Wepener (Nederduits Gereformeerde Gemeente Wepener 1938). A publication celebrating the 100-year existence of Wepener explicitly mentions the De Wet and Strauss families for their service to the community during the town's hundred-year existence (Oberholster 1969: 160). Finally, another descendent of the De Wet family, a cousin of H.J. Strauss's, would later become one of the last and most infamous leaders of the National Party, that is, P.W. Botha.

## 2. “Well to do with his stock”: Jacoba Elizabeth and Michiel van Breda du Toit

There is a scrap of evidence to suggest that Strauss’s mother’s family, the Du Toits were relatively wealthy prior to the South African War and that they somehow managed to make a financial recovery after the war. Michiel van Breda Du Toit filed a claim for compensation to the amount of £2,057 against the British government for losses suffered during the war. The official charged with assessing the claim describes the claimant as having been “well to do with his stock” before the war and judges that despite having lost all his stock and household effects, the claimant did not qualify for compensation, since he still had “ground to plough.”<sup>34</sup> This suggests that the Du Toits, notwithstanding major losses, were not reckoned among those most in need of assistance after the war.

The most comprehensive picture of the Du Toit family’s relative wealth, however, emerges from the combined will of Jacoba Elizabeth du Toit and Michiel van Breda du Toit, Herman Strauss’s maternal grandparents. It would appear that at the time of Jacoba Elizabeth’s death in 1917, the family could still be described as “well to do”. The death certificate recorded Jacoba Elizabeth’s occupation as stock farmer *and* grain farmer (“*landbouwer*”), confirming that the family took advantage of the expanded agricultural prospects offered by the region. We learn from the will that the total value of the estate came to £14,431.11.5,<sup>35</sup> of which the immovable property amounted to £13,908. Importantly, the estate was not significantly indebted. The total value of liabilities amounted to £589.7.9, which included a single mortgage bond in favour of the *Land en Landbouw van Z.A.*, to which was owed the outstanding capital balance of £342.7.5. Keegan

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<sup>34</sup> A smaller claim was eventually awarded on account of Du Toit’s status as Prinsloo surrenderer.

<sup>35</sup> According to the Bank of England, calculated at an average interest of 4.3% per year, this figure would amount to just over a million pounds in 2019; calculated at an exchange rate of £18 to the Rand, this amounts to approximately R18 000 000.

notes in this regard, “the farmer who was not also a multiple debtor was a rare man indeed” (1981: 156).

The Du Toits’ immovable property consisted of several adjoining farms with a combined coverage of 2 655 hectares, as well as a lot in the town of Wepener. Keegan (1986: 4) notes that 3 000 morgen (2 570 hectares) was the official standard in the Eastern Free State, where farms tended to be smaller and the country more densely populated.<sup>36</sup> Undoubtedly, this was a small property compared to some of the absentee landlords that had been buying up land for speculation purposes, (see Keegan 1981), but it is worth noting that Jacoba du Toit’s will dates from 1917, that is, long after the process of rural transformation had started, and well after many other farmers had been left with tracts of land too small to be economically viable, and others had become dispossessed. As Keegan (1986: 124) points out, it is estimated that by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century almost half of the rural white families in the Free State had lost their land. It is also worth noting that the Rietspruit, a tributary of the Caledon River, passed through the Du Toit’s land; the presence of perennial water was no doubt a feature that further improved their agricultural prospects as well as the value of their property.

The inventory of Jacoba du Toit’s estate further identifies her as the owner of 270 sheep (amongst some other livestock), suggesting the commercial nature of their farming activities. Although one would perhaps rightly hesitate to call the Du Toits “capitalists”, a final detail confirms the undeniably sound economic position of the family – the inventory lists a “spider,” a type of light, robust horse-drawn carriage that was manufactured in the United States of America, “the last word in comfort and style” as Van Onselen puts it, and

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<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, as Keegan notes, huge tracts of lands were concentrated in the hands of individual speculators – as much as 40 000 or 50 000 morgen (Keegan 1986: 4).

very popular among the Boer political elite in the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Van Onselen 2017: 44).

The available information about the economic position of Herman Strauss's maternal grandparents suggest that they formed part of the wealthy class of farmers in the Caledon River Valley that Visscher described in 1903, and their familial relations with Boer notables such as General Christiaan de Wet provide further evidence of this. Their five children, however, who would each inherit a comparatively small share of this wealth, were poised to become part of that emerging group that Isabel Hofmeyr (1987) describes as the “moral brokers” for Afrikaans, that is, small farmers, teachers and professionals, in other words, the *petty bourgeoisie*. Before I elaborate on this point, it is first necessary to consider another important factor in the development of Afrikaner nationalism as it pertained to Herman Strauss's family, namely, the impact of the South African War – and this as a case in point of what Norval refers to as a “dislocation of identity”.

### **3. The South African War 1899-1902**

In 1899 the Kruger government of the ZAR, faced with unacceptable demands by a British Empire eager to seize control of the richest gold deposits in the world, was forced to declare war against a much more powerful adversary. The Republic of the Orange Free State was compelled by an existing alliance to assist the ZAR if war should break out. This would have tragic consequences for many Dutch-Afrikaner families, among them the Du Toit and Strauss families. If the small Boer republics had already been put under pressure by the far-reaching social and economic changes that were being wrought by the mineral revolution, this was nothing compared to the trauma and destruction that followed the outbreak of the South African War. The literature on Afrikaner nationalism concurs that Dutch-Afrikaner experiences during the South African War was a major catalyst in forging

a pan-Afrikaner identity (Giliomee 1987), and as we will see later in this chapter, it did not fail to capture Herman Strauss's political imagination in the heated political atmosphere of the 1930s.

Herman Strauss's father, David Strauss, joined the Free State Republican forces under General Marthinus Prinsloo. In July 1900 Prinsloo surrendered under ignominious circumstances near Fouriesburg. David Strauss, together with the bulk of the South-Eastern Free State's Burghers, were captured and shipped to a prisoner camp in Ceylon (Oberholster 1969: 75).<sup>37</sup> As we will shortly see, however, the "Prinsloo surrenderers" did draw some small benefit from ignominious defeat.

In the same year as David Strauss's capture and imprisonment, Lord Field-Marshal Roberts, commander-in-chief of the British forces, instituted the burning of Boer farms as a measure to intimidate the Boers and force them to surrender during the conventional phase of the war. From November 1900 Major-General Kitchener extended and intensified Roberts' practice of clearing the farms with the purpose of completely depriving the Boers of sustenance and help (Van Heyningen 2013: p. 58, 75). The destruction of farms soon led to an influx of homeless and destitute people into the republican towns. Informal refugee camps created by townspeople first came under the administration of the British military and later the civilian authorities. The purpose of the "concentration camps", as they came to be known, was ambiguous, alternatively presented by Kitchener as protection for surrendered Burghers and as a measure to provide food and shelter for families who had lost their farms. Van Heyningen points out, however, that finally it

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<sup>37</sup> Prinsloo's surrender has gone down as shameful in the history of the war. General Christiaan de Wet for one believed that more Burghers could have escaped and famously described Prinsloo's action as "nothing short of an act of murder" (Pakenham 1979: 445; Grundlingh 1999: 312).

amounted to the imprisonment of women and children with the purpose of forcing the Boer commandos to end the guerrilla war (Van Heyningen 2013: 76).

Van Heyningen's social history of the camps offers a glimpse of conditions in Wepener as described by the district commissioner: "In some instances there are large families living at home, their husbands away to Ceylon [as prisoners of war], and they [are] practically left with nothing but a little mealie meal in the house (Van Heyningen 2013: 54)." The available evidence suggests that the Strauss family was not spared these harms. From Catherina Helena Strauss's death certificate (Herman Strauss's aunt) we learn that her will was destroyed by fire, which strongly suggests that the homestead at Grootdam<sup>38</sup> was burned down. This seems to be confirmed by the existence of a claim for compensation against the British government in favour of the estate. David Jacobus Strauss's wife, and most of the Du Toit family living at Grootdam at the time were interned at the concentration camp in Bethulie, by all accounts a particularly demoralised camp (Van Heyningen 2013: 9). Theirs was one of the more extreme cases of tragedy. Three of Hester Jacoba's sisters died within the space of two months during the winter of 1901, and her infant son died in 1902. This could not but have left a mark on the family, and Herman Strauss, although born ten years after the war ended, would surely have been well informed of his family's ordeals during the war.<sup>39</sup>

British scorched earth policy had a devastating effect on Boer agriculture. Livestock and crops were destroyed and approximately 30 000 homesteads were burnt down. In the Orange Free State, half a million cattle and some three and a half million sheep were lost,

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<sup>38</sup> Grootdam was the name of the largest portion of the property that belonged to Herman Strauss's grandparents, and several of their children also lived there.

<sup>39</sup> I initially came to learn of the infant's death from D.F.M. Strauss, the son of H.J. Strauss, suggesting that the events were remembered and passed on to following generations (E-mail, 29 August 2017).

amounting to 50 per cent of the Boers' herds. The reparations made by the British imperial government after the War were long-delayed and could only be secured by those who had managed to keep their land (O'Meara 1985: 25). The Du Toit and Strauss families were clearly among those families that managed to cling to and rebuild their farm after the destruction of the war. This may speak equally of the character of the individuals themselves, as of their socio-economic position before the war.

A further factor may also have been pertinent here, namely, the unique position of Du Toit and Strauss in terms of war compensation, as "Prinsloo surrenderers". After the war the British government instituted two separate funds to provide for the compensation of losses suffered by Burghers in the ex-Republics. A fund of £3,000,000 was established for ex-Burghers, that is, the *Bittereinders*, those Boers who refused to sign the British oath of neutrality and continued with a guerilla conflict long after Pretoria and Bloemfontein had been occupied by British forces. A second fund of £4,500,000 was established for the compensation of so-called "Protected Burghers", that is those Burghers who laid down their arms in terms of Lord Roberts's proclamations and signed the oath of neutrality. The property of the latter would be protected. Bottomley notes that over half the population of the eastern districts of the Orange Free State counted among the "Protected Burghers", which he suggests may be explained by the desire to protect their relative affluence (Bottomley 1992: 3, 4).

As mentioned earlier, David Strauss, together with his father and brothers in law were among the 3 000 Free State commandos who surrendered under General Marthinus Prinsloo in 1900. Prinsloo had managed to secure a promise from Lord Hunter that his men's property would be protected under what was otherwise essentially an unconditional surrender. As a result, the Prinsloo burghers came to occupy a unique war compensation

status which effectively amounted to that of “Protected Burghers” (see Bottomley 1987). This is clear from the claims by David Strauss as well as his father and brothers. In Strauss’s case the claims assessor’s decision simply states: “The board finds that claimant is a Prinsloo surrender, that he has suffered losses and assess his claim @ £184.”<sup>40</sup> In the case of his father-in-law an initial decision not to award the claim was seemingly overturned when it was realised that the claimant was a member of the commando who surrendered under Prinsloo. In both cases the amount awarded was significantly lower than the initial claims (£577 and £2057 respectively), but it is clear that these claimants were assured of compensation in a way that others were not. Additionally their claims were settled concurrently with those of the “Protected Burghers”, that is, in 1903, two years before the claims of “ex-Burghers”. As Grundlingh points out, the distinction between “ex-Burghers” and “Protected Burghers” led to tension in Boer society after the war, since the *Bittereinders* felt that the “Protected Burghers” were unfairly advantaged with regards to compensation. As a consequence, the “Protected Burghers” experienced a period of social ostracism after the war (Grundlingh 1999: 366-367), which may be construed to add a further dimension to the Strauss family as a case of “dislocation of identity”.

There is no indication as to the social consequences of David Strauss’s status as a “Prinsloo surrenderer”, but as such, he as well as his father and brothers-in-law received compensation in cases where others did not, and also at an earlier date than other recipients. This may well have been a factor in their economic recovery after the war.<sup>41</sup> As we will see in the next section, the issue of compensation ultimately became a significant

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<sup>40</sup> National Archives Repository, Central Judicial Committee (1902-1906), Claims for compensation ex-burghers Edenburgh to Wepener. Claim 131.

<sup>41</sup> One also cannot help but wonder to what extent this part of the family history was known to Herman Strauss; if he was aware of the details of his father’s surrender and the relative benefits it resulted in after war, the question inadvertently arises if the fervent nationalism of his later years was not to some degree sustained by latent feelings of shame.

factor in the political resurgence of the Afrikaners in the Orange River Colony in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

#### **4. The political revival of Afrikaners in the Orange Free State**

The South African War spelled the end of the Boer republics. The Peace Treaty of Vereeniging provided for the eventual self-government of the new British colonies, but in the years immediately following the war, Afrikaners focused on rebuilding their farms and retreated from political life (Naudé 1970: 19). A revival of Dutch-Afrikaner political consciousness took place during the first decade of the 1900s. Having been among the “well-to-do” farmers in the Eastern Free State and boasting familial ties to Boer leaders like General Christiaan de Wet, the Strauss family may well have found themselves in relative proximity to the resurgence of Afrikaner politics in the Orange River Colony.

A number of factors contributed to a renewed interest in politics among the Afrikaners in the Orange River Colony. First, “ex-Burghers” and “Protected Burghers” alike were disgruntled over the issue of compensation for wartime losses. It was felt that the administration of the process was handled poorly, and the compensation offered unsatisfactory. “Protected Burghers” in particular were at the forefront of efforts to raise the issue with the British imperial government. Secondly, the Free Staters felt that the maintenance of Dutch as a public and educational language as provided for by the Peace Treaty of Vereeniging was being neglected. Finally, the Free Staters had become dissatisfied by imperial rule and felt that the time was rife for self-government as was agreed to in the Peace Treaty. As Grundlingh (1999) notes, however, the issue of compensation was initially the most important catalyst for action.

Dissatisfaction over the compensation issue ultimately led to a congress in Brandfort in 1904. The committee that organised the congress mostly consisted of “Protected Burghers”. Representatives from all over the Free State attended the congress to raise their grievances. The representatives from Wepener specifically raised the issue of the “Prinsloo surrenderers” and it appears that among this group there was significant dissatisfaction with the way the process was handled. The shared grievances among the “ex-Burghers” and “Protected Burghers” about compensation ultimately mended the rift between the two groups and led to the formation of a new political association, *Het Orangia Unie*, in 1905. General Christiaan de Wet (Hester Strauss’s second cousin), together with Abraham Fischer and General J.B.M. Hertzog stepped forward as the leaders of the new association.

In a speech delivered in Wepener in 1905, Hertzog made known the organisation’s political intentions. The immediate purpose of the association was to secure self-government for the Orange River Colony, which Hertzog argued was a right granted in terms of the Peace Treaty of Vereeniging. However, since its inception, the *Orangia Unie* also undertook to promote the interests of Afrikaners, most notably the maintenance of Dutch as a public and educational language (Naudé 1970: 20–28). This element would remain an intrinsic part of Hertzog’s agenda throughout his political career.

The Orange River Colony was granted self-government on 5 June 1907. After the formation of the Union of South Africa in 1910, the *Orangia Unie* from the OFS, the *Het Volk* party from the Transvaal and the *Afrikaner Bond* from the Cape Colony amalgamated to form the South African Party (SAP), with General Louis Botha from the Transvaal as its leader. As O’Meara points out, the relationship between these regional groupings was uneasy from the beginning, since each represented differing political ideologies and interests that were in each case tied to the uneven development of capitalist agriculture. In

the Transvaal, *Het Volk* was dominated by emerging capitalist farmers, who soon entered into a political alliance with the mine owners, a co-operation which carried over into the SAP. In the OFS the wartime destruction was more severe and the development of capitalist agriculture was stunted. The *Orangia Unie* party of Hertzog was much more anti-‘imperialist’ than its *Het Volk* counterpart in the Transvaal, and the emerging political co-operation between the mine owners and the capitalist farmers in the Transvaal did not take place in the OFS. After the formation of the SAP, Hertzog continued to oppose Botha’s pro-British policies. The tension between Botha and Hertzog ultimately precipitated a split in the SAP and the founding of the National Party (NP) by Hertzog in 1914. The official launch of the National Party took place not far from Wepener, in the nearby town of Smithfield, and by the 1915 elections voters in the Eastern Free State overwhelmingly supported the NP (Eloff 1980: 371, 382).<sup>42</sup>

## **5. The Afrikaner Rebellion of 1914-1915**

There is reason to think that incipient Afrikaner nationalist sentiment in the Orange Free State resonated in the orbit of the Strauss family. With the outbreak of the First World War, the Union of South Africa was constitutionally bound to join the British war effort. The South African government, under the leadership of General Louis Botha, could determine the scope of its engagement. On 9 and 12 September the Union parliament agreed to a request to invade German South West Africa. Certain Afrikaner leaders, to whom the South African War was still a recent memory, found this allegiance with their former enemy reprehensible, and under their leadership a fair number of Afrikaners in the Free State (7 123) and the Transvaal (2 998) took up arms against the Union government in what became known as the 1914–1915 Rebellion (see Bottomley 1993: 21). The Botha

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<sup>42</sup> It is difficult to say for certain, but highly likely that Herman Strauss’s parents were among those that made up Hertzog’s support base in the Eastern Free State.

government easily squashed the rebellion, but the events only provided further impetus to the emerging nationalist movement. In the Free State General Christiaan de Wet initially put events into motion by organising a number of political meetings at which a potential response to the Botha government's actions were the primary item on the agenda. According to Herman Strauss's son, D.F.M. Strauss, his grandfather, David Strauss, attended one or more of the political meetings that preceded the Rebellion, but it is not clear if his involvement stretched any further than that (E-mail, 29 August 2017).

Swart & Grundlingh (2009) point out that although South Africa's decision to invade German South West Africa was the immediately precipitating factor, the reasons for joining the Rebellion was complex and its legacy ambiguous. Judging from Swart and Grundlingh's research, it is not obvious that someone like David Strauss would have been drawn to the Rebellion. They point out that the men who joined the Rebellion were in many cases unemployed, indigent *bywoners*, not necessarily motivated by strong nationalist or republican sentiment, but rather driven by the illusory promise of some monetary reward, or the promise of a change in social status (Swart & Grundlingh 2009: 24–25). By all accounts, not many from the South-Eastern Free State joined the Rebellion, once again, because the relative affluence of this area was not conducive to the kind of festering discontent that elsewhere drove people to desperate actions. In the Northern Free State, rural transformation accelerated rapidly in the twelve years between the war and the Rebellion; here, under-capitalised farmers and the landless steadily became dispossessed, leading to the kind of social dislocation that would feed the Rebellion. The Eastern Free State, Bottomley notes, was largely to remain an observer in the rebellion (Bottomley 1992: 34-38). If David Strauss attended some of the political meetings that preceded the Rebellion as his grandson claims, then one can only speculate that he did so out of a sense of loyalty and kinship to Christiaan de Wet, who was after all his wife's second cousin and

leader of the Republican forces during the South African War. Herman Strauss, at least, would later show an awareness of the historical significance of the Rebellion and interpret it in Christian-nationalist terms.

## **6. N.J. van der Merwe in Wepener**

Between 1915 and 1919 the developing struggle for the recognition of Afrikaans as an official language of the Union alongside English would have been a familiar issue for the community in Wepener. In 1915 N.J. van der Merwe became minister of the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) congregation in Wepener. In 1921 Van der Merwe successfully defended a doctorate in theology at the Free University in Amsterdam (Scholtz 1944: 47) and became a leading figure in the development of Afrikaner nationalism in the 1930s. He was the founding chairman of the *Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuurverenigings* (FAK)<sup>43</sup> in 1929 and remained in this position until his death in 1940. By the time he took up the position of DRC minister in Wepener, Van der Merwe had already been actively involved as a student in the struggle for the recognition of Afrikaans as a language of tuition at Victoria College<sup>44</sup> (Scholtz 1944: 24). As a minister of the DRC he stressed the need for Afrikaans (in addition to Dutch) to become an officially recognised language of the church and his stint as minister in Wepener is recalled as an important period in the history of the community (Scholtz 1944: 36-47).

## **7. A *petty bourgeois* family?**

Isabel Hofmeyr argues that the Afrikaner *petty bourgeoisie* took up the role of “moral brokers” for Afrikanerdom, that is, they answered the call of advancing Afrikaans as reputable language, spoken by reputable people. This group included teachers, DRC clergy,

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<sup>43</sup> As Moodie (1975) has shown, the FAK was in essence the public arm of the *Afrikaner Broederbond*.

<sup>44</sup> Victoria College became Stellenbosch University in 1918.

professionals, and according to Hofmeyr, small farmers. The Strauss family may not be readily classifiable as “small farmers”, but they could also not be counted among the large landowners who engaged in capitalist agricultural production. Reading the 1926 mutual will of Herman Strauss’s parents and his father’s estate files dating from 1933 against the backdrop of economic advances made by Afrikaans-speaking whites as a result of National Party policies adopted by Hertzog’s Pact government, the question arises as to whether David and Hester Strauss could be described as having formed part of an emerging Afrikaner *petty bourgeoisie*.

The evidence is limited to the information contained in a mutual will drafted by Herman Strauss’s parents in 1926. The will, however, makes the striking provision that each of the five Strauss children should inherit the sum of £1,000 upon the death of the longest surviving spouse. This added up to a substantial amount of money at the time, and one cannot help but wonder about its provenance. A perusal of Hester Strauss’s estate files after her death in 1928 shows that the bulk of the estate’s value of nearly £7,200 consisted of registered mortgages in favour of the estate. The value of the mortgages added up to more than £5,000 pounds, and at 5% interest, they were collecting a modest income of £250 a year. Five years later, when Herman’s father died, the value of the estate had remained more or less the same. Strauss’s estate held £230 cash in Barclays Bank and several bordering properties in the town of Reddersburg adding up to a value of £645; the biggest share of the estate’s assets consisted of the same mortgages, of which the outstanding capital had hardly shrunk. It is impossible to say what the initial source of the capital was, but it may have been the earnings from the sale of their farms in the Wepener district. Hester Strauss inherited a comparatively small piece of land (214 hectares), curiously named “Politiek” (“Politics”) when her mother died in 1917. David Strauss acquired the bordering farm, Tasmania, in 1905 from his father-in-law. It appears both

pieces of land were sold at some point before 1926, when the Strausses moved to the town of Reddersburg, about 70km south of Bloemfontein. It is not clear why they moved to town, but it may have been that at age 62 David Strauss no longer had the appetite for the uncertain life of a farmer and had somehow acquired enough capital to generate a sufficient income in a less arduous way. It is difficult to picture the 62-year-old David Strauss, son of *trekboere*, *Burgher* of the Orange Free State, and veteran of the South African War as an enthusiastic member of an emerging Afrikaner *petty bourgeoisie*, but the generous inheritance that was envisioned for each of his five children in 1926, especially in the case of the then-15-year-old Herman, suggests that he had aspirations for his progeny to be included in the rising class of Afrikaner professionals, teachers and academics. The fact that Herman Strauss enrolled at the GUC suggests that this may have been the case, and as we will see in due course, certain remarks in his letters further confirm that the youthful Strauss envisioned for himself a roll in Afrikaner society much different from that of his parents.

When all debts on his father's estate had been settled, Herman Strauss inherited £945 – a small fortune at the time. Calculating for inflation at an average of 4.3% a year, this would have been worth £68,142 in 2019, somewhere in the vicinity of a million Rand. In 1930 the costs of a BA degree amounted to £20 per year; hostel fees, including meals, came to £60 per year (University of the Free State 2006: 21). While studying in Germany in 1937 Herman informed a fellow student from South Africa that £200 was sufficient to cover lodging and living expenses for two people in Germany for one year (PV337/26/06/1937). Later, when Herman had moved to Amsterdam to study at the Free University, his funds were apparently sufficient to rent a small house for him and his newly wedded wife outside of the city, where he was able to eat “*beerlike boerekos*” [delicious homestyle food] every day (PV337/21/2/1939). Even if it was too late for David and Hester Strauss to become part

of the rising Afrikaner *petty bourgeoisie*, they had undoubtedly paved the way for their youngest child.

In conclusion, we must admit that there is no direct evidence of how Herman Strauss experienced his formative years, and we are mostly dependent on circumstantial evidence pertaining to his extended family's social and economic position to reconstruct the factors that may have influenced him. There is evidence, however, that his extended family was relatively affluent, and it seems reasonable to think that this played a part in Strauss successfully completing school and attending university at a time when many Afrikaners were indigent. Furthermore, there is some evidence to suggest that the Strauss family moved within the orbit of events and people that were connected to an emerging Afrikaner nationalist sentiment in the Free State. The Republic was first drawn into a devastating war that was not of its own making and ultimately lost its political independence in a conflict that directly affected Herman Strauss's family. The revival of political consciousness amongst the Free Staters under the auspices of the *Orangia Unie* was directly informed by the issue of war compensation and went hand in hand, from the beginning, with an awareness of a pan-Afrikaner identity, an awareness that would carry over into the founding of the National Party by J.B.M. Hertzog. Boer leaders in the Free State, like General Christiaan de Wet, were part of the Strausses' extended family circle while a leading nationalist figure like N.J. van der Merwe occupied as DRC minister in Wepener – what was arguably then the most influential position in Afrikaner society. Finally, the National Party was officially launched in the town of Smithfield, and farmers hailing from this area, like the Strausses, were destined to become the core constituency of the party. In the next chapter, we turn our attention to the history of the University of the Free State, which came into being during the reconstruction period in the first years after the South African War.

## Chapter 3

### **Afrikaner nationalism, philosophy and Grey University College**

In 1926, as the Strauss family moved to Reddersburg, Prime Minister Hertzog achieved a significant political aim when a conservative British government reluctantly conferred the status of “autonomous community” on South Africa in terms of the Balfour Declaration. At the same time, O’Meara points out, this marked the beginning of the end of the “old” National Party. On his return from the Imperial Conference, Hertzog, without consulting his colleagues, declared that the National Party would abandon republicanism, since its constitutional aims had been achieved. This step seemingly signalled a greater accommodation to imperialism, which outraged many sections of the nationalist opinion, and significantly weakened the party’s ideological foundations. In response to these events the Afrikaner Broederbond resolved to take on a much more active role in the fortunes of Afrikaner nationalism (O’Meara 1985: 39–40).

In the Free State, a significant part of the *Broederbond’s* activity would take place in the context of the struggle for Afrikaans at Grey University College. It was in the midst of this heightened political awareness that Herman Strauss embarked on his academic career. From his letters written during the 1930s it becomes clear that the youthful Strauss was in search of an intellectual tradition that could ground and give direction to his political sentiments. It also appears, however, that he was disappointed in this regard by his initial encounter with intellectual life at Grey University College. “I can almost lament the positive unfruitfulness of my G.U.C.-days, but I hope to catch up,” Strauss wrote from Germany in 1937 (PV337, letter to J. van den Berg, 26/06/1937). In order to better understand Strauss’s search and his subsequent choices, it is necessary to situate Grey University College in its political and social context.

## **1. The discipline of philosophy in South Africa in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century**

In the preceding sections we saw with reference to O'Meara's analysis that the uneven development of capitalist production had a differential impact on regional Afrikaner politics. The social and political differences between the northern provinces and the Cape make possible an understanding of differences in the institutional and intellectual development of higher education institutions in the respective regions. Andrew Nash (2009) highlights this aspect of regional differences in his account of the development of the discipline of philosophy at the University of Stellenbosch.

Drawing on O'Meara's analysis of these differences, Nash briefly compares the Stellenbosch context with educational institutions in the northern provinces and puts forward an argument to explain the diverging development in the discipline of philosophy. In the Cape Colony, the NP drew its support from an Afrikaner capitalist class consisting of wine and fruit farmers and a small but powerful sector of financial capital in the form of Sanlam insurance (O'Meara 1985). Institutions such as, most importantly, the DRC, but also banks, newspapers, journals and educational institutions were also more firmly established in the Western Cape than elsewhere (Nash 2009: 69).

According to Nash these institutions were distinct from those elsewhere in the country in so far as they were "pre-political", that is, they dated back to before the emergence of the Afrikaner nationalist movement. This lent a certain degree of power to these communities, while at the same time limiting their ideological flexibility: "Cultural institutions could not as easily be co-opted for political causes in the Cape, precisely because they had existed before the causes and had developed around them a complex web of ideologies and interests, and a tradition of autonomy" (Nash 2008: 69). By implication, the relatively

precarious state of Afrikaner cultural institutions in the north left them more susceptible to ideological co-optation.

This argument is supported by Marx's (2008) analysis of the differences in political culture between the Cape and the northern provinces. In the Cape, a parliamentary tradition had slowly taken shape since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century according to informal alliances that emerged around particular interests. In the northern provinces, however, politics was strongly leader-oriented and based on networks of clientage that stretched back to before the War (Marx 2008: 77–78). As Marx points out, the men who dominated South African politics in the first part of the century, namely Smuts in the Transvaal and Hertzog in the OFS, had won much of their renown and political following as a consequence of their involvement in the South African War, and these loyalties remained a significant factor in Transvaal and Free State politics (Marx 2008: 78).

A brief comparison of some aspects in the early history of Stellenbosch University and Grey University College serves to illustrate Nash's point. In Stellenbosch, nestled among the affluent Afrikaans-Dutch wine and wheat farmers of the Western Cape, the value of a tertiary education institution that served the interests of this community was recognised relatively early. In 1913 D.F. Malan expressed the need for an autonomous university at Stellenbosch as follows:

Stellenbosch is ... closely tied to the spiritual, moral and national life of the Dutch-speaking part of the people. It is the place where the Afrikaner people can best realise their ideals, and from which the greatest influence can be exercised on South Africa. It is the best fulfilment which the people have yet found for a deeply-felt need. It stands for an idea (quoted in Nash 2009: 68).

Nash argues that the capacity for Stellenbosch to “stand for an idea” was in large part made possible by the Cape Afrikaners’ long-standing interest in capitalism. He notes that Sanlam, Santam and KVV were all established in the same year as the University of Stellenbosch. When the Union government set in motion a proposal to establish a single teaching university in Cape Town using English as the only medium of instruction, opposition arose in Stellenbosch. The plan for the new university meant that the Victoria College, as Stellenbosch University was known at the time, would become a constituent college of the new university, and therefore subordinate to it. Cape Afrikaner leaders realised that this would endanger Dutch as a language of instruction, which would in turn disrupt prevailing social and economic relations. The early Cape Afrikaner capitalist, J.H. Marais, finally ensured the institution’s autonomy when he bequeathed the funding necessary for establishing the independent Stellenbosch University. This bequest was made upon the condition that Dutch or Afrikaans should have “no lesser place” than English at the institution. This enabled the University of Stellenbosch to become a fully-fledged university in 1918, together with the University of Cape Town, on the basis of its own Act of Parliament. By 1930, virtually no lectures at the University of Stellenbosch were presented in English (Giliomee 2004: 364).

As Nash points out, the communities served by Stellenbosch was able to exert a certain amount of influence on the intellectual direction taken by the university. He argues that Afrikaner intellectuals in Stellenbosch faced a complex relation to modernisation in so far as they were forced to reconcile the modernising interests of capital and the traditional elements in the communities they served. A distinct philosophical tradition was able to emerge in Stellenbosch because of a more or less dialectical interaction between tradition and modernity, religion and science, and the individual and society (Nash 2009: 68-70).

The Free State Colony was arguably not characterized by economic and social conditions conducive to the emergence of a distinct and self-reflexive philosophical tradition – here the fate of academic philosophy was more closely bound to, first, the area’s economic dependence on the markets serving the mining industry on the Witwatersrand and secondly, the ideological response to English hegemony as articulated by the Afrikaner *Broederbond* from the late 1920s.

In contrast to the University of Stellenbosch, Grey University College, from its founding in 1904 until the late 1940s faced a continuous struggle for financial survival. It received little to no support from the community it served, either in the form of financial endowments or student numbers.<sup>45</sup> In fact, prominent Free State families preferred to send their children to Stellenbosch to further their studies. In 1904, the Orange River Colony, which superseded the republic of the Orange Free State after its defeat by Britain in the South African War, was still struggling to recover from the economic and social damage inflicted by the three-year conflict. The widespread and extensive damage to agriculture scarred the economy, and the first years after the war were dominated by the challenges of reconstruction. Financial support for a tertiary education institution was not foremost among their priorities. In addition, Free State society was characterized by significant social divisions: the opening of new markets on the Witwatersrand transformed the agricultural economy in the Free State, and farmers who could not adapt to the new circumstances were forced off the land, creating a substantial class of financially vulnerable *bywoners*. This process of class differentiation in turn led to shifting allegiances during the South African War, as substantial numbers of *bywoners* joined the British war effort as National Scouts. In addition, Afrikaners had to contend with a substantial English population, loyal to the

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<sup>45</sup> In 1904 six students registered at the College; in 1909 the students numbered 68; in 1920 they numbered 130, and in 1930 they numbered 329. After extensive recruiting efforts by the Rev. J.D. Kestell, student numbers reached 420 in 1927 (University of the Free State 2006: 41).

British Empire, who dominated business and the professions. These divisions, a struggling economy and the lack of interest in a local tertiary institution all contributed to the precarious position of the Free State's first institution of higher education.

As novelist and historian Karel Schoeman points out in his history of the city of Bloemfontein, public and social life in the city was overwhelmingly English for the first hundred years of its existence (Schoeman 1980). Following the South African War the ranks of the city's civil service, businessmen and professionals were swelled by new arrivals from Britain. It was only during the 1920s and 1930s that the Afrikaans-speaking population started to gain significantly in numbers so that, as reported by the 1936 census, the Afrikaans-speaking population outnumbered the English-speaking by 57% to 35% (Schoeman 1980: 270–271). However, the city council and municipality as well as its business and cultural life remained notably English until 1945, when Afrikaners succeeded for the first time in gaining a majority on the city council and proceeded to rid the city of the symbols of its English past. Schoeman further notes the paucity of any noteworthy writers with a significant link to Bloemfontein and remarks that in general the city did not seem to be conducive to the production of literature.<sup>46</sup> He further notes that by 1930 the circulation of Afrikaans books at the public library amounted to a paltry 0,6% of the total lending figure. In these conditions, the prospects for an Afrikaans institution of higher education, let alone a distinct tradition of philosophy, would have been grim to say the least.

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<sup>46</sup>Ironically, Schoeman himself, who studied at the University of the Free State in the 1960s and spent the last years of his life in that city, may presently be reckoned as the most noteworthy Afrikaans author to have had a significant link with Bloemfontein, if not one of the most important Afrikaans writers in general.

Grey University College developed from Grey College, an institution established in 1856 through the intervention of then Cape Colony Governor, Sir George Grey (1812–1898), to serve as a theological seminary of the Dutch Reformed Church. As the UFS’s official history notes, the early years of the institution were characterized by a shortage of funds and a lack of interest from the community (University of the Free State 2006: 7). In 1903 the education department of the Orange River Colony made provision for funding that allowed for the teaching of university subjects and in 1904 additional funds provided for new grounds and buildings. The new institution, with Johannes Brill as rector, accepted its first students for the BA examination in 1904.

In 1920 J.D. Kestell (1854–1941) became the second rector of the GUC. Around the time of Kestell’s appointment, the institution was still struggling financially and had failed to grow its student numbers. The low student numbers further deterred the Free State public from sending their children to the GUC. Kestell commanded much respect in the Afrikaner community for his role as chaplain during the South African War. He was widely known by the moniker of “Father Kestell”, a title which acknowledged him as father to the Afrikaner nation.<sup>47</sup> Kestell was already 65 years old when he accepted the position and was not formally qualified to serve as rector of the College. He had, however, served as DRC minister in several congregations and had on several occasions been elected as moderator of the synod of the DRC, which conferred on him a considerable stature in Free State society. Kestell was pro-Afrikaans, and the College council offered him the position of rector in the belief that he would be able to offer competent leadership and stimulate the growth that the institution needed (University of the Free State 2006: 23).<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Kestell is buried at the Women’s Memorial in Bloemfontein, together with President M.T. Steyn and General Christiaan de Wet, respectively the epitome of Afrikaner churchman, statesman and warrior, as Moodie puts it (1975: 19).

<sup>48</sup> Kestell also contributed to the first Afrikaans translation of the Bible.

Kestell's most important task was to promote the university among the Free State population. He succeeded in raising the student numbers but met with limited success in securing more financial support. In contrast to the University of Stellenbosch, which was able to count on the support of affluent Cape Afrikaners, Grey University College had to rely for its survival on such sentiment as could be evoked by the figure of "Old Father Kestell", war hero and august churchman of the Orange Free State Republic. In this respect, the institutional culture of the GUC arguably mirrored the leadership-based political culture of the north. Kestell supported the long-held ideal of a higher education institution that would meet the educational needs of the Afrikaner population in the Free State, but during his tenure most of the teaching personnel remained English, and the instructional offering in Dutch and later Afrikaans remained limited until the late 1920s.

As we have seen, the University of Stellenbosch becoming an independent institution was predicated on an existing articulation between cultural institutions and economic interests in the Cape. As Nash (2009) shows, the granting of independence to the University of Stellenbosch would serve to nurture that articulation. The GUC took a step towards further independence when it became a constituent college of the University of South Africa in 1918. However, despite the long-voiced aspirations for an indigenous university in the Free State, this community was apparently unable in 1918 to secure the funding necessary to establish an independent institution such as happened in Stellenbosch. Indeed, even the financial obligations that came with its new status as a constituent college proved difficult to meet, as evidenced by the meagre success of Kestell's fundraising campaign in the early 1920s (see University of the Free State 2006: 42–43). This apparent inability to appreciate the benefits of higher education can be ascribed to the relatively poorly articulated relationship between capitalism and cultural institutions in the Orange Free State, a legacy of both the social and economic upheaval of the war, as well as the

dominance of an Empire-oriented, English *bourgeoisie*. The conditions which hindered the establishment of an independent university would therefore also determine its future development: unlike in Stellenbosch, the local community would have limited influence over its intellectual direction, and the articulation between cultural and economic interests that could foster a local philosophical tradition would remain inadequate.

The Dutch historian, Pieter Geyl, undertook a tour of the Union of South Africa between July and December 1937 during which he delivered public lectures at a number of the country's universities and university colleges, the University College of the Orange Free State among them.<sup>49</sup> In his report of the tour he reflects on the language struggle at UCOVS, but also makes a number of general observations about the College. He admits that in that "wide, thinly populated country" these colleges played a significant role as centres of culture a day's journey or more from Cape Town or Pretoria-Johannesburg. Despite this he describes the College milieu as "a rather feeble little world"<sup>50</sup> and "hardly more than a sort of a [extended] secondary boarding school"<sup>51</sup> (Geyl 2000: 32). Furthermore, Geyl had little praise for the academics at the College. He describes the scientific standard of the historian, presumably S.P. Barnard, as low, and compares him to a "rusty teacher at a small Higher Civic School<sup>52</sup> in a remote provincial town"<sup>53</sup> in the Netherlands (Geyl 2000: 33).

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<sup>49</sup> The name of the Grey University College changed to the University College of the Orange Free State in 1935.

<sup>50</sup> "vrij pover wereldje"

<sup>51</sup> "niet zo veel meer dan een soort middelbare kostscholen, voortgezet middelbaar laat ons zeggen."

<sup>52</sup> Hogere Burgerschool. Intended as a practically oriented secondary school for higher functions in industry and trade.

<sup>53</sup> "Als historicus te vergelyking met een vastgeroest leraar aan een klein H.B.S. in een afgelegen provinciestedje bij ons."

This dismal picture can now be augmented by reference to the main focus of this study, namely, the department of philosophy. As was the case elsewhere in the South African colonies, the first professional philosophers to teach at GUC came from Britain. Starting in 1904, W.S. Johnson from the Royal University of Ireland was the first to teach philosophy at GUC, but – attesting to the humble beginnings of the College – Johnson was also responsible for teaching English. It was only with the appointment of Thomas Miller Forsyth (1871–1958) in 1911 that anything resembling a particular tradition of philosophy made its influence felt at GUC.

Like many of his contemporaries in Britain and elsewhere in the British colonies, T.M. Forsyth was broadly associated with the school of British Idealism (see Nash 1985; Sweet 2006: 1135–1136; Sweet 2009: 290–293).<sup>54</sup> The respective philosophies of individual British Idealists could differ in significant ways, but arguably constituted a movement by virtue of their shared orientation towards the philosophy of Hegel. It gained ground in Britain from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, according to Nash, as a response to the inadequacies of the reigning utilitarianism of John Stuart Mill in providing an intellectual justification for the imperial project (Nash 1985: 47–48). As Nash puts it: “In a world in which British imperialism has worked to transform so dramatically, it was no longer possible to ignore the reality of historical change” (Nash 1985: 48). Hegel’s thought proved to be expedient in these circumstances in so far as it was precisely distinguished by the attempt to give a self-reflexive, historically situated account of itself. “[I]t enabled the reality of historical change to be recognised within the British Empire, and provided a framework for promoting such change while still containing it within the limits of imperialism” (Nash

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<sup>54</sup> Forsyth was educated at the University of Edinburgh and completed his doctorate under Andrew Seth Pringle-Pattison. In the preface to his 1910 monograph, *English Philosophy: A study of its method and general development*, he acknowledges the influence of F.H. Bradley, a noteworthy exponent of British Idealism.

1985: 52). Rephrased in Norval's (1996) language, we might say that the philosophy of Hegel was able to provide the British Empire with a discursive horizon for making sense of its historical condition. In more general terms, Hannah Arendt has said of the Hegelian concept of history that it was "extremely useful in giving the secular political realm a meaning which it otherwise seemed to be devoid of" (Arendt 2006: 83).

The key elements in Hegel's thought were able to give a particular purpose and place to the discipline of philosophy within Britain's Imperial programme (Nash 1985). These elements were, according to Nash, "the comprehensiveness of [Hegel's] account of the historical process, the relation of the state and civil society proposed in his account of ethical life and his stress on education in the broadest sense, as the crucial instrument of historical change" (Nash 1985: 52). These elements could be made to articulate a concrete historical task for the professional philosophers who landed teaching positions in Britain's colonial possessions (Nash 1985: 54). In the colonial context, the philosopher as educator could act as the link between history and consciousness, guiding colonial society towards its necessary historical goal, while maintaining the basic social relations of British Imperialism (Nash 1985: 53). As Nash points out, around the time of unification (1910), the vocation of philosophy at the English-language institutions (like GUC) was openly acknowledged as a form of "practical Imperialism" (Nash 2009: 222).

There is regrettably no evidence as to how T.M. Forsyth viewed his task as a teacher of philosophy in a far-flung, rural corner of the British Empire, but there is rich evidence relating to the arguably comparable experiences of others. The most distinguished of the British Idealists who taught philosophy in South Africa was Alfred Hoernlé. Nash's study of Hoernlé's early years (1908–1911) at the South African College provides a valuable insight into the limitations that the colonial situation put to the discipline of philosophy.

Nash argues that Hoernlé's letters reveal a tension between the requirements of the vocation of philosophy and the inherent features of the colonial situation: philosophy was essentially an imported tradition that was artificially introduced into a radically different context from the one in which it had emerged. Furthermore, according to Nash, there is something inherently "irrational" to the colonial situation, which makes the teaching of philosophy (with its pretensions to rationality) a somewhat incongruous activity.

Nash draws our attention to the fact that the secularisation of intellectual life in Western Europe was a protracted process that had begun with the 17th century conflict between the emerging intellectuals of the scientific revolution and the established authority of the church. He points out that no such conflict took place in South Africa; the rising capitalist class that asserted the claims of rational and secular knowledge in Europe had no need to do so in the colonial context, since the existing feudal aristocracy who may have challenged them could be removed by military conquest. In a further twist, religious authority proved to be useful as a means of subordinating colonial life to the needs of the metropolis. Nash observes that it was only once imperialism found itself faced with the problem of transforming colonial societies in order to maintain economic expansion in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, that processes of secularisation began to be encouraged (Nash 1985: 85–86). Nash finds evidence in the remarks of such prominent champions of secularisation as Superintendent-General of Education for the Cape Colony, Langham Dale, and the first chancellor of the University of the Cape of Good Hope, Sir William Porter. Nash suggests that secularisation and the appeal to rational argument were to be subjected to the demands of "practical and industrial agencies" that facilitated economic growth in the colonial context. From this Nash infers that philosophy became important in the educational system of the Cape Colony not as an instrument of rational enquiry, but as an instrument

of its suppression (Nash 1985: 86–88). In other words, the suppression of rational enquiry served to keep the exploitative logic of colonialism hidden.

In a piece titled, ‘The Crisis in our Present Civilization’, published in the *South African Journal of Science* in 1930, Forsyth engages in a limited consideration of ubiquitous philosophical and political themes from the period, even making an oblique reference to the “native question” which had become more pronounced in South Africa from the 1920s. His British Idealist lineage becomes clear in his concern with spiritual as opposed to material values, as well as in his basically dialectical understanding of the historical process.

In his diagnosis of the “crisis of civilization”, Forsyth takes Spengler’s *The Decline of the West* (1923) as central point of reference. He concludes his discussion, however, by challenging Spengler’s analysis and his cultural pessimism with the suggestion that contemporary technological advances may have transformed the very conditions that Spengler identifies as determining the rise and fall of civilizations.<sup>55</sup> He also suggests that what Spengler views as signs of the decline of culture may in fact be viewed as the “basis for a new beginning”:

[O]ne may expect that in our present phase of civilization the interaction of East and West, perhaps also of white and black, will lead to some further synthesis. It may also be that, whatever has happened in the past, the world-wide extension, however superficial, of our Western civilization and the vastness of its scientific achievements forbid the possibility of its passing away as completely as previous civilizations have done, even although it must undergo great changes or have entirely unforeseen developments. Indeed, the disillusionment, the searching, the dissatisfaction of the present themselves contain a

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<sup>55</sup> With the invention of the atomic bomb in the 1940s, the conditions determining the survival of civilization were of course altered beyond both Spengler and Forsyth’s imaginations.

promise of the dawning sooner or later of a new era; and many of the phenomena which Spengler describes as marking the end of a culture – democracy, socialism, feminism, the greater articulateness of the mass or fourth estate – may be interpreted as a basis for a new beginning (Forsyth 1930: 606).

Forsyth's debt to Hegel speaks clearly from his dialectical conception of historical change: the contradictions of "East and West" and "white and black" may lead to a further "synthesis"; the very crisis of the present must be understood in its dialectical relation to what came before and the "new beginning" that might follow.

Further on, Forsyth identifies the "too exclusively industrial organization of our present civilization and its too predominantly commercial outlook" as the biggest threat to "higher cultural values". He continues:

For this reason, what is required more than anything else, if civilization is to be saved from disaster, is the conservation, through the work of inquiry, education, and organization, of all that is best in the cultures of the past and present. In this task there is no place for isolations and antagonisms of class, creed, or race. All the best minds of the world, of all peoples and countries, are needed to solve the world's problems (Forsyth 1930: 608).

Here also, Forsyth's idealist lineage is clear from the implicit conviction that what is best from cultures past and present can be "conserved", that is given a place in organized whole, which may be comprehended by means of rational inquiry and transferred by means of education. The question as to which "culture" would be entrusted with this act of conservation, that is, which culture which would have the right to comprehend, educate and organize, is not addressed. The appeal to "all countries and peoples" in itself suggests that there were no longer obvious leading candidates for such project.

Forsyth's position here to some degree reflected the politics of the "liberal" SAP, with its orientation towards "conciliation" and co-operation between the Afrikaners and "the English". Forsyth's antipathy to class, creed and race antagonisms, together with the notion of a future "synthesis" between white and black perhaps signalled his opposition to both the growing nationalist sentiment among Afrikaners at the time, as well as the pro-capital and segregationist policies of the SAP. He may well have been speaking from personal experience, since by the late 1920s, a division between a cultural nationalist camp, and a "liberal" camp was becoming apparent within the faculty and council of the GUC.

Whether Forsyth's teaching reflected in any way the relatively progressive ideas contained in this 1930 article, and whether they were capable of making any notable impression on his students is difficult to answer to any degree of satisfaction. In the absence of any concrete evidence of Forsyth's teaching or his experience as a teacher of philosophy in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Free State, we can only speculate that it would have had much in common with Alfred Hoernlé's account. For his part, Hoernlé had the following to say:

I suffer from the lack of any kind of philosophical intercourse and from the necessity of doing a great deal of elementary routine work with pupils too young in years and very broadly grounded in the schools [...] Few have acquired a taste for literature, while hardly any of them can be got to read, except the text-books which are compulsory. Fewer still think for themselves. Mind you, I don't think they are to be blamed. It would be a miracle were it otherwise, considering the inefficiency of the schools, and the total absence of an atmosphere and tradition of culture and fine thought, to stir their feelings and stimulate their imaginations. I am merely describing to you the *de facto* conditions which handicap me in teaching philosophy. What are you to do with an Honours' class which has to take the History of Greek Philosophy with Plato's Republic (in translation) but to which 'Greece' is

little more than a name, since many of them have begun Greek only at the University, none of them know any Greek history, have read any Greek literature, seen any Greek statues, or, in short have any idea what Greek civilization, culture and thought mean (quoted in Nash 1985: 89–90).

If Hoernlé had reason to complain about the lack of historical tradition in the Cape Colony, one can reasonably infer that the situation could hardly have been better in Bloemfontein. In this regard, it serves to recall the crucial role played by the DRC in colonial life since the earliest days of the Dutch settlement, and that it was, as Nash reminds us,

[...] the only major institution which extended across the entire area of white settlement, even beyond the colony's borders, and the only major institution in which colonial intellectuals were dominant. Its Christianity provided the basic framework of belief and legitimation which the colonial government and the colonists had in common (Nash 2009: 41).

As Nash points out, the first major intellectual conflict within a colonial-born group was the so-called “liberalism struggle” in the DRC. An orthodox party in the Cape church opposed the theological liberalism that had developed in the Netherlands during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, viewing this as the product of the “modernism and unbelief” that fuelled the French Revolution. The central figure among the conservatives was the Rev. G.W.A. van der Lingen (1804–1869), who had been shocked during his studies in the Netherlands by the modern Dutch church's emphasis on rationality and its critical reading of the Bible. Van der Lingen was drawn to the contemporary anti-revolutionary struggle to revive the pure Reformed Faith and its Calvinist principles (the Dutch Réveil). As Giliomee notes, Van der Lingen “returned to the Cape imbued with an anti-revolutionary and anti-liberal zeal” (Giliomee 2003a: 206).

Nash observes that the conflict between the conservatives and the theologically liberal ministers returning from the Netherlands,

[...] concerned the meaning of the central assumptions of colonial political and intellectual life: the character of human progress; the role of conscious thought in bringing it about; the role of reason and revelation in sustaining and developing morality within colonial society; the meaning and significance of human freedom; the character of the Christian, Protestant and Dutch Reformed tradition and the relationship of colonial society to Western historical tradition more generally (Nash 2009: 41).

The “liberalism struggle”, however, took place in the very different context of Cape colonial life, and was to have a lasting influence on the “dialectical tradition” in Stellenbosch (Nash 2009). This debate may have resonated far less distinctly in the Boer societies beyond the Orange River. The early history of the DRC in the Orange Free State is characterized by the relative religious deprivation of the *trekboere* and the *Voortrekkers*. Oberholzer and Van Schoor (1963), the authors of a history of the DRC in the Orange Free State, point out that the *trekboere* who settled across the Orange River “were totally isolated, without an organised church, without the church as institute and deprived of the administering of the gospel” (1963: 23). They further recount the considerable and protracted struggle of the *Voortrekkers* to secure a minister, noting that at the time of the Great Trek (1834–1836), none of the *Voortrekker* parties, despite their anxious efforts, could convince an ordained minister of the Cape Church to accompany them (Oberholzer and Van Schoor 1963: 27).

A key figure among the younger conservatives in the Cape Colony also played a founding role in the DRC of the Orange Free State, namely, Andrew Murray. Murray, unlike Van

der Lingen, was not strongly associated with the traditional Calvinist doctrines of the sovereignty of God in all areas of life and covenant theology, but rather personified an evangelicalism which arose in response to what was perceived as a destitution of faith among inhabitants of the Cape Colony. Furthermore, Murray represented a colonial nationalism, meaning that he was a “staunch supporter of the Empire as the foundation of order and liberty in South Africa” (Giliomee 2003: 205).

By the time that Murray accepted the call to tend to the religious needs of the white inhabitants of the Orange River Sovereignty in 1849, these descendants of the *trekboere* and *Voortrekkers* had been starved of regular spiritual instruction for more than a generation (Oberholzer & Van Schoor 1963: 57); moreover, Murray’s energies would have been stretched to its limits, since he was responsible for at least four congregations, covering an area of more than fifty thousand square miles, with hardly a suitable building to house a church. In 1850, the church council of Bloemfontein acknowledged the effects of this long absence of an organised church:

Also in a spiritual sense, thousands of souls belonging to the Dutch Reformed Church gave cause for concern, of which even now the traces persist. There are many profoundly lost sheep here, that need to be sought out by a Shepherd in order to urge them to look for salvation (quoted in Oberholzer & Van Schoor 1963: 57).<sup>56</sup>

In 1860 the Bloemfontein newspaper, *The Friend* reported the opinion that “the nomadic, restless, pugnacious sort of existence of the immigrants had been leading, and perhaps

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<sup>56</sup> Ook in eene geestelijke betrekking, was het bekommerenswaardig gesteld met vele duizenden van zielen die tot de Hollandsche Gereformeerde Kerk behooren, waarvan nu nog overal de sporen zijn. Vele, zeer veel verdwaalde schapen zijn er hier, die door den herder moeten worden opgezocht om hen aan te sporen tot het zoeken der zaligheid (quoted in Oberholzer & Van Schoor 1963: 57).

obliged to lead, was accompanied by unmistakable evidences of moral as well as religious retrogression” (quoted in Oberholzer and Van Schoor 1963: 57).

In other words, the influence of the DRC, in its role as the main colonial institution that could accommodate a discourse regarding the political and intellectual life of the colony, can reasonably be assumed to have been far more limited in the embryonic society beyond the Orange River.

Conditions in Bloemfontein encompassed a further layer of complexity in so far as whatever historical tradition had been sustained in the Boer Republics was severely disrupted by the war. The reconstruction of the former republics, administered by Alfred Milner, therefore also had to attend to the reconstruction of historical tradition, but from the perspective of the British Empire (Nash 1985: 92-93). The preserved schoolbooks of the Free State-born DRC minister and politician, N.J. van der Merwe, a secondary school student of Grey College and later one of the first graduates of GUC, clearly show to what extent the students were reared in the intellectual milieu of the new colonial authorities. His biographer, G.D. Scholtz notes that in 1904, Van der Merwe had to write essays on Sir Walter Scott, “The Character of Lord Clive”, The Puritans, Lord Macaulay and “How Shakespeare’s works resemble real life” (Scholtz 1944: 16). Karel Schoeman provides further evidence of this state of affairs in the words of Ms Cecil Boyle of the South African Colonization Society: “One feels one is doing a little bit of empire building [...] It is all helping to bring the Dutch element into more modern views and ways of life. The *Backveld Boers* are a race that is gradually being eliminated” (quoted in Schoeman 2024: 27). Thus, so far as historical tradition is concerned, the situation in the Free State may have proved even more challenging than in Cape Town.

Before taking up his appointment at the GUC, Forsyth was selected for a professorship at Victoria College in Stellenbosch; this decision, however, was overruled by the College council in favour of N.J. Brümmer, a graduate of Victoria College and the Dutch Reformed seminary in Stellenbosch, and co-founder of the *Suid-Afrikaanse Akademie vir Taal, Lettere en Kuns* (presently the *Suid-Afrikaanse Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns*, that is, the “South African Academy for Science and Art”, an Afrikaans equivalent of ASSAF, the Academy of Science of South Africa) in 1909 (Nash 2009: 221). The College’s rejection of Forsyth, in favour of the Stellenbosch-trained DRC minister and early advocate for Afrikaans language and culture, is evidence of the contrasting conditions between Stellenbosch and Bloemfontein as they related to philosophy’s place in the social order. Brümmer’s selection over Forsyth through the direct intervention of the College council illustrates the extent to which, in Stellenbosch by 1911, an articulation had taken shape between the College as intellectual institution and the community it served. In contrast to this, Forsyth’s appointment at the GUC suggests that conditions in Bloemfontein were not conducive to any significant articulation between philosophy as a discipline and the community it served. In the absence of such a relationship, there would have been limited scope for the emergence of a distinct tradition of philosophy, capable of reflection on the interests it served, or for that matter, capable of reflecting on the radical cultural nationalist sentiment that would insinuate itself into the GUC in the 1930s.

At this point it is meaningful to recall Derrida’s argument, sketched in the Introduction, that all institutions are to some extent determined by their relation to their “outside”; a philosophical institution, for example, bears an essential relation to the non-philosophical, and in this sense the philosophical is always already contaminated by the “political”. All borders between the philosophical and the non-philosophical, however, do not take the same form, and a history of a particular institution will have to account for the particular

features of that relation. In this regard, the work of the late Stellenbosch-based philosopher, Paul Cilliers on complex adaptive systems is suggestive. Cilliers notes that a system, and by this we might understand an institution, can only develop an identity of its own if it is able to resist some of the changes in its environment. If a system responds to every change in its environment, it becomes nothing more than a reflection of that environment. The system's ability to resist changes in its environment is, however, already a function of its "identity", that is of the history of its interactions with the environment (Cilliers 2009). Complex systems, like universities, are as Derrida argues, always "open" to their outside, that is, their borders are both sites of differentiation and connection, but following Cilliers, it could be argued that institutions which exhibit stronger and more stable identities (histories), are more capable of reflecting on what happens in their environment and less vulnerable to becoming mere reflections of it, for example, universities as they relate to the political context in which they take shape.

Considering Cilliers's view, we might argue that the lack of historical tradition in the colonial context, and the disrupted sense of tradition in the Free State in particular, made for a very poorly defined boundary between the institution and the political context in which it took shape. Put differently, it made GUC particularly vulnerable to a crude ideological co-optation by Afrikaner cultural nationalists, starting in the late 1920s and reaching a zenith during apartheid.

In further support of this line of argument, we may draw on André du Toit's account (1985) of the reception of neo-Calvinist thought in Afrikaner intellectual circles from the late 1920s onwards. Du Toit argues that the Dutch-Afrikaner settlers who penetrated the Highveld in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were not in possession of a sophisticated and dynamic Calvinist intellectual tradition; *neo-Calvinism* was another "imported" tradition adopted in

the 1920s for ideological reasons.<sup>57</sup> Du Toit argues that if the Afrikaners had had recourse to a robust, dynamic and well-established local intellectual tradition, they would have been better equipped to engage critically with the ideological currents that were imported from Germany and elsewhere in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the event, these ideologies frequently met with little critical resistance.

It is ironic to note that one of the most prominent ideologues to emerge in this context of nationalist mobilisation at GUC in the 1930s was also the most successful of T.M. Forsyth's students, namely Nico Diederichs. Diederichs counted among a number of Afrikaner intellectuals who pursued post-graduate studies in Europe during the 1920s and 1930s and became involved in the nationalist movement upon their return. This group also included Piet Meyer, Geoff Cronjé and Hendrik Verwoerd. Christoph Marx describes Diederichs's 1936 booklet, *Nasionalisme as 'n Lewenbeskouing en sy Verbouing tot die Internasionalisme* as "one of the most ambitious attempts ever to give nationalism a philosophical grounding" (Marx 2008: 213). As we will see below, Diederichs's philosophical nationalism retains elements of the Idealist school that contributed to his intellectual formation, but here it came to serve a decided rejection of the kind of cosmopolitanism espoused by Forsyth in 1930.

Diederichs joined the GUC faculty shortly after his return from Europe in 1929, where he played a key part in the institution's becoming a site of Afrikaner nationalist mobilisation. The nationalists were initially met with resistance from English-speaking members of the senate and other Afrikaners alike, and it was only by 1946 that the nationalists managed to gain the upper hand in the College's management structures. The College became an

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<sup>57</sup> I discuss Du Toit's argument in more detail in Chapter 4.

autonomous university in 1950, which marked an important step in the “Afrikanerization” of the institution. From this point on the university became exclusively Afrikaans and assumed the character of a *volksuniversiteit*. These aspects will be considered in more detail below and in the chapters that follow. For the moment, it is important to note that whereas in the case of Stellenbosch University the eventual Afrikaans character of the institution, as well its intellectual traditions, were to some degree rooted in established capitalist social relations and a complex engagement with the forces of modernisation, the Afrikanerization of Grey University College proceeded as a more explicitly ideological project, driven by the organised Afrikaner nationalism of the 1930s. In the next section we take a closer look at some aspects of this project especially as they relate to Herman Strauss.

## **2. Afrikaner nationalism and Grey University College 1927–1934**

### **2.1 The *Broederbond* and the language struggle at the UFS**

Herman Strauss commenced his studies at GUC during the period when the Afrikaner nationalist movement actively sought to extend its influence over the character of higher education institutions. In this endeavour, the *Broederbond* played a significant role (Stals 2021: 77–78; 144–145).<sup>58</sup> In 1929, the poet, novelist, professor of Afrikaans and leading figure in the nationalist movement, D.F. Malherbe, was appointed as rector of Grey University College. Significantly, the first Bloemfontein chapter of the *Broederbond* was also established in 1929, with none other than Malherbe as its regional chair (Stals 2021: 61). Malherbe studied linguistics in Germany and in 1910 he accepted the position of professor of Dutch, French and German at GUC at the request of then Minister of Education in the Free State, J.B.M. Hertzog. In 1918 he became the first professor of Afrikaans (Steyn 1993: 89). Malherbe was also a prominent and prolific early Afrikaans novelist. A draft resolution

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<sup>58</sup> Stals recounts how the AB had employed a variety of tactics to apply pressure to the Transvaal University College (currently the University of Pretoria) to adopt a more explicitly Afrikaans character (Stals 2021: 77–78).

penned for the College council by A.J.R. van Rhyn in 1929 shows in which direction the College was intended to develop during Malherbe's tenure as rector:

The College's continued existence is primarily determined by the fact that it is called upon to serve the intellectual and moral interests of the population of the Free State. Its duty being the advancement of science and art, promotion of research and the raising of civilizational standard, the education of students occurs in a manner that is in keeping with the religious life-view and traditions of the population of the Free State, with the understanding that, although students from all sections are welcome and will be served to the best of our abilities, the interests of the vast majority will be accorded acknowledgement commensurate with their cultural needs (Steyn 1993: 97–98).

Malherbe's nationalist sentiments most clearly came to the fore in his efforts to extend the use of Afrikaans as a language of tuition at the College. In 1910 GUC's language of tuition was English. Among the twelve lecturers Malherbe was the only one who could speak either Dutch or Afrikaans (Steyn 1993: 92). When a new university dispensation came into being in 1918, the Minister of Education handed down a number of guidelines for universities, which included that the bilingual student should be seen as the norm and that accordingly subjects were to be taught in Afrikaans as well as English. However, a number of factors made this impractical. Afrikaans had not yet advanced sufficiently as an academic language, and there was a lack of study material in Afrikaans. Some lecturers accordingly found it difficult to teach subjects with a large technical vocabulary in Afrikaans, although Malherbe would later contest this assertion. Nevertheless, tuition in Afrikaans did not gain ground at GUC until Malherbe started to mobilise for the issue from 1925 onwards, first as a member of the senate and from 1929 as rector of the College (Steyn 1993: 87–117).

As Moodie (1975: 239) notes, the fight for the official recognition for Afrikaans and its equality with English in everyday life was a central rallying point in the nationalist movement. The fight for Afrikaans was also able to unify Afrikaners that were otherwise divided by ideological differences. As Moodie puts it, “‘language’ was [...] perceived as one of the taproots of the separate ethnic consciousness of Afrikaner culture” (Moodie 1975: 239). It must be emphasised however, that initially those members of faculty who were in support of Afrikaans, like Malherbe, were only insisting that the College comply with the 1918 decision that established the principle of a bilingual policy. Malherbe’s early mobilisation was therefore primarily aimed at seeing this decision complied with. Nevertheless, as Steyn notes, by 1927 two opposing groups had emerged, namely, those that favoured a turn towards an Afrikaans, Christian institution, and those who favoured the maintenance of a bilingual, neutral institution (Steyn 1993: 93). As Steyn notes, it was likely H. Van der Merwe Scholtz who in a joint meeting of the senate and council in 1929 first suggested that the institution should become exclusively Afrikaans since 80% of its students were Afrikaans-speaking. Scholtz argued that the bilingual policy served neither English nor Afrikaans students and held up the example of the Universities of Stellenbosch and Cape Town as institutions which thrived because they chose one or the other language (Steyn 1993: 96).

In his account of these events, J.C. Steyn unfortunately does not attempt to relate them to the social relations prevailing in the Free State. Andrew Nash points out that ideologically speaking, the nationalist intellectuals based at Afrikaans universities in the northern provinces were committed to resisting the reproduction of a social order that was dominated by the mining industry. However, lacking a material base from which to challenge this social order, the nationalist movement was forced to resort to ideological mobilisation: “That ideological mobilisation could succeed only by repudiating the secular

and individualist bases of the *bourgeois* world-outlook” (Nash 2009: 71). This dimension becomes clear from the fact that mobilisation for Afrikaans was from the beginning coupled with an appeal to the “religious life-view” and traditions of the people of the Free State.

Given the discontinuity of historical tradition resulting from the post-war restructuring of the social relations that sustained that tradition, the “traditions” of the people of the Free State, if not the “religious life-view”, would necessarily require a degree of reconstruction. This reconstruction would be driven by intellectuals who had received their earliest intellectual grounding in the contradictory context of colonial education during the period of reconstruction, many of whom had recently returned from studies in the Netherlands and Germany. In addition, the changing nature of Afrikaner nationalism in response to the fusion of the SAP and NP in 1934, meant that the retrieval of “tradition” would take place in the context of a modernising nationalist movement. The presumed access to organic “traditions” evoked by the nationalists was thus questionable. I address this question as well as its relation to “religious life-view” in more detail in the next chapter with reference to H.J. Strauss’s reflections as a student in Europe during the 1930s.

In his account of these events, J.C. Steyn at one point emphasises that the language struggle was only in a secondary sense concerned with ideological concerns. The documented involvement of the *Broederbond*, however, suggests otherwise. E.L.P. Stals, in his unpublished official history of the *Broederbond* (1998), candidly describes how this organisation became involved in the fight for Afrikaans tuition at the GUC around the time that Malherbe was appointed as rector. Stals (2021) refers to the formation of a *Broederbond* “action group” that consisted of faculty members as well as members of the College council. Members of faculty included J. De W. Keyter, H. Van der Merwe Scholtz,

J.J. Dekker and Nico Diederichs. This group, who had all completed doctorates in either Germany or the Netherlands, are also identified by Steyn as Malherbe's main supporters on the senate (Steyn 1993: 91). Prominent *Broederbonders* in the College council included N.J. van der Merwe, DRC minister and leading member of the Free State NP; C.R. Swart, another prominent NP politician; A.J.R. van Rhyn, the editor of the nationalist Free State newspaper, *Die Volksblad*, and J.C. Pretorius, yet another active member of the NP and a founder of *Die Volksblad*. Marx (2008: 301) points out that the bureau of the *Volksblad* and Van Rhyn in particular were highly influential in the expansion of the *Broederbond* at GUC during the early 1930s.

With Malherbe as rector, and supported by the *Broederbond* "action group", Afrikaans tuition was extended, but the nationalists did not succeed in securing a dominant position for Afrikaans. When Malherbe's tenure as rector ended in 1934, he declined to make himself available for the position again. In correspondence between Malherbe and P.J. Meyer, it appears that Malherbe was unhappy with changes in the composition of the College council, complaining that this body was now dominated by members of the SAP (University of the Free State 2006: 89). As Steyn (1993: 114) notes, Malherbe's rancour towards the changed composition of the council was probably related to the bitter divisions that opened in Afrikaner politics after the fusion between the SAP and the NP in 1934. Steyn (1993: 114) speculates that the new members on the council were in favour of fusion, making them "Sappe" in Malherbe's estimation.

Malherbe supported R.B. Saayman to become the new rector, believing him to be committed to the cause for Afrikaans,<sup>59</sup> but misjudged him, since he soon reverted to the

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<sup>59</sup> Saayman was also a member of the *Broederbond*, which perhaps explained Malherbe's trust in him.

bilingual policy (Steyn 1993: 115). We know from Herman Strauss's correspondence what he thought of the bilingual policy: "As long as UCOVS is stuck with that indecisive policy and men, it will be and remain a bungling business" (PV337 letter to J. v.d. Berg, 26/06/1937).<sup>60</sup>

## 2.2 Afrikaner nationalism and the department of philosophy 1930-1939

The *Broederbond's* influence on the College stretched beyond the fight for Afrikaans. In 1934, still during Malherbe's tenure as rector, Nico Diederichs was appointed as professor and head of the department of philosophy at the age of 31. The circumstances of Diederichs's appointment strongly suggest that it was orchestrated by the *Broederbond*. Diederichs was an alumnus of GUC and had returned to South Africa in 1929 after completing his doctorate in philosophy in Germany and the Netherlands.<sup>61</sup> Shortly after his return, he was appointed as lecturer in the department of philosophy. In October 1930 he became a member of the *Broederbond* on the recommendation of R.B. Saayman<sup>62</sup> and D.F. Malherbe, registrar and rector of GUC respectively. When T.M. Forsyth retired in 1933, the Internal Arrangements Committee of the College council oversaw the appointment of the new head of the department. The editor of *Die Volksblad*, A.J.R. van Rhyn, chaired the committee. Van Rhyn reported to the council that although excellent applications had been received from overseas, it was decided to confine the appointment to local applicants who were equally competent. The committee then recommended the 29-year-old Diederichs and Van Rhyn moved for adoption. W.H. Logeman, professor in physics, objected to this, arguing that it would constitute an injustice to other, more senior

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<sup>60</sup> "Solank O.K.O.V.S. [sic] met daardie halfslagtige beleid en manne sit, solank sal hy 'n gesukkel wees en bly."

<sup>61</sup> I discuss the significance of Diederichs's studies in Germany in more detail below.

<sup>62</sup> According to fragments of memoirs written by D.F. Malherbe, now housed in the *Broederbond* archives at the Voortrekker Monument, R.B. Saayman was initially also an enthusiastic member of the *Broederbond*, but later inexplicably turned his back on the organisation (AB 1/1/125, Geskiedenis afdelings 1930-1966).

staff members to have Diederichs promoted to a professorship above them. Logeman's counter proposition – to offer Diederichs a senior lectureship – was defeated in a vote by 8-3, which is not surprising, considering that at least five members of the committee were also members of the *Broederbond*.<sup>63</sup>

Diederichs served as head of the department of philosophy and political philosophy from his appointment in 1934 until 1941. During this time, he emerged as a prominent Afrikaner nationalist intellectual. He was one of the founders of the Economic Movement and became chairman of the *Reddingsdaadbond* in 1939, the organisation tasked with coordinating the economic advancement of the Afrikaners. He became a member of the executive council of the *Broederbond* in 1934, a mere four years after becoming a member, and served as chairman from 1938–1942. As chairman of the executive council of the *Broederbond*, and head of the department of philosophy and political philosophy, Diederichs was in an ideal position to reach the hearts and minds of Afrikaner students.

H.J. Strauss's main subjects at GUC were Economics and Political Philosophy and as such he was a student of Nico Diederichs during the period that Diederichs became an active participant in Afrikaner nationalist mobilisation at the GUC. The frequent references to Diederichs in his correspondence suggest that Diederichs was an important intellectual figure during the early phase of Strauss's academic life. Strauss eventually rejected Diederichs's brand of nationalism, but as scholars like Dubow (1995) and Norval (1996) note, the internal disagreements between different strands of nationalist thought were an inherent characteristic of the overall discourse concerning the authentic identity of the

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<sup>63</sup> Minutes of the council of the Grey University College, 20/11/1933. D.F. Malherbe, H. Van der Merwe Scholtz, C.R. Swart, N.J. Van der Merwe and A.J.R. Van Rhyn were all members of the *Broederbond*.

Afrikaner. Strauss partly develops his position in relation to Diederichs's thinking and it is therefore necessary to consider the latter's thought in more detail here.

Diederichs began his doctoral studies under the supervision of Max Scheler (1874–1928) in Cologne but was forced to complete his degree in Leiden after Scheler died in 1928. In Diederichs's case, however, the search for alternative intellectual traditions should not be interpreted as a break with his earliest influences. In his doctoral thesis, *Vom Leiden und Dulden (On Suffering and Bearing)* (1929), Diederichs acknowledges the formative influence of Forsyth, both as teacher and as a person; he also approvingly cites the British Idealist, F.H. Bradley (Diederichs 1929: 78). His book collection, held at the University of Free State, also attests to his lasting interest in German Idealism in so far as it contains volumes by Fichte and Hegel.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, following Christoph Marx's typology of the different strands of nationalist thought, Diederichs can be described as the most prominent proponent of what Marx calls "integral nationalism" (Marx 2008) and Dubow "volksnationalism" (Dubow 1995: 261). Norval describes the philosophies of Diederichs and Meyer as "cultural nationalism" (Norval 1996). Marx's discussion is one of the more recent of several studies that have treated Diederichs's philosophical grounding of nationalism in some detail, notably that by Moodie (1975).<sup>64</sup> Marx takes care to eliminate some widespread misunderstandings about the provenance of Diederichs's ideas, most prominently Moodie's description of Diederichs's thought as "neo-Fichtean". Marx argues that there is no concrete proof that Diederichs was ever directly influenced by Fichte. He criticizes Moodie for drawing on Elie Kedourie's theory of nationalism (1960), which in

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<sup>64</sup> See also: Norval 1996; Simson 1980.

Marx's view attributes too much weight to the reception of philosophical ideas. Marx argues instead that any specifically nationalist ideology that Diederichs may have encountered during his studies in Germany should be traced to the cultural pessimism of the Wilhelminian Empire and the radical, nationalist movements that featured prominently in the politics of the Weimar Republic. Nevertheless, it bears mentioning that contrary to what Marx contends (see Marx 2008: 221), Diederichs *does* on a few occasions fleetingly refer to Fichte in his doctoral thesis (see Diederichs 1929: 159, 182, 189) and he also refers to Fichte in the preface to *Nasionalisme as 'n Lewensbeskouing en sy Verhouding tot die Internasionalisme* (1936); it should also be pointed out that a copy of Fichte's *Addresses to the German nation*, evidently bought in Germany during the 1920s, can be found in Diederichs's book collection, currently held at the University of the Free State. The copy in question, however, shows no clear signs of having been read much, as opposed to certain other volumes, which I will come to shortly. Nevertheless, Marx's description of Diederichs's political philosophy as "integral nationalism" does seem preferable to "neo-Fichteian", which as Marx points out, assumes a particular tradition of reception which does not exist and moreover reduces Fichte's thought to a single work (Marx 2008: 220–221).

Diederichs's best-known work is the small tract with the title *Nasionalisme as 'n Lewensbeskouing en sy Verhouding tot die Internasionalisme* (1936), in which he argues that the individual can only realise himself fully within the organic unity of the *volk*. He further argues that the *volk* or nation is grounded in its unique spiritual qualities as manifested in its cultural artefacts. Marx (2008: 212–213) points out that Diederichs's notion of man as a spiritual and a material being may be traced to Max Scheler, who supervised Diederichs's doctoral studies until Scheler's death.

Diederichs's earliest academic work is suggestive for his later political thought in unexpected ways. In the introduction to his doctoral thesis, *Vom Leiden und Dulden (On Suffering and Bearing)*, he argues that the West's intellectual development has left it unable to properly pose the question of suffering. For the West, according to Diederichs, the meaning of knowledge has been reduced to the quest for mastery over nature, and thus knowledge has lost its "cosmic" meaning. The European Spirit (*europäische Geist*) having focused on the instrumental mastery of the outside world, in the process became alienated from the self; that is, in the desire to control the outside world, Western man did not gain insight into himself – instead, he became more and more like the object of his intended mastery, and thus he himself had been subjected to its power (Diederichs 1929: 2).

Diederichs's latent cultural pessimism and anti-modernism can be attributed to the themes of crisis and Western decline that were prevalent in the cultural context of Weimar Germany. As Gordon and McCormick note (2013: 7), the period was characterized by unprecedented political unrest which was felt especially intensely in Germany: "Abject material deprivation during the era of hyper-inflation, occupation by foreign forces, and psychological burdens associated with war guilt, all conspired to intensify the perception of a broad-scale crisis of culture and civilization".

The topic of Diederich's thesis, namely, suffering as a philosophical problem, and his reference to the alienating features of modernity resonate with this broader context; they also resonate, however, with the challenges that faced Boer society in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Diederichs, who hailed from Ladybrand in the Free State, would have had an intimate knowledge of the transformations taking place on the South-Eastern Highveld in response to industrialization on the Rand. Poverty, occupation by foreign forces and psychological burdens associated with war, will all have been familiar themes for Diederichs by the time

he left for Germany, and the intellectual climate he encountered there would perhaps have strongly resonated with the experiences he brought with him.

Having established that Western thought lost itself in instrumental reason, Diederichs contends that it thereby lost the ability to address the big metaphysical questions – the problem of suffering is according to Diederichs a metaphysical question of the first order: the question about the meaning of life, and the problem of suffering are so intimately connected that the one cannot be posed without the other. Given the deficiencies of Western thought, Diederichs appeals to what might seem an unlikely source for an Afrikaner from the South African Highveld, namely Oriental thought, and more specifically the teachings of Buddha and Lao Tzu. For Diederichs, Oriental thought still possesses the “philosophical attitude” that is necessary to approach metaphysical questions; the Orient knows that mastery of the inner self has priority over mastery of the world; Oriental thought draws back from the multitude of the world and seeks a wholeness, a wholeness which it finds within the self. These remarks find clear resonance when he writes in *Nasionalisme* (1936), “[man] is the only creature that is capable of *reigning in, mastering, guiding and shaping the lower and natural* in him according to guidelines and principles imparted by the spirit” [my emphasis] (Diederichs 1936: 14).

Diederichs’s appeal to Oriental wisdom, as unlikely as it may seem, forms part of a broader intellectual current in Weimar Germany. Suzanne Marchand (2013) traces the reception of Oriental thought in 1920s Central Europe to two main figures, Karl Neumann and Richard Wilhelm. These authors respectively translated several classic works of Buddhism and Confucianism. As Marchand notes, these translations would establish the core of what Weimar intellectuals would think of as “Oriental wisdom” (Marchand 2013: 346). Diederichs refers to the works of both Wilhelm and Neumann in his doctoral thesis.

Diederichs was likely introduced to these works by Scheler, who was involved with an obscure institution called the *Schule der Weisheit*, founded in 1920 by the Baltic aristocrat Hermann Graf Keyserling. This organization, described by Keyserling as a combination of Platonic academy and Buddhist monastery, introduced the works of Neumann and Wilhelm to many important intellectuals in Central and Eastern Europe.

Marchand's further discussion of the reception of Oriental thought as mediated by Keyserling's school is suggestive. She notes that what made the "Oriental wisdom" appealing was in the first place the conviction that the West was in decline. The interest in the East therefore manifested as a neo-romantic and anti-modernist longing for the cultural rejuvenation of Europe. As Marchand notes, Keyserling's project "was about salvation from *within* the soul" and the theme of Western despair and alienation was juxtaposed with that of the "East's superior ability to understand meaning (*Sinn*) and to perform self-mastery" (Marchand 2013: 349–350). As Becker and Dahlke (1942: 311) point out, Scheler himself valued what he viewed as the emphasis in Oriental thought on self-liberation and resigned acceptance of the world. The latter concept, rendered in German as "*Dulden*" partly provided the title to Diederichs's thesis, and the Introduction reflects these themes to a remarkable degree. As Marchand further notes, the intellectuals who were drawn to Keyserling's *Schule der Weisheit* generally despised Marxism, were anti-British and were scornful of all forms of materialism (2013: 349); all these themes would feature heavily in Diederichs's subsequent writings.

Even more suggestive is the following: Marchand points out that the reception of Oriental thought in Europe facilitated intellectual exchanges between "neo-romantic seekers" in Europe and indigenous nationalists from colonial states; these exchanges cultivated critical perspectives on prevalent European norms in a society still reeling from the destructive

impact of the First World War. Notable in this regard was the visit to Keyserling's school of the Indian poet and novelist, Rabindranath Tagore in 1921. Tagore became a celebrity during his tour of Germany, and several thousand people attended his performances at the *Schule der Weisheit*. His son later attributed this popularity to the fact that Tagore, as a man fighting for his nation's freedom, represented to the recently defeated Germans a spiritual power worth striving for (Marchand 2013: 350). There is no proof that Diederichs was influenced by this particular aspect of neo-romantic Orientalism, but the dichotomy he presents in his thesis between a Western world set adrift by its fixation on the material outside world, and an Eastern wisdom characterized by its quest for spiritual wholeness finds clear resonances in his 1936 tract on nationalism.<sup>65</sup> Diederichs's foray into Oriental thought offers further support for Norval's contention that Afrikaner nationalist discourse reflects a "dislocation of identity", that is, it may be seen as further evidence of the degree to which earlier "modes of identification" had dissolved and of the "absence of discourses which could give coherence and sense to people's experiences" (Norval 1996: 52).

There is also reason to believe that Diederichs drew at least some of his ideas from Mussolini's writings on fascism. The Nico Diederichs book collection housed at the University of the Free State Library contains a copy of Mussolini's *Fascism: doctrines and institutions* (1935) and certain passages from Diederichs's *Nasionalisme as 'n lewensbeskouing en sy verbouding tot die Internasionalisme* strongly resemble passages in the copy of Mussolini's book, which moreover had been underlined and annotated. For example, Mussolini writes:

Thus many of the practical expressions of Fascism – such as party organisation, system of education, discipline – can only be understood when considered in relation to its *general*

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<sup>65</sup> It is perhaps not implausible to think that the quest for spiritual unity that Diederichs picked up in his early excursion into Oriental thought eventually played a role in his integral conception of the nation.

*attitude toward life. A spiritual attitude.* Fascism sees in the world not only those superficial, material aspects in which man appears as an individual, standing by himself, self-centred, subject to natural law which instinctively urges him toward a life of selfish momentary pleasure; *it sees not only the individual but the nation and the country* ... In the Fascist *conception of history*, man is man only by virtue of the spiritual process to which he contributes as a member of the family, the social group, the nation, and in function of history to which all nations bring their contribution (Mussolini 1935: 8–10; my emphasis on underlined sections in the copy).

In 1936, Diederichs writes the following:

The true goal and destiny of man is therefore not merely the pursuit of mere pleasure or happiness here on earth, the pursuit of economic power and riches and to give expression to and satisfy his base natural instincts. But the destiny of man as spiritual being is in the first place to be warrior and bearer of spiritual values, to place himself in service of the eternal and immortal in and above himself, to make the world more beautiful, better, holier, richer in spiritual and cultural goods. This is the true calling of man as man [...] Every bearer of the national life-view experiences himself as the interpreter and servant of cultural values, as servant of a spiritual realm that is higher and more eternal than himself as well as the natural man within him (Diederichs 1936: 15-16).

For Diederichs, as for Mussolini, the distinction between the spiritual and the material is crucial. In both, the material aspect is aligned with “natural instincts”, superficiality and fleeting individual pleasure, whereas the spiritual side of man allows him to transcend his individual wants and needs. For Mussolini, as for Diederichs, the spiritual realm provides the link between the individual and the nation.

Around this time, the themes dealt with in Diederichs's 1936 publication on nationalism were incorporated into the curriculum of the department of philosophy and political philosophy. In the College yearbook for 1936, we note for the first time, under the courses in ethics taught by Diederichs, the inclusion of the topics, "Nationalism and Internationalism" and "State and Culture" – an unmistakable echo of the themes that dominate Diederichs's treatise. Diederichs and his fellow *Broederbonders* on the College staff also took other steps to incorporate the concerns of the nationalist intelligentsia into the curriculum.

In 1936, it appears to have been Diederichs and J. De W. Keyter who took the initiative to introduce sociology as a subject. The prominence of the poor-white question and its associated social ills had led to keen interest among Afrikaner intellectuals in sociology as a discipline. This aligned with the *Broederbond's* reorientation to a modernist point of view in addressing social problems. It therefore seems likely that the introduction of sociology as a discipline at this juncture further reflected the *Broederbond's* aims to incorporate the pre-occupations of the nationalist project into the academic offering: poverty, social pathology, race relations, social reform, and the relationship between town and city take a prominent place in the curriculum. George Pavlich (2014) traces the development of what he calls "administrative sociology" at Afrikaans universities, a strand of the discipline which he argues was conceptualised with the purpose of actively defining and defending apartheid; he identifies J. De W. Keyter, together with H.F. Verwoerd and G. Cronjé as the most prominent exponents of this current. It is worth noting that Herman Strauss was intent on studying sociology when he first arrived in Germany in 1937, which suggests that he had encountered sociology at GUC as mediated by the social and political concerns of Afrikaner nationalists like Diederichs and Keyter.

To conclude this discussion of Diederichs, we can briefly revisit Norval's argument as introduced in Chapter 1, namely that nationalist discourse took shape as an attempt to make sense of the "dislocation of identity". The discourse of the *volksie* put into question the unity of the European community; this discourse had to distinguish not only between Afrikanerdom and the loyal (English) subjects of the British Empire, but it also had to distinguish between true Afrikaner nationalists and Afrikaner liberals. This latter dimension arguably played out to some extent in the language struggle at GUC. It should also be possible to address this aspect in the specific context of academic philosophy, because Diederichs was after all a trained philosopher and a teacher in the department of philosophy. In this regard, the pertinent fact is that Diederichs's early philosophical education was framed by the reception of British Hegelianism and the "historical task" (Nash 1985) it conferred upon philosophers like T.M. Forsyth, Diederichs's first philosophy teacher. In the attempt to carve out the identity of the *volksie* and deliver an alternative "high culture" (Gellner 1983) Diederichs could not afford to reject entirely the Idealist heritage that informed British Imperialism's sense of cultural superiority. This offers a plausible interpretive framework to explain Diederichs's strong appeal to "spiritual differences" between nations and the depiction of the nation as the product of man's transcendence to a "super-individual order of unity" (Norval 1996: 79). Diederichs remained within the dialectical, developmental framework established by British Hegelianism but attempted to locate a unique space for the Afrikaner within such a process.

### **2.3 The *Broederbond* and the ANS at the GUC**

Although occupying a senior academic position at GUC, Diederichs became deeply involved with what were ostensibly student affairs. Most conspicuously, in 1933 Diederichs was instrumental in the founding of the radically nationalistic *Afrikaanse*

*Nasionale Studentebond* (ANS), and thereafter succeeded his student, P.J. Meyer, as chair of the organisation in 1934. The ANS, which was on the face of it an organisation consisting of students, representing student interests, was in fact managed by the *Broederbond* as a vehicle to work towards nationalist mobilisation in higher education institutions (Marx 2008: 169–170). In an address delivered at the first general meeting of the GUC branch of the ANS, Diederichs declared that the ANS was the most powerful movement that had ever existed in the Afrikaner student community, and that salvation of the Afrikaner nation was to be sought in this movement (Wapenskou 1935: 11).

In an account of the founding of the ANS, J.F.W. Haak<sup>66</sup>, who served as deputy chair of the organisation in 1940, notes that Diederichs acted as liaison between the ANS and the *Broederbond*. The 1940 annual report of the UCOVS branch of the ANS, possibly written by Diederichs himself, also provides a clear statement of the organisation's pursuits:

The management wishes to inform that during the last half of 1939 the ANS could not function that much directly, because all attention was focused on a struggle in the interest of the Afrikaner student at UCOVS and the Afrikaner cause in general. With certainty however can we declare that this action – to drive the policy of the UCOVS to Christian-nationalism also in practice, was inspired and backed up to the greatest extent by the power that emanated from the ANS (PV148/3/1/5).

As a student, Herman Strauss occupied an executive position in the UCOVS branch of the ANS in the early 1930s. In a student survey relating to this branch, Strauss and Diederichs are described as deeply involved in the activities of the ANS; Diederichs is

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<sup>66</sup>J.F.W. Haak was chairman of the University of Stellenbosch student council in the 1930s. He later served as minister of Mines and Planning (1964–1967) in H.F. Verwoerd's government and as Minister of Economic Affairs (1969–1974) under B.J. Vorster.

identified as always being one of the main speakers and advisers, and Strauss as an “active” member (PV148/5/1). In the same document it is noted that the ANS put its stamp on all student organisations, and that the ANS idea determines the nature and character of most of the student associations (PV148/5/1/3).

Marx points out that the ANS was one of the first organisations of Afrikaner nationalism to unequivocally support the extreme right and to more or less openly embrace the fascist order (Marx 2008: 172). The organisation published a monthly organ called *Wapenskou*,<sup>67</sup> which its members and leaders used to promote radically nationalist and fascist ideas. In an issue dating from July 1934, P.J. Meyer contributed an exceedingly sympathetic exposition of German National Socialism. He describes the movement as

... a national movement that carries the features of the German people, country and traditions. It is not a thought-out system, a theory, but an attitude to life, a *volk*-disposition (*volksgeestesindheid*). It is the expression of a spontaneous, irrational, uncalculable German *volk*-feeling (*volksgevoel*) that offers many surprises to the outsider. [...] The core feeling is the racial feeling, the core task *volksseenheid*. Each individual has a place, a unique task to fulfill in the whole. The whole is thus more than the sum of the individuals. All individuals are thus not equal, though each possesses a distinguishing value (Meyer 1934: 4).

The ANS also became involved in the ideological battle around the poor-white question, which is not surprising, given Nico Diederichs’s and Geoffrey Cronjé’s involvement in the organisation. A national ANS congress on the topic of the poor-white question was organised to take place in Bloemfontein from 27 June to 1 July 1936. Herman Strauss served as secretary of the organising committee. Speakers at the congress included H.F.

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<sup>67</sup> In English: “Weapon show”. The Afrikaans *Wapenskou* conjures the image of a display of military might by means of a parade.

Verwoerd, Nico Diederichs and Goeffrey Cronjé. In the run-up to the congress, an editorial of *Wapenskou* promoted the congress as follows:<sup>68</sup>

The socio-economic distress of our nation cannot be overestimated. No one can deny that our nation today finds itself in a condition of far-reaching social denaturing [ontaarding], deformation [verwording] and derision [veragting] [...]. The ANS believes in our nation. It believes that there is still hope, that a future still awaits, a more beautiful and better future [...]. The process of social deformation [verwordingsproses] that threatens our nation with demise must be stopped; our nation must be socio-economically saved and made strong. [...] Let us take this to the congress. We have to deliberate there on what task the social distress of our nation lays upon us and how we will tackle it (*Wapenskou* 1936: 6).<sup>69</sup>

At the congress itself, Cronjé delivered a lecture titled “Maatskaplike nood as nasionale vraagstuk” (“Social need as national question”) in which he discussed the poor white problem at length, noting the main causes, such as natural causes, individual causes (problematic persons), and social causes. Under social causes he refers to “exploitation by other nations”, and mentions the gold mines with “all the gold going to Jerusalem or London”, a clear instance of the ethnically slanted rhetoric of class struggle that was adopted by the radical nationalists in the 1930s (*Wapenskou* 1936: 4).

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<sup>68</sup> The editorial was probably written by Goeffrey Cronjé, editor of *Wapenskou* at this stage.

<sup>69</sup> “Die ekonomies-maatskaplike nood van ons nasie kan nie oorskat word nie. Niemand kan betwis dat ons nasie vandag in ’n toestand van verregeande maatskaplike ontaarding, verwording en veragting verkeer nie [...] Die ANS glo in ons nasie. Hy glo dat daar nog hoop is, dat daar nog ’n toekoms wag, ’n skone en beter toekoms. [...] Die maatskaplike verwordingsproses wat ons nasie met ondergang bedreig, moet gestuit word; ons nasie moet ekonomies-maatskaplik gered en sterk gemaak word. [...] Laat ons hiermee na die kongres toe gaan. Ons moet daar gaan beraadslag watter taak die maatskaplike nood van ons nasie ons oplê en hoe ons daardie taak sal gaan aanpak.

From the foregoing it becomes clear that as a student at GUC between 1931 and 1936 Herman Strauss was in close contact with leading figures in the *Broederbond*, and actively involved in an organisation through which the *Broederbond* advanced its radical cultural nationalist project. As we will shortly see from his letters, the poor-white question, as framed by the intellectual leaders of the ANS, apparently informed Strauss's academic interests when he continued his studies in Germany in 1937. It was more than likely Strauss's close association with the ANS and Nico Diederichs that ultimately led to his decision to pursue doctoral studies at Heidelberg University, Germany. The ANS organised several study tours to Germany during the 1930s in collaboration with the *Dietsche Studenten Verbond*; as Schutte notes, during the first tour, the group even met with Hitler through the mediation of Rudolph Hess (2005: 276). During his stay in Europe Strauss would serve as foreign correspondent for the ANS, but as we will see in the next chapter, he would soon come to view National Socialism as a potentially harmful influence on the organisation.

The extent of the Afrikaner nationalist presence at GUC is further suggested by the significant number of its faculty that were involved in the founding of the radically nationalist *Osewa Brandwag* in Bloemfontein in 1939. As A.J.H. van der Walt<sup>70</sup> records in his official history of the organisation, professors H. Van der Merwe Scholtz, D.F. Malherbe, J. De W. Keyter, J.J. Dekker and H. Arndt were among those present in Bloemfontein in 1938 when it was decided to found an organisation aimed at "uniting all Afrikaners in one mighty movement" (Van der Walt 1944: 11). Scholtz, who would become rector of UCOFS a few years later, was responsible for formulating the founding principles of the organisation, which included: "the maintenance, extension and expression

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<sup>70</sup> A.J.H. van der Walt was professor of history at the University of Potchefstroom and later became secretary of the OB.

of the language and traditions of the *boer* nation, the protection and promotion of the religious, cultural and material interests of the Afrikaner [and] the cultivation of patriotic love and pride in the nation” (Van der Walt 1944: 12).

### **3. Conclusion**

Nico Diederichs gave up his academic career in 1940 to serve as chair of the *Reddingsdaadbond*, and was succeeded as head of the department of philosophy by G.H.T. Malan. Malan’s appointment in 1940 further supports the argument introduced earlier that in contrast to Stellenbosch, for example, the GUC and the Free State lacked significant organic intellectual traditions that could form an articulation with philosophy as an academic discipline.

Malan took up the position at the relatively advanced age of 53, having previously taught philosophy at the South African College (later the University of Cape Town) from 1916 to 1936. He was a student of Alfred Hoernlé’s at the South African College in the 1910s, and his writings as a graduate student predictably reflected the influence of British Idealism (see Nash 1985); judging by his publications from the 1940s he had subsequently become a proponent of logical positivism, which superseded British Idealism as the dominant philosophical approach in Britain by the 1940s. This means that between 1911 and 1952, the department of philosophy was successively headed by a British Hegelian from Scotland, an Afrikaner nationalist with fascist sympathies and an Afrikaans-speaking logical positivist. This underscores the argument that the department largely mirrored external social, political and intellectual forces and could not lay claim to founding, or even creatively appropriating, a tradition of thought capable of critically reflecting on its own conditions of possibility and developing a distinct identity through a dynamic engagement with its larger social context.

This pattern was set to repeat itself twelve years later when the UOFS council intervened with the appointment of the neo-Calvinist, E.A. Venter. Venter, perhaps as much as Forsyth, Diederichs or Malan before him was an “import”, reflecting the recent political transformation of South African society. By the time of Venter’s appointment in 1952, however, the foundations for a more enduring articulation between philosophy as a discipline and the politics of Afrikaner nationalism had been laid by the efforts of H.J. Strauss, who had joined the GUC faculty in 1942. These efforts of Strauss are the subject of Chapter 6.

In the next chapter, however, it is necessary to first investigate Strauss’s period of study in Europe, and to reconstruct his intellectual development from his arrival in Germany in 1936 up to his return to South Africa in 1939.

## Chapter 4

### Serving the *volk* at God's feet: Herman Strauss in Germany and the Netherlands, 1937–1939

And, lastly, that whosoever rejects atheism as his fundamental thought, is bound to go back to Calvinism, not to restore its worn-out form, but once more to catch hold of the Calvinistic principles, in order to embody them in such a form as, suiting the requirements of our own century, may restore the needed unity of Protestant thought and the lacking energy to Protestant practical life.

– Abraham Kuyper, *The Stone Lectures*, p. 41.

Herman Strauss left for Germany in early 1937 to pursue doctoral studies at Heidelberg University. As argued in Chapter 3, it is highly likely that Nico Diederichs was somehow involved in Strauss's decision to go to Germany.<sup>71</sup> His correspondence with friends and family during this stay, first in Germany and later in the Netherlands, reveals a picture of his intellectual development and its relation to the evolution of Afrikaner nationalism. In this chapter, I trace the course of Strauss's intellectual development as it changed from his arrival in Germany 1937 up until his return to South Africa in 1939. The overarching theme that emerges is one of a young man in search of an intellectual tradition appropriate to what he perceived to be the challenges faced by the *Afrikanervolk*. Strauss articulated his struggle in a way that resonates with Norval's notion of the "dislocation of identity" as she uses it with reference to Afrikaner nationalist discourse.

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<sup>71</sup>Both Diederichs and J. de W. Keyter seemed to be help to students in this regard. One of Strauss's correspondents, G.C. Olivier, wrote to Strauss in 1938 to ask his advice on overseas studies, and notes having first approached "Father Nic" and "Keytertjie" for their assistance.

## 1. Best laid plans

Strauss himself offers a revealing picture of the evolution of his thinking in a letter written in 1939 to H.G. Stoker, the neo-Calvinist philosopher based at Potchefstroom University College. The letter is written towards the end of Strauss's period of overseas study and apparently concerns a contribution that Stoker had requested from Strauss for inclusion in the Potchefstroom-based neo-Calvinist journal, *Koers in die krisis*. By this time, Strauss is already intensely committed to the Calvinist cause, for as he says to Stoker in agreeing to write the piece: "Your request is a concluded contract, not signed by me, but signed by Calvinism *for me*" [emphasis in the original]. However, Strauss moves on from these practical matters to talk briefly about his studies in Amsterdam, from which it becomes clear that he established personal contact with Herman Dooyeweerd and adopted him as a mentor. Strauss then launches into a cryptic summary of his intellectual journey as it unfolded in Bloemfontein, Germany and the Netherlands. The story that he recounts here, which almost reads like a confession, provides a remarkable picture of how Strauss reflected on the relationship between his intellectual pursuits and his future role in South Africa. It is worth quoting at length:

... but allow me now to tell my story from A-Z. At U.C.O.F.S. I was mostly under the tutelage of Profs Diederichs and I.S. Fourie, because Economics and Political Philosophy were my main subjects for the B.A. On the philosophical side, I was therefore a product of pseudo Neo-Kantianism and when it came to Economics a full blood *Klassiker* with Marshall as leader. Slowly but surely, I became a salon-Nazi, and that's why I left for Germany in the beginning of 1937 – with grand plans. Marshall<sup>72</sup> and Kant were no good, because the Scripture remained in the closet,<sup>73</sup> but maybe Hitler would be able to do something about

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<sup>72</sup> Strauss was probably referring to the neoclassical English economist, Alfred Marshall (1842-1924).

<sup>73</sup> "Closet" is here used to translate the Afrikaans word "binnekamer". In this context the figurative use of the word "binnekamer" would have resonated with Matthew 6:6 in the 1933 Afrikaans translation of the Bible. "Closet" occurs as the equivalent for "binnekamer" in the King James version of the passage.

that, and moreover, a generous bursary called – which I also received, 8 months later (September 1937), when I was already settled at the *Vrije* [Free University]. In Heidelberg I quickly had to learn that Marshall and Kant were perhaps still better than the faith in Nazism. I knew about the *Vrije*, but I also knew much about Prof Diepenhorst’s works, but neither of these was a light on my road. It became a hunt to the depths. I criss-crossed my discipline but found nothing and also nothing from Prof Diepenhorst; yet I would come to the *Vrije*, because I read your work in South Africa, and I knew that apart from the wholesome atmosphere I would find here, I would also encounter Profs Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd. The scriptural-philosophical basis was lacking, and Economics remained hanging in the air – also the first few months at the *Vrije* under the guidance of Prof. Diepenhorst. In my heart the contradictions lived on and in my head they engaged in fist-fights. It had to go one way or the other with science, or I was destined to end up somewhere on a *Boereplaas*, with neutered *mofskape*, *Rooi Afrikaners*, and *melkmonwe* around me and the Word in front of me. Then there would be rest – the rest of a broken man (PV337/2/3/39).<sup>74</sup>

The letter reveals in no uncertain terms that Strauss had chosen to go to Germany because he had become sympathetic, albeit in a passive way, to German National Socialism. His admission to becoming a “salon-Nazi” was most likely a reference to his membership of the radically nationalist ANS, which, as seen from the writings of P.J. Meyer in the organisation’s official organ, *Wapenskou* (see Chapter 3, page 128), more or less openly associated with German National Socialism. Strauss would later tell his son, D.F.M. Strauss that the “generous bursary” he refers to had been facilitated by the Nazi’s.<sup>75</sup> According to D.F.M. Strauss, his father only became aware of the bursary’s dubious origins after his arrival in Germany, at which point he purportedly rejected the bursary and used his inheritance to move to Amsterdam, where he continued his studies at the Free University

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<sup>74</sup> All translations of Strauss’s letters are my own.

<sup>75</sup> D.F.M. Strauss offered this information in an e-mail (E-ilmail, 29 Augustus 2017).

(Strauss 2013: 79).<sup>76</sup> Herman Strauss makes no mention of this alleged rejection of the German scholarship in his letter to Stoker, and in light of his reasons for going to Germany (as related to Stoker) it is difficult to believe that he was entirely unaware of the bursary's origins.

The letter also lays out the main terms of the inner conflict that beset Strauss a few months after his arrival in Germany. The most intriguing aspect is Strauss's allusion to "the Scripture" (*Skrif*) that remained in the 'closet' (*binnekamer*), and the prospect that Hitler might be able to "do something about that". Considering the context, that is, a letter written in 1939 to the Afrikaans-speaking neo-Calvinist philosopher, Hendrik Stoker, the word "*binnekamer*", which I have here translated as "closet", would have clearly and powerfully resonated with Matthew 6:6 as it appeared in the 1933 Afrikaans translation of the Bible. The verse in question records part of the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus instructs his disciples how to pray:

Maar jy, wanneer jy bid, gaan in jou *binnekamer*, sluit jou deur en bid tot jou Vader wat in die verborgene is; en jou Vader wat in die verborgene sien, sal jou in die openbaar vergelde [my emphasis].

(But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy *closet*, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly (King James Version).)

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<sup>76</sup> Unfortunately D.F.M. Strauss provides no further details as to when and how his father found out about the bursary's Nazi connections; D.F.M. Strauss also does not provide a source, and it can only be assumed that his father recollected these events in his presence.

This passage has commonly been interpreted as suggesting that prayer was a private matter between the believer and God. In addition, Jesus's words suggest that God knows our most intimate and hidden thoughts. Strauss was seemingly intimating to Stoker that during his student years at the GUC, his most deeply held convictions, which related to the Word of God as revealed by the Scriptures, prevented him from fully embracing the modern intellectual currents that he encountered as a student. Marshall and Kant, emblems of enlightened modernity, were “no good” because “the Scripture (*Skryf*) remained in the closet ...”. Strauss could also have been suggesting that Marshall and Kant were “no good”, because their modernism relegated the Scripture to the “closet”, that is, because it required of Strauss that he confine his religious beliefs to the private realm.

It is difficult to understand, however, what Strauss means by the remark that “maybe Hitler would have been able to do something about that”, that is, about the Scripture that “remained in the closet”. We can only speculate that Strauss faintly hoped, initially at least, that the ideology of German National Socialism would be more accommodating to his religious commitments than the reigning theories of the emerging liberal order. As he describes it to Stoker, Strauss was clearly going through a period of uncertainty, and in retrospect he may have seen his decision to go to Germany as an attempt to find some clarity – one way or another.

When considered together with his earlier correspondence from this period, it becomes clear that for Strauss it was a question of how he could best serve the “*volk*”. As we will see shortly, this question was not settled by Hitler and landed him in the grips of a tortuous conflict between his religious beliefs and the various ideological remedies that were taken up by radicalised Afrikaner nationalism of the 1930s. Strauss's inner conflict not only amounts to a personal crisis of identity, it also resonates with the broader contemporary

problem of what intellectual traditions Afrikaners could call upon as they confronted their political enemies. First and foremost of these enemies was British Imperialism and its perceived liberalism.

Strauss left for Germany in 1937 with “grand plans”, we learn from the letter to Stoker, but he does not elaborate on what those plans were; he only offers a vague allusion to how Hitler might liberate him from “the Scripture” in a way that Kant and Marshall could not. The remainder of the letter suggests, however, that these “grand plans” concerned what role he might play as an Afrikaner intellectual upon his return to South Africa. Several earlier letters dating from his time in Heidelberg seem to confirm this suggestion. A letter to his uncle, Koos du Toit, dated 18 June 1937, provides insight into what Strauss may have admired in Hitler and German National Socialism:

Germany and Hitler! The Third Reich! One Nation, one Soil, one Blood and one leader! Brilliant for the German Nation, who have been subjected so many times, and are now, as they believe, permanently at the top. Economically and Politically an outstanding organisation in which each and every link connects perfectly. In the streets almost no people who are clothed in rags. Everybody is eating well and no one needs to be anxious that the cold winter will catch him without clothes and warm blankets. He who is still unemployed knows and trusts that his chance is on its way, and he who was unemployed and is now employed can't help but know a single word of thanks, namely, Heil Hitler! (PV33718/06/37).<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> “Duitsland en Hitler! Die Derde Ryk! Een Volk, een Bodem, een Bloed en een Leier! Pragtig vir die Duitse Nasie wat al so baie-maal onder was en nou, soos wat hulle glo, permanent bo is. Ekonomies en Polities ’n puik organisasie waarvan die een skakel presies soos elke ander een perfek hak. In die strate byna geen mense wat in vodde geklee is nie. Almal eet goed en niemand hoef meer angs te hê dat die koue Winter hom en sy huis sonder klere en warm komberse sal vang nie. Hy wat nog werkloos is en weet en vertrou dat sy kans nog aan kom is, en hy wat werkeloos [sic] was en nou werk het, hy kan nie help om net een dankwoord te ken nl. Heil Hitler! nie.”

Given the letter's overall tone and context, Strauss's seeming admiration for Hitler and the Third Reich must not be taken at face value here. In the immediately preceding paragraph, he expresses his relief in knowing, however partially, what the "Boer nation" is, and how circumspect he is about everything he encounters in Europe, first "tasting" everything before he "swallows", and sometimes not even tasting. It soon becomes clear that he harbours much doubt about contemporary circumstances in Germany. At the same time, his praise for the economic reconstruction brought about by the Nazis after the economic crises of the Weimar era suggests that he is drawing a comparison between Germany's plight after the First World War and the Afrikaner's experiences during and after the South African War.

While he clearly has sympathy and respect for the Germans' efforts at reconstruction, he qualifies this sentiment by noting that Germany's "worship" of Hitler can only be explained by the fact that the country had previously been deeply rooted in liberalism and communism. In other words, Strauss views the German people's adoration of Hitler as a disposition born from a prior deprivation, and not as something to be taken at face value. As we will see, it appears Strauss was not unaware of the possibility that the Afrikaners were similarly vulnerable to the pull of ideologies like National Socialism and fascism as a result of their own economic and social disruptions, which were also attributed to the influence of "foreign rulers", like liberalism.

Germany's economic recovery under Hitler resonated with the Afrikaner nationalist intelligentsia's growing preoccupation with the poor-white problem. H.J. Strauss would have been well acquainted with the nationalists' articulation of this issue by virtue of his membership in the ANS. It is therefore reasonable to think, in light of his positive appraisal of Germany's political and economic organisation under the Nazis, that Strauss's "grand

plans” related to scholarly pursuits in service of his further involvement in the nationalist movement, specifically in its focus on socio-economic questions. This inference seems to be supported by the fact that Strauss originally intended to study sociology at Heidelberg (18/06/1937, PV337). The institutionalisation of sociology as a discipline at South African universities was in fact closely intertwined with the heightened anxiety about the poor-white problem dating from the late 1920s. As Ally, Mooney and Stewart note, at its inception, the discipline’s task was “to provide social workers with the training and knowledge needed to address the problem of white poverty”, while it would later become “a consistent and institutionally fortified epistemic weapon in the considerable arsenal of the apartheid state” (Ally, Mooney & Stewart 2003: 71; 74). H.F. Verwoerd, the epitome of nationalist social engineering, chaired the nascent department of sociology at the University of Stellenbosch from 1933 and first gained national prominence for his analysis of the Carnegie report; G. Cronjé, infamous for his contribution to the elaboration of the apartheid idea, established sociology as discipline at the University of Pretoria. More or less concurrent with these developments in Pretoria and Stellenbosch, Strauss’s early mentors, N. Diederichs and J. De W. Keyter, had recently taken the lead in introducing sociology as a subject at GUC. Pavlich (2014: 152) describes Cronjé and Keyter as proponents of an applied, administrative sociology that was “deeply implicated in the initial enunciation, and justification, of apartheid”. Diederichs and Keyter’s efforts to introduce sociology at GUC should be considered as part of the nationalist movement’s new interest in the 1930s to address social problems with a scientific approach. Strauss’s initial desire to study sociology may well be explained by his close contact with these figures and the way they positioned the discipline within the nationalist discourse.

Straus was disappointed to learn, as he tells his uncle in June 1937, that sociology was no longer a recognised subject under the Third Reich.<sup>78</sup> As a result, he was forced to revert to economics (PV337/18/06/1937). On 12 May 1937, in a letter to Rudolph Kotzé,<sup>79</sup> the 25-year-old Strauss voiced what were now presumably his slightly altered ambitions:

After much thought and also many troubles, I threw myself into Economics once more with Political Philosophy and Civil Law as additional subjects. Economics was always my strongest subject and you will realise that I now live in my studies. My task lies clearly before me, and that is nothing less than helping to crush the Liberal Economy in South Africa (PV337/12/05/1937).

The task Strauss foresaw for himself clearly reflected his immersion in Afrikaner nationalist ideology as it was being articulated by figures such as Diederichs in the period of radicalisation that followed fusion. Hostility towards liberalism and capitalism – the “Liberal Economy” – was a ubiquitous theme in nationalist discourse. As we saw from O’Meara’s analysis, the redefinition of Afrikaner nationalism by the *Broederbond* in the northern provinces was in large part a response to the fusion of the SAP and the NP, which was in turn a response to the changing structure of South African capitalism. *Petty bourgeois* Afrikaner intellectuals were increasingly marginalised and isolated by Hertzog’s “fatal collusion with the forces of capitalism and imperialism” (O’Meara 1985: 50), that is with the “Liberal Economy” that Strauss now saw it as his task to “crush”. Strauss never

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<sup>78</sup> The subject did in fact not completely disappear, but it is true that the National Socialists thought little of the discipline, and the academic field of sociology and other subjects was thinned out by the expulsion of scholars of Jewish origin and political opponents after 1933 (Ruegg 2011: 384).

<sup>79</sup> Rudolph Kotzé was the son of the Rev. C.R. Kotzé, a minister in the DRC and known for his staunch Afrikaner nationalism and his hostility to the British Empire (see Vosloo 2014).

elaborates on how he intended to do this, except for briefly expressing an interest in the “new direction” in economics as advanced by Keynes.<sup>80</sup>

The Carnegie Commission concluded that white poverty was in large part to blame on the capitalisation of agriculture, and Strauss’s antipathy towards the liberal economy may have been based on knowledge about the report’s findings. He never mentions the report, but his upbringing in an agricultural community in the Eastern Free State will have given him a first-hand experience of the social effects of this transformation.

## **2. In search of local intellectual roots**

Strauss’s gradual disillusionment with National Socialism was accompanied from the beginning by an interest in an intellectual and political orientation that stemmed from the “Fatherland”. The letter to Rudolph Kotzé from May 1937 already reveals Strauss’s growing discomfort with “foreign” ideas as well as his desire to draw his intellectual inspiration from the world he grew up in:

[...] there is only one place where an Afrikaner can find himself, and that is in his Fatherland. Those who find themselves in foreign countries (*in die Buiteland*) and who did not undergo a rebirth in their Fatherland, have always been lost to their nation.

By the time he writes to his uncle in June 1937, he unequivocally expresses his wish to render a service to the *volk* on a *Calvinist* basis:

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<sup>80</sup> We might ask how Strauss reconciled his initial attraction to National Socialist Germany with an interest in the economic theory of John Maynard Keynes. Keynes was famously critical of the peace treaty signed at Versailles and more or less predicted the economic crisis that precipitated the rise of fascism in Germany (see Keynes 2019). Whether Strauss took note of Keynes’s arguments, or considered their relevance for South Africa can only be guessed at.

I am not studying to become a Professor. No, God willing, I will stand closer to my nation and try to serve it close to its feet, at HIS feet. The task I have set myself in my dissertation is daunting, but here I have the time to reflect and to work. God willing, I hope to point out, *on a Calvinist basis*, the direction (in my humble opinion) by which we must engage the future [my emphasis].

Thus, in spite of his admiration for the practical accomplishments of the Third Reich, Strauss sought to engage the future from what he believed to be an intellectual tradition that was rooted in the *volk*'s past. His remarks here echo H.G. Stoker's words in *Koers in die krisis* (1935), where he proposes to "free our *volk*, by means of knowledge, from the exile of modernism, liberalism, humanism, evolutionism and other alien rulers", and Strauss's understanding of Calvinism may indeed have been strongly indebted to Stoker's thought by this time.

His reference to "engaging the future" is significant here, since it implicitly acknowledges that the *volk* found itself at a historical crossroads, that the future presented a challenge, and that it demanded a particular intellectual and a spiritual grounding. For Strauss, that grounding could only be Calvinism, in so far as he considered it an intellectual tradition with an organic link to Afrikaner history. Strauss's contention in this regard, and his own relation to an indigenous Afrikaner intellectual tradition needs to be considered in more detail at this point.

The question is whether Strauss's appeal to a Calvinist basis attested to the existence of a historically continuous, robust Calvinist tradition, particular to the history of the Boer Republics, to which Strauss had access by virtue of his family's connection to the Republican past, or whether it amounted to what Hobsbawm called an "invented

tradition”, that is a “tradition” which superficially draws on elements of the past, but which is in fact articulated to serve the aims of a contemporary political project (Hobsbawm 2022).

André du Toit addresses this question in some detail, reaching the conclusion that there was no substantial evidence to support what he called the “Calvinist paradigm” of Afrikaner history (Du Toit 1983; 1985). This paradigm involved the idea that the Dutch-Afrikaner *trekboere* that settled on the frontier in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century nurtured an authentic and primitive version of Calvinism, and that this Calvinist tradition was to be decisive for the development of Afrikaner nationalist thought in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He argues that evocations of such a tradition in the writings of nationalist intellectuals like H.G. Stoker during the 1930s were indeed an instance of the invention of tradition. Du Toit argues that to the extent that a specifically “Calvinist” tradition did figure in Afrikaner thought, this could be traced to the relatively recent efforts of S.J. du Toit to introduce the neo-Calvinism of Abraham Kuyper into Afrikaner politics towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Kuyper’s neo-Calvinism found only a limited reception amongst Potchefstroom intellectuals, among whom a major figure was S.J. du Toit’s son, J.D. du Toit (Totius).

In assessing Du Toit’s argument, it is important to note the specifics: he is not claiming that Afrikaner society beyond the Orange River was completely devoid of tradition. He argues that there was no evidence that warranted the description of their traditions as specifically *Calvinist*, and that moreover could justify tracing the 20<sup>th</sup> century political ideology of Christian-nationalism to the influence of such a “Calvinist” tradition. Du Toit notes that Afrikaner “Calvinism” as it came to exist in the Boer Republics no doubt subscribed to the most basic tenets of Protestantism, for example, the doctrine of predestination. This understanding of “Calvinism” could not be claimed to stand up to a

comparison, for example, with the subtle and complex politico-theological discussions that emerged from the Puritan context of 17<sup>th</sup> century New England. Du Toit notes the immense differences between the *trekboer* societies and the Puritans:

The complex and vigorous theological tradition of the Puritans was largely self-sustaining, with ample resources in terms of educational institutions, relatively autonomous church and civil governments, forums for discussion and publication, etcetera. The New England Puritans were in the vanguard of the development of capitalist enterprise and the work ethic; and in these tightly cohesive communities, which did not recognize the liberal distinction between private and public morality, the laws of God were enforced within the family as in the community at large in a strict collective discipline (Du Toit 1985: 235).

*Trekboer* and *Voortrekker* society on the other hand was characterized by its relative cultural insularity:

Lacking regular schools, largely beyond the orbit of the organised church, denied easy access to newspapers or literature of any description, and with only the most fragmentary ties to the Cape economy, both *trekboers* and *Voortrekkers* could indeed be said to have been effectively cut off from much of the development of social thought and intellectual currents sweeping the rest of the modern world (Du Toit 1985: 216).

Du Toit rightly admits to the difficulty in establishing with any certainty what patterns of thought may have emerged in these circumstances, but emphasises that we cannot simply assume a continuity with that which pertained after the closing of the frontier; for as he notes, the coming of the railways in the 1870s and 1880s already transformed the intellectual and social conditions of this society to such an extent that even the rural communities of the 1890s lived in a much changed world.

The markedly more sophisticated “neo-Calvinist” thought that emanated from Potchefstroom during the 1930s thus had no basis in a longstanding, northern tradition of Calvinist thought. In so far as it took its immediate bearings from Abraham Kuyper, it was even less palpably the product of a continuous tradition of Calvinist thought, for Kuyper was arguably already a political innovator, who was able to revive a “Calvinism” that could find purchase in the context of a modernising Netherlands. Du Toit argues that the reception of neo-Calvinism in South Africa should be understood with reference to the highly ambiguous context of Afrikaner nationalism, which despite its orientation towards the Afrikaner past, was also a modernising movement, in the process of radically transforming Afrikaner views and traditions (Du Toit 1985: 219-220).

It is against this backdrop that I now consider Strauss’s appeal to “Boer-Calvinism” as an organic intellectual tradition capable of mediating the Afrikaners’ encounter with modernity. In June 1937, in the context of a letter dealing with the various ideological directions that presented themselves to Afrikaners at the time, Strauss writes to his uncle as follows:

We only have one weapon that we can fruitfully use in our struggle and that is Calvinism. Nationalism is necessary, but what is indispensable, is Calvinist Nationalists. All nations have Nationalists, but only the Boer nation has Calvinist-Nationalists, or rather, Boer-Calvinist Nationalists. (Holland also has Calvinists, but they are Hollanders and not Boers and their Calvinism is different from ours) (PV337/18/06/1937).

Strauss does not here elaborate on what he believes the features of this “Boer-Calvinist Nationalism” to be.<sup>81</sup> He does, however, attempt some sort of explanation in an earlier letter to Rudolph Kotzé: “[T]he Boer nation is the supreme representative of Calvinism, because it is connected to the history of his becoming, and to profoundly know what Calvinism is for the Boer, is to be a Boer oneself (PV337/12/5/37).” This admittedly limited attempt at an organic, historical account of “Boer-Calvinism” is fatally circular and suggests, more than anything else, that Strauss has no substantive conception of what “Boer-Calvinism” is. His further remarks do little to augment the picture: he declares that the Dutch can never understand Boer-Calvinism, because they “grew up too close to each other and too far from nature” (PV337/12/5/37). In other words, Boer-Calvinism is mediated by the Boers’ close relationship to nature, and the wide-open spaces of the South African Highveld. As he continues, the proposition that he does not really possess a substantive working concept of what “Boer-Calvinism” is, seems to be confirmed when he mentions his regret at not having discussed the subject more often with “Calvinist ministers” in South Africa. It would seem that Strauss has a vague notion that “Boer-Calvinism” is embedded in the church, but the remark also suggests that this tradition, to the extent that Strauss thought it to exist, was not a widely internalised way of thinking, such that it could naturally present itself as the “one weapon ... in our struggle”.

Strauss did on one occasion at least attempt to speak to a minister. This attests to the depth of his religious commitment, but at the same time to the unsatisfactory resources it offered under the circumstances. On 21 July 1937 he wrote an agonising letter to ds. D.G. van der Merwe, a minister in the Bloemfontein-West DRC congregation (*Weskerke*), whom Strauss

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<sup>81</sup>H.G. Stoker used the term “Boere-Calvinisme” in his 1942 publication, *Die Stryd om die Ordes*, to describe the basically neo-Calvinist conception that places “politics, national existence [*volksbestaan*], education, yes everything under God’s sovereignty and subject to kingship of Jesus” (Stoker 1942: 84).

apparently trusted sufficiently to confide in.<sup>82</sup> The *Weskerk* congregation was founded with the purpose of providing pastoral care for the students from the various educational institutions that were located nearby, including the GUC and the Teachers' Training College. From this letter it appears that Strauss was deeply conflicted about the relationship between his studies and his faith, and in particular what role his faith would play in public political and cultural life. He begins by referring to what in his view were the profound troubles with the church in both Germany and the Netherlands – “Germany has made a pact with the Anti-Christ and the Netherlands with the Catholics” – and then goes on to say:

When boiled down, there remains only one flicker of light for the *Boerenasie*,<sup>83</sup> and that is to return to the Bible. If the *Boerenasie* is to have any hope of a future, then it must first be willing to stand in service to its Creator. This you taught us more than once in the *Weskerk*. I only understand it now, and now I have more difficulties than ever. I believe in and accept the whole Bible as the Word of God. You know that with this point of view one already clashes with a significant part of the Church and where will this bring you in Culture and Politics? [...] You know now in what state I find myself and now I am asking for your help, because I really need it (PV337/21/7/37).

These remarks speak once more of Strauss's inner struggle to reconcile his religious convictions and his desire to serve his nation in a political and cultural arena that he considered to be hostile towards his religious views. He further believes that the sphere of culture and politics is not amenable to his beliefs about the place of the Creator in the life of the nation. According to Strauss, culture and politics are rife with anti-Christian

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<sup>82</sup> Van Der Merwe would later become a founding member and serve on the leadership council (*hoofraad*) of the radically nationalist *Ossena Brandvag* (OB).

<sup>83</sup> This refers to the Afrikaner nation, but I retain Strauss's word, since it reveals to what extent Strauss thinks of the Afrikaner nation in terms of the “Boer Republics” of the Transvaal and the Free State.

relations, and he alludes to being chastised in this area, and even rejected. Strauss does not provide any details about the people that supposedly chastised and rejected him, but he may have been referring to his friends and colleagues in the ANS, for as we will see below Strauss would soon distance himself from dominant positions within the ANS.

On another occasion Strauss describes Calvinism as the “way in which our Fathers served [God]” and then assigns it a singular place in Afrikaner history:

Only that Calvinism could console the concentration camp mother with “Thy Will be Done!” Only that Calvinism allowed the Boer nation to rise up against England and only that Calvinism allowed General De Wet to lead the rebellion (PV337/18/06/37).<sup>84</sup>

Once again, Strauss’s description of Calvinism here offers little evidence of any substantive engagement with specifically Calvinist thought. For Strauss, there was a personal dimension to this history, since his father had been captured by the British forces, and his mother had suffered the ordeal of the concentration camps. At the same time, he is invoking precisely those themes that were coming to occupy a central place in the radicalising nationalist movement of the 1930s. These themes, which recounted a “heroic age” (De Klerk 1975), characterized by successive episodes of suffering, endured in the hope of a future political salvation, expressed in the 1930s as a resurrection of the Republican past, were key elements of what Moodie (1975) referred to as the “Afrikaner civil religion”. Moodie argues that the civil religion reached a high point with the centenary celebration of the Great Trek in 1938.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> “Net daardie Calvinisme kon die Konsentrasiekampmoeder laat berus met “Uw Wil Gesschiede!” Net daardie Calvinisme kon die Boerenasie teen Engeland laat optrek en net daardie Calvinisme kon Genl. de Wet die rebellie laat lei”.

<sup>85</sup> Du Toit (1983) argues that both Moodie and De Klerk adopted the “Calvinist paradigm” of Afrikaner history, and that their interpretations of Afrikaner nationalism to some degree already accepted the historical premises engendered by the nationalists themselves. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to

In light of Strauss's vague conception of "Boer-Calvinism" as suggested by his correspondence it seems reasonable to suggest that his appeal thereto must be understood as appropriation of and further contribution to the "invention of tradition" and not as reflecting a widely internalised, specifically Calvinist intellectual heritage on his part. Strauss's invocation of a "Boer-Calvinism" should rather be understood as an expression of a nationalist consciousness, which as Du Toit notes, is "[t]ypically preoccupied with the genesis of an 'authentic' national tradition to be differentiated from all outside agencies or foreign influences" (Du Toit 1985: 219)

This aspect of nationalist consciousness speaks clearly from Strauss's further reflections on Calvinism as a life-view that is to be distinguished from the life-views of other nations: "National Socialism is more than an Economic and Political Organisation. It is a life-view, just like Liberalism and just like Calvinism. Add to that Communism and Fascism (Italy) and we have all the isms that are different from Calvinism." According to Strauss, the difference between these "-isms" is determined by the place God occupies within each. All "-isms" except Calvinism are characterized by the distorted nature of their relationship to God. In fact, all "-isms" except for Calvinism serve one or the other idol, for example, the nation (PV337/18/06/37). These different life-views constitute the unique nature of different nations:

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evaluate the competing historical claims of Du Toit, Moodie and De Klerk. It may be mentioned however, that it is possible to accept Du Toit's claim that there is no evidence to suggest the existence of a sophisticated tradition of specifically *Calvinist* thought, comparable to the Puritan context in New England for example, while at the same time recognising that in so far as any continuous politico-theological tradition did exist, "Calvinism", broadly understood, was an important point of reference.

They [other nations] are the creation of God, just like we are, but each to his own nature, with his own calling and a task [...] It is precisely these life-views which make up our unique nature, but now the life-views of two other nations are hindering us in fulfilling our task and our unique nature. Today these are Liberalism and Communism in S.A (PV337/18/06/37).

The idea that all nations are the creations of God, each with its own calling and task, was a central tenet of Christian-nationalist ideology both within the thought of the “Scripturalists”, where Stoker was the central figure, and within the integral nationalism of Diederichs. Given Strauss’s close contact with Diederichs at GUC, it is possible that he was one source of Strauss’s ideas in this regard. H.G. Stoker would later develop this conception of the different life-views in more detail in his book *Die Stryd om die Ordes* (1942). Norval’s reading of Stoker is also relevant for Strauss; as she notes, “the identity of Afrikanerdom was thus given insofar as it could be distinguished from a series of ‘others’” (Norval 1996: 70). In other words, in his attempt to give political content to Calvinism, Strauss must do so by distinguishing it from liberalism and communism.

It was also in this context that he started to distance himself from National Socialism. He argues that Germany succeeded in destroying the twin “plagues” of liberalism and communism by resorting to National Socialism. He expresses the concern, however, that the “young turks” in the National Party (he names Albert Hertzog) might also resort to a “foreign weapon”, such as fascism, to combat liberalism and capitalism. Strauss considers National Socialism another “foreign weapon” and fears that after the battle has been won, these alien weapons will turn against their masters, and so continue the cycle of foreign rule (PV337/18/06/37).

Strauss thus came to believe that the ideological direction of the ANS needed to change in favour of a “Calvinist” conception of nationalism, this despite the fact that he apparently still had only the vaguest notion of what this might entail. In a letter to J. van den Berg, chairman of the GUC students’ representative council between 1934 and 1936, Strauss expresses his doubts about the direction taken by the ANS, and voices his alternative vision for the organisation:

I tend to think that the ANS should change or augment its Constitution and therewith its entire ambition and contents. Calvinism must replace Christian Nationalism and the first and highest goal must be to teach the people what a life-view and attitude is, what Calvinism is, the life-view of the Boer nation, and then what all other –isms are, with preference to Liberalism and National Socialism. Communism can come last, since it is not such a wolf in sheep clothing (PV337/26/06/37).<sup>86</sup>

Around the same time, he directed a strong warning to the ANS leadership:

Know that what you have here is unadorned heathendom. Let the ANS be wakeful and keep its eye on all connections that we have with the current Germany. It has become time to consider whether the ANS can still send people to study in Germany. The Universities over there have become a propaganda institute for National Socialism. I think especially for the social sciences (quoted in Schutte 2005: 278).

Judging from ANS members like Piet Meyer’s adoration of German National Socialism, it is possible that Strauss’s strong opinions made him unpopular within the organisation.

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<sup>86</sup> “Dis vir my al of die A.N.S. sy Grondwet en daarmee sy hele strewe en inhoud moet verander (of vermeerder). Calvinisme moet Christelike Nasionalisme vervang en die eerste en hoogste strewe moet wees om die mense te leer wat ’n lewensbeskouing en -houding is, wat Calvinisme is, die lewensbeskouing van die Boerenasie, en dan wat alle ander –ismes is, met voorkeur an Leberalisme [*siz*] en Nasionaalsosialisme. Kommunisme kan maar laaste kom aangesien dit nie so ’n wolf in skaapklere is nie”.

Indeed, as Schutte (2005: 278) points out, Strauss's warnings were not heeded, and the programme of the Fourth Dietsche Study Tour undertaken by the ANS from 4 December 1937 to 27 February 1938 included visits to several universities in the German Rhineland.

Strauss's determination to remain true to the Calvinist life-view of the Boer nation did not deter him from his ambition to serve the *volk* by means of knowledge. Writing to Rudolph Kotzé, he expresses his resolve to remain a Boer, and to write his dissertation from this perspective, that is by thinking like a Boer, and not a *Boergevinde Uitlander* [a Boer who has adopted foreign ideas]. He adds however, that "in order to at least be a scientific Boer" he requires the Calvinist literature.

The reference to being a "scientific Boer" is illuminating. It suggests that Strauss sought to reconcile being a "Boer" with scientific knowledge, or put differently, that he sought to reconcile a "traditional" identity with a certain imperative to modernise; it further appears that Strauss ardently hoped that Calvinism would be the intellectual orientation that could achieve this reconciliation. The "Boer-Calvinism" he had thus far appealed to, however, seemed to offer little more than the emotional appeals to the Republican past, and the equally ill-grounded conception of an Afrikaner life-view. Strauss would only find the answers he was looking for when he left Germany for the Netherlands.

### **3. Finding solace at the Free University**

It is not clear exactly when Strauss decided to move his studies to the Free University in Amsterdam. Initially at least, he planned to travel to the Netherlands for personal reasons. His fiancée, Heleen Malherbe, the daughter of D.F. Malherbe, met him in The Hague, where they would get married. The fact that he was soon to become the son-in-law of D.F. Malherbe, a prominent figure in the nationalist movement, and founding member of the

first Bloemfontein branch of the *Broederbond*, is further evidence of Strauss's close ties to the Afrikaner nationalist intelligentsia during this period.

Speaking of his bride to be he confides to J. van den Berg that "that quiet girl is responsible for much that I still am and later may mean" (PV337/26/06/37). As for the couple's reasons to get married in Europe, far from family and friends, Strauss explains to his uncle: "All the causes may be succinctly summarised by saying that I thought it best not to languish alone out here in the unknown" (PV337/18/06/37). The marriage took place on 11 August 1937 in The Hague. As late as 26 June 1937 the plan was still to return to Heidelberg, but at some point during their stay in the Netherlands their plans changed.

There is no available correspondence for the greater part of Strauss's stay in the Netherlands after leaving Germany 1937. As we saw, Strauss briefly relates the whole saga in his 1939 letter to Stoker: after becoming disenchanted with German National Socialism, Strauss enrolled at the Free University in Amsterdam. It is possible that he was already well enough acquainted with Stoker's work to hope that the Free University would satisfy his desire for a Calvinist intellectual grounding.

The Free University was one of the most significant achievements of Abraham Kuyper's neo-Calvinist movement. Neo-Calvinism was briefly discussed in Chapter 1 as one of the intellectual traditions that informed the development of Afrikaner nationalism in the early 1930s. Abraham Kuyper, a Reformed minister and leader of the Anti-Revolutionary party, spearheaded the neo-Calvinist movement as a continuation of Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer's views. Groen identified the French Revolution with a radical rejection of God in the name of a secular religion, and advocated for a return to anti-revolutionary, Christian principles in public life. Kuyper depicted the movement as grounded in the "Calvinist

world and life view,” with which he wished to emphasise its broader cultural ambitions and distinguish it from Reformational theology in the narrower sense of the word. As Wolters notes, for Kuyper,

Calvinism was not just a theology but a total view of all life and the world which had direct implications for every area of human affairs. It was the task of Calvinists to work out those implications not only in their ecclesiastical and personal lives but also in every other area of culture, including that of the university and scholarship. It was Calvinism as world and life view which provided the transforming vision that undergirded, motivated and inspired Christian action on every front (Wolters 1985: 2–4).

The neo-Calvinist movement accordingly endeavoured to secure a rightful place for a reformed, Christian approach to all spheres of cultural life, which included, most prominently, politics and education. The Free University was the product of this endeavour, and this was where Herman Strauss now found himself.

At first, Strauss continued his studies in economics. He was however not entirely satisfied with his promotor, Prof. Diepenhorst, whose work still did not provide the longed-for clarity.

It became a hunt to the depths. I searched my subject from corner to corner, but found nothing [...] The Scriptural-philosophical base was lacking and Economics remained hanging in the air [...] In my heart the contradiction lived on, and in my head a fist-fight raged. A decision had to be reached so far as science was concerned ...” (PV337/02/03/39).

Sometime after this period of wavering, Strauss decided to enrol for jurisprudence with Herman Dooyeweerd. This proved to be the decisive moment:

I quieted myself and made a start with the three thick volumes [*De Wijsbegeerte van de Wetsidee*] that I previously didn't feel man enough to take on. After hard work, in which paging back and paging back was the order of the day, and faithful prayers, the light pierced through and Heleen and I decided to set up house, because now it would take time before I had enough to return with to the Fatherland. Not anymore to the *Boereplaas* [Boer farm], but to the front. So God willed it! To be his co-worker [...] also in science (PV337/02/03/39).<sup>87</sup>

The encounter with Dooyeweerd finally brought a resolution to inner conflict between the demands of modernisation, and Strauss's religious commitments. Now Strauss was on his way to acquiring what he needed to return to the Fatherland not as a *boer*, but as someone who could serve his *volk* by means of knowledge – knowledge moreover that was no longer at odds with what he ostensibly viewed as the Boer life-view. Strauss's decision to further his studies in Europe with the clear intention of applying this knowledge in service of the *volk* suggests that he longed to embrace modernity; at the same time he may have anticipated the risks this held for traditional Afrikaners. From these remarks it appears that Dooyeweerd provided the bridge between tradition and modernity that Strauss's Calvinist Nationalism required.

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<sup>87</sup> “Ek het stil geword en weggeval met die drie dik boeke wat ek voorheen nie mans genoeg voor gevoel het nie. Na harde werk, waarin terugblaaï en terugblaaï aan die orde van die dag was, en getroue gebede het die lig begin skyn en het Vroutjie en ek besluit om maar 'n huis op te sit want nou sou dit somar baie lank duur voor ek genoeg het om mee terug te gaan na die Vaderland. Nou nie meer na die boereplaas nie, maar na die front. So het God dit beskik! Mede-arbeider van Hom te wees [...] ook in die wetenskap.”

The new environment clearly agreed with Herman Strauss, and it appears that he was able to articulate the political import of his presence at the Free University to fellow South Africans in Amsterdam. Elisabeth Conradie, a lecturer in Afrikaans at UCOVS who was visiting Amsterdam in 1938, had the following to say about Strauss after a social visit:

Herman is developing beautifully. I have high expectations of him as political scientist when one day again it becomes our turn to govern. *That* we will have our turn once more, I never doubt – the question is only *when*. I predict that we will call out a Republic within ten years if only we could get in ten such educated Afrikaans intellectuals at the next election (quoted in Schutte 2005: 314).<sup>88</sup>

A single letter from 1937 and several from early 1939 provide some detailed insights into Strauss's intellectual development in Amsterdam. By 7 November 1937, Strauss was already well immersed in Kuiperian neo-Calvinism as developed by Dooyeweerd. This transpires from a feverish letter to P.W. Botha, Strauss's mother's second cousin, who would later become leader of the NP and executive State President of the Republic of South Africa. Strauss writes: "Now, for the first time, I have discovered material that I would really like to put in your hands. In brackets, if you encounter the works of S.J. du Toit, don't pass them by. He was the first man who tried to introduce us to Calvin and Kuyper." (PV337/07/11/1937)

By this time, Strauss seems to have become more knowledgeable about the reception of neo-Calvinism in South Africa, but there is unfortunately no evidence to suggest that he

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<sup>88</sup> "Herman ontwikkel pragtig. Ek het hoë verwagtings van hom as staatkundige as ons eendag weer aan die beurt kom om te regeer. *Dat* ons weer aan die beurt sal kom, betwyfel ek nooit – die vraag is maar net *wanneer*. Ek voorspel dat ons binne tien jaar 'n Republiek uitroep as ons net tien sulke gestudeerde Afrikaanse intellektueles by die volgende verkiesing kan inkry".

ever tried to reconcile this newfound knowledge with his earlier appeals to Boer-Calvinism. Strauss impresses on P.W. Botha that he should come to the Free University and study Calvin and all that is Calvinist. Strauss then launches into a long and rambling account of what he had learnt up to that point regarding the history of Western science as interpreted by his recently discovered Calvinist teachings. It is worth quoting this section at length, since Strauss here sets forth in broad terms the Kuyper-inspired neo-Calvinist view of science, which was further developed by Dooyeweerd, and remained the basis of Strauss's thinking throughout his academic career:

The history of western science is the history of the struggle between uniformity and pluriformity. Uniformity works with recipes; pluriformity with life principles.

The heathen sciences were unable to grasp the pluriformity of creation, because they did not operate under the special grace of God. That is to say, Humanism, which is the father of all -isms of today, stood blind towards the work of God. As such, Humanism put the emphasis on mortal life and proclaimed itself a god. The *I* became everything and with that everything was ready for the downhill-race that followed. Today we are stuck in the mud and bushes of this heathen quagmire.

Because man no longer asked what God said, but said, so said I, everything went wrong and all of life was made uniform [...] The conception of life was lost and science unravelled life, cut it into pieces. Specialisation became the order of the day and Theologians, Engineers, Doctors, Philosophers, Economists, Political Scientists, Ethicists and Pedagogues, etc. ... unravelled in neat chains like the woollen threads from a motley robe. When the last fibre fell apart all was destroyed; no, then the disciplines, each with his own thread stepped into the world and shouted out, each as loud as the next: life is green; life is red; is black; etc. ... life is Reason; life is Feeling; life is Mystique, is Suffering; is Love; is Struggle – survival of

the fittest; is thesis-antithesis to synthesis. The robe could not be mended by their shouting. They killed; sinned and all the blowing could not return life to anyone of their mummies.

Thesis, antithesis to synthesis: Horse, Donkey to Mule. A mule can kick into perpetuity [*Al skop 'n mul tot weersiens toe*], but a foul is out of the question. Here life is violated and dead.

[...]

Now you see uniformity; death. That is why we are forced to choose between the free market and protectionism; Individualism and Socialism; Egoism and Altruism; Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism, etc. ... That is why the woman is the antithesis of the man; the child towards the adult, etc. ...

No, that is not how God created it, and if we bring this about, we commit murder; sin; kill.

In Creation there are no extremes from which golden means are born. There is pluriform-diversity in harmony through unity. Only Calvinism knows this, accepts this and lives it ...

Diversity and Uniformity; Right and Wrong; Truth and Lie; Life and Death. In the final pair this is the clearest, namely, that there is no synthesis, because where is the relation between life and death? You either live, or you are dead. Two things are not opposed here, no, there is only one thing here, namely, Diversity, Right, Truth and Life ...

Now you realise how confused everything is. This is the time we are living in; our dead period. We cannot mend what they have unravelled – only God can create. We have to start from the beginning, that is, with LIFE and not with DEATH. With everything, not with nothing (PV337/07/11/37).

Strauss's writing is frantic; one has the impression of someone who is brimming with ideas, and his enthusiasm is palpable; clearly, the neo-Calvinist conception of modern science offered him a satisfactory explanation of the inner contradictions he had been battling. Strauss, however, does not seem to notice the contradictions within the system he is describing, for at the same time that he is criticising modern science for cutting up the phenomena it seeks to explain, admonishing against making use of recipes and dividing up the world into extremes, he sets up a series of dichotomies that are just as absolute as those he takes issue with, namely: diversity/uniformity; right/wrong; truth/lie, and life/death.

Strauss's writing here is a remarkable example of the characteristic response to what Griffin (2007) calls the widespread "nomic crisis" that enveloped the Western world since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. This sense of crisis was precipitated by the widespread disruption caused by the capitalist, scientific, technological and liberal revolutions, and engendered a number of social revitalisation movements that were aimed at fulfilling "timeless longings" for "wholeness", "the totality of life" and "fixed reference points in a changing world" (Berger quoted in Griffin 2007: 176).

As I briefly suggested in Chapter 1, Kuyperian neo-Calvinism can be viewed as a form of political modernism as described by Griffin (2007), which entails a rebellion against the real or imagined traumas of modernity in the name of an alternative modernity. For Strauss, "humanism" is the ultimate source of modernity's decadence and decay, the source of reality's "unravelling" into different threads. The appeal of Dooyeweerd's philosophy for Strauss appears to be what Griffin may have called its "programmatic modernism", that is, the attempt to counter and retool the disorder and ambivalence unleashed by modernity.

The modernism of Strauss's thinking lies in his characterization of humanist thought as disorderly, or decadent. As Bauman (1992) points out, the modernist obsession with order occurs in response to the ambivalence brought on by modernity (see Griffin 2007). Reading Strauss's confused remarks regarding thesis, antithesis and synthesis, and witnessing his exasperation at the binary concepts of dialectical thinking, it appears that his real issue here is with ambivalence and dialectics. The problem with uniformity for Strauss is not simply that it destroys diversity, but rather the relationship it sets up between different entities. Most emphatically, he is against the "unravelling" of reality into different threads which then compete for supremacy. Much of his concern seems focussed on the disorderliness of it all, the proliferation of concepts and the synthetic creatures of the dialectic, that is, the distortion of the proper relationship between different things.

The Calvinist notion of pluriformity and diversity rejects this unravelling and illegitimate transformations; it rejects difference as a relational concept, that is, as a relation between different entities that could precipitate a mutual transformation or synthesis. His reference to the sterility of mules – a crossbreed between a horse and donkey – is especially pertinent: for Strauss, the sterility of the mule signifies the violation perpetrated by all syntheses; these mixtures cannot bring forth new life.

What is perhaps also rejected here is difference as a temporal concept: the experience of social dislocation that was brought on by the Afrikaners' encounter with industrialisation, urbanisation and proletarianization, can be described as an experience of the "annihilation of space by time" (see Harvey 1989: 222): the experience of rapid historical change is experienced as an unravelling of the order of things, the unstoppable transformation of one thing into another. The philosophy that Strauss encountered at the Free University offered him a perspective through which he could intellectually stall this transformation.

In Strauss's words, the neo-Calvinist perspective does not accommodate "extremes from which golden means are born. There is pluriform diversity in harmony through unity". In other words, the relationship between different entities is fixed, and each is assigned its particular place in the harmonious whole. "[We do not know] a relationship between something and nothing; no mules; <sup>89</sup> no Fusion [*Samesmelting*]; no syntheses" (PV337/07/11/37). Strauss's capitalised reference to "Fusion" [*Samesmelting*] inadvertently recalls the political developments that brought to life the United Party in 1934, an event which was of major significance in the development of the nationalist movement. There is no concrete indication that Strauss intends to make a direct political reference here, but his capitalisation of "*Samesmelting*" is suggestive. Earlier references to the fraught choice between nationalism and cosmopolitanism, individualism and socialism, etc., also show that the political implications of these philosophical questions were not far from his mind. It is therefore not entirely implausible that Strauss's rejection of *fusion* as a philosophical concept will also have had a political resonance for his correspondent (P.W. Botha). It was also precisely this notion of pluriformity and diversity that J.D. du Toit (Totius) would later employ in his justification of apartheid (Dubow 1995).

A few months later, on 23 April 1938, Strauss seemingly felt confident enough in his new philosophical grounding to write a letter to N.J. van der Merwe, leader of the NP in the Orange Free State, and to share with him his concerns regarding the NP's shortcomings with regards to a proper "Christian" understanding of the state. Strauss was aware that Van der Merwe had also completed a doctorate at the *Vrije Universiteit* and acknowledges him as one of the "true leaders of the *Volk*", who had naturally drawn Strauss to the NP. In this letter too, Strauss identifies what he sees as the major forces contending for power

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<sup>89</sup>I.e., no crossbreeds.

in South Africa: liberal Imperialists, national socialists (fascists) and communists, the last two of which he views as being fundamentally the same. He then impresses on the provincial NP leader that “Calvinism” is the only viable direction for the “Boerenasie” (PV337/23/04/1938).

In March 1939, Strauss had been studying at the Free University for more than a year. By now, he seems to have mastered Dooyeweerd’s philosophy, as we learn from a letter to Rudolph Kotzé written on the same day as the letter to Stoker (2 March 1939). Strauss’s tone here is measured and confident, and his formulation precise, as he emphasises to Kotzé that philosophy is not something abstract, but something real:

It is in fact your religious life-view systematised into scientific forms in order that you may approach your discipline in light of your life-view, your philosophy, which in your case must and shall be Calvinist philosophy if you wish to view reality through the lens of Scripture (PV337/02/03/39).

The notion that philosophy is a person’s “religious life-view systematised into scientific forms” already suggests a much more comprehensive understanding of the philosophy of the cosmomic idea. Strauss conveys this thought to Kotzé with evident certainty, which suggests that he has by now managed to overcome the disquiet and confusion attested to in his earlier letters. Calvinist philosophy has apparently provided Strauss with the means to reconcile science with his religious life-view: Calvinist philosophy translates Scripture into scientific forms. Strauss elaborates this conception to Kotzé in a way that is illuminating for our understanding of his future endeavours:

Reality, the so-called cosmos, is created by God. Our task is to submit earth to our control. The Scriptures are the special Revelation that He gives us in order to know and understand so that we may tackle and attempt to perform this earthly task of controlling-forming [*beheersende-vormingsarbeid*] labour according to his Will and Laws. Every discipline ... is but one aspect of this complete reality, and all disciplines are integrated by philosophy. Science is always abstract precisely because we must first separate this reality into its different aspects in order to grasp it. Every discipline therefore articulates but only part of reality and only philosophy combines all the parts into a meaningful whole ... Therefore, if he wants to see reality as a whole, as well as the place of his discipline within this whole, no special scientist should neglect the study of philosophy ... Every philosophy is based on a faith, a religion, and so ours is based on the Calvinist religion.

These remarks amount to a concise account of neo-Calvinist philosophy as developed by Herman Dooyeweerd, and they provide support for the overarching argument of the first four chapters of this thesis, namely, that Strauss's appropriation of neo-Calvinist philosophy should be understood in the context of the radicalisation of Afrikaner nationalism and its embrace of a modernistic standpoint in the 1930s.

Strauss has apparently accepted the modernistic view that knowledge amounts to power over reality, albeit within the framework of neo-Calvinist philosophy. Man's task is to submit earth to his control; the Scriptures provide us with the understanding that is required to perform this task according to God's will. Philosophy integrates our abstract knowledge of the separate disciplines into an integrated whole, and thus mediates between our faith and our approach to science; philosophy is therefore the discipline that uniquely comprehends the relationship between our earthly task and our faith.

It is significant that the “earthly-task” is here described in terms of “controlling-forming” labour. As we will see in the next Chapter, “controlling-forming” labour is for Dooyeweerd the irreducible meaning kernel of the historical aspect of reality. This means that historical action is primarily conceived according to the model of fabrication, that is, of the artisan that freely designs a project and executes it by means of the transformation of raw material. Furthermore, it suggests that the “earthly-task” holds a privileged relationship to the historical dimension of existence. History is thus conceived as the enactment of a plan according to God’s will. Apart from providing an understanding of science that Strauss could reconcile with his religious beliefs, neo-Calvinist philosophy thus also related the reconciliation between religion and science to a historical task. Dooyeweerd herewith allowed Strauss to be “unreservedly modern and unashamedly Christian” (see Zuidervaart 2004: 72).

There is also evidence of a final break with Nico Diederichs around this time. By March 1939, in the same letter that Strauss unburdens himself to Stoker, he mentions a visit from Diederichs:

Five days before our discussion with Prof. V [Vollenhoven] I had a three and a half hour talk with Prof. Diederichs about this philosophy [the philosophy of the cosmological idea] and about Calvinism in general. As you probably know he is currently studying in Berlin and is therefore immersing himself in the philosophy and the political philosophy [*staatsleer*] of the Nazis. We have radical differences and he believes that our *volk* is ripe for Nazism but not for Calvinism (PV337/02/03/1939).<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> This confirms accounts by both Wilkens and Strydom (2012: 76) and Stals (2021: 116-117) regarding the reasons for Diederich’s visit to Germany during this time.

At this point, a further dimension to Strauss's embrace of neo-Calvinist philosophy comes into view. As we have seen, British Imperialism came to the fore as the primary enemy in the articulation of Afrikaner nationalist discourse. As shown with reference to Nash's work on philosophy and colonialism (1985), philosophically speaking, British Imperialism embraced the Hegelian philosophy of history as interpreted by the British Idealists, because this philosophy not only provided a comprehensive account of the historical process, it also allowed the British Empire to locate itself at the vanguard of Western civilization. In order for Afrikaner philosophers from the north to successfully confront British Imperialism at the ideological level, it had to be able to draw on an intellectual orientation that had its own claims to being "scientific", while also meeting British Imperialism's claim to occupying a privileged place in the unfolding of the historical process. At the same time, they needed to be able to differentiate this position from British Imperialism and establish an organic link with the Afrikaner past. Neo-Calvinist philosophy arguably met all of these requirements.

Strauss returned to South Africa some time between March and November 1939. The Union's contested decision in September 1939 to join the war on the side of Britain and its allies had repercussions for South Africa's domestic politics. This development was a deciding factor in the galvanisation of nationalist ideology and the development of the apartheid plan between 1939 and 1948. During this period, Strauss would take up the cause for Boer-Calvinist nationalism as a lecturer at his alma mater. A comment by Michael Walzer regarding the impact of Calvinist discipline and organisation on certain individuals in the 16<sup>th</sup> century is perhaps also applicable to the Herman Strauss that returned from the Netherlands:

Of them it seems fair to say that they were the creations of an ideology, that they were somehow reshaped, their energy channelled and controlled by the new discipline. The pious and rigorous routine of their lives brought them a sense of self-assurance, which was the end of alienation and which in politics often looked very much like fanaticism (Walzer 1965: 30).

Before we investigate Strauss's attempts to establish neo-Calvinist philosophy at the University College of the Orange Free State, the next chapter will provide a more detailed exposition of the main exponent of neo-Calvinist philosophy at the Free University, Strauss's mentor and later friend, Herman Dooyeweerd.

## Chapter 5

### The philosophy of the cosmomic idea

The law is the profound and immutable nature of the existent, and as such alone makes science possible.

– Stoker, *Die Nuwere Wysbegeerte aan die Vrije Universiteit*, p. 19.

As soon as logic as a movement of thought – and not as necessary control of thinking – is applied to an idea, this idea is transformed into a premise. Ideological world explanations performed this operation long before it became so eminently fruitful for totalitarian reasoning. The purely negative coercion of logic, the prohibition of contradictions, became “productive” so that a whole line of thought could be initiated, and forced upon the mind, by drawing conclusions in the manner of mere argumentation.

– Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, p. 470.

In the preceding chapters I argued that H.J. Strauss’s embrace of Dooyeweerd’s neo-Calvinist philosophy should be understood in the context of what Norval calls the “dislocation of identity” experienced by Afrikaners during the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the subsequent radicalisation of Afrikaner nationalism in 1930s. In Chapter 4 I turned to Strauss’s personal correspondence as I attempted to reconstruct a picture of his intellectual development during his period of study in Germany and the Netherlands, which led to an enthusiastic embrace of the “philosophy of the cosmomic idea” as elaborated by Herman Dooyeweerd during the 1920s and 1930s. Strauss’s letters provide a rudimentary introduction to Dooyeweerd’s thought and are suggestive as to which elements made a particular impression on him. Strauss’s correspondence further reveals that upon his return to South Africa, he soon set to work advocating for Dooyeweerd’s

philosophy at his alma mater, the University College of the Orange Free State. In Chapter 6 and 7 respectively, I reconstruct an account of how neo-Calvinist philosophy became established in the department of philosophy and the department of political philosophy and examine how the Bloemfontein neo-Calvinists drew on Dooyeweerd's philosophy in their justification of apartheid. In order to do so, however, it is first necessary to acquire a more precise understanding of Dooyeweerd's thought through an introduction to Dooyeweerd's "philosophy of the cosmonomic idea."

This purpose is qualified by being mainly intended to engage with selected writings of the Bloemfontein neo-Calvinists. In other words, not to offer a contemporary introduction to, or critique of Dooyeweerd's extensive body of work on the philosophy of the cosmonomic idea, which is beyond the scope of this study, but to investigate a certain historical engagement with it. My focus is the relationship between Afrikaner nationalism and institutionalised philosophy at the University of the Free State. The philosophy of the cosmonomic idea is a significant element in this relationship due to its appropriation by the Bloemfontein neo-Calvinists and my exposition of Dooyeweerd is accordingly limited by that mediation. The texts by H.J. Strauss and E.A. Venter that I discuss in subsequent chapters invoke certain themes of Dooyeweerd's thought more strongly than others, and my exposition is further narrowed by the focus of their work.

These constraints notwithstanding, I will draw attention to a number of important criticisms of the philosophy of the cosmonomic idea, notably in Conradie (1960) and more recently, Zuidervaart (2004), which are relevant to my line of thinking. These critical questions illuminate aspects of Dooyeweerd's thought that are relevant to the political meaning it assumed in the context of institutional philosophy at the University of the Free State between 1948 and 1976.

The chapter is structured as follows: the first part briefly situates Dooyeweerd's thought within a broader intellectual and social context, and then proceeds with a discussion of what is widely considered as the most significant influence on Dooyeweerd's philosophy, namely, Abraham Kuyper's conception of the Calvinist world and life-view. The second part consists of a systematic introduction to Dooyeweerd's thought in the qualified sense described above.

### **1. The intellectual and social context of Dooyeweerd's thought**

Dooyeweerd was born in Amsterdam in 1894 and lived till 1977. This makes him the intellectual contemporary of leading philosophers originating from Europe such as Martin Heidegger (1889–1976), Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951), Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900–2002), Herbert Marcuse (1898–1979), Theodor W. Adorno (1903–1969), Max Horkheimer (1895–1973) and Hannah Arendt (1906–1975), to name only a few. Dooyeweerd can therefore be situated within the milieu of European philosophy that confronted the effects of and wide-ranging crises brought on by both World Wars. Dooyeweerd himself and many of his adherents considered the philosophy of the cosmonomic idea to be a uniquely compelling rejoinder to those intellectual currents which were viewed as either complicit in or unable to coherently confront the many crises that beset the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For Dooyeweerd, foremost amongst these intellectual trends to be countered was historicism, due to its purported weakening of normative conceptions of cultural development.

In Reformational circles the value of Dooyeweerd's philosophical output is considered comparable to that of his celebrated contemporaries. His extensive, integrated system of thought has been compared to the work of Jacques Maritain and Bernard Lonergan in philosophy, that of Paul Tillich in theology, Arnold Toynbee in history and Talcott Parsons

and Pitrikin Sorokin in social theory (McIntire 1985: xi). He is further described as “a leader among philosophers of all schools of thought” in the Netherlands and for originality he has been compared to Baruch Spinoza (McIntire 1985: xi). Dooyeweerd’s past stature in Dutch academic life also seems beyond dispute: he was president of the Royal Dutch Society of the Philosophy of Law for several years, a member of the Royal Society of Arts and Sciences of the Netherlands from 1948 until his death, co-founder in 1936 and editor of the journal *Philosophia Reformata*<sup>91</sup> until his death, and twice rector of the Free University of Amsterdam (McIntire 1985: xi). In his home country, his intellectual legacy is at present still institutionally acknowledged by the existence of the Dooyeweerd Chair in Christian Philosophy located in the department of philosophy at the Free University. Outside of the Netherlands, Dooyeweerd’s philosophical legacy notably endures at the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto, Ontario as well as the Albert M. Wolters Centre for Christian Scholarship at Redeemer University in Hamilton, Ontario. In South Africa, a few scholars mostly, but not exclusively affiliated with the North-West University in Potchefstroom still broadly work within the neo-Calvinist tradition.

It is beyond the scope of this study to provide a detailed account of Dooyeweerd’s intellectual development or the social context in which it took place.<sup>92</sup> However, at least two major influences need be mentioned here. First, the philosophy of the cosmonomic idea was deeply influenced by the neo-Calvinist movement that took shape under Abraham Kuyper in the Netherlands during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As Wolters (1985) points out, this influence was more than intellectual or philosophical: Dooyeweerd’s social and cultural milieu was permeated by this movement, and ultimately “the uniqueness of Dooyeweerd

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<sup>91</sup> The journal was dedicated to the publication of scholarly work in the neo-Calvinist tradition. South African neo-Calvinist thinkers like H.G. Stoker, E.A. Venter and H.J. Strauss contributed articles and served as editorial associates.

<sup>92</sup> See Verburg (1989) for a detailed intellectual and personal biography of Dooyeweerd.

among twentieth-century philosophers lies in the vigour and persistence with which he carried out the neo-Calvinist program in philosophy” (1985: 16). Secondly, as far as academic, or institutionalised philosophy is concerned, Dooyeweerd specifically mentions the neo-Kantian schools, which prevailed in German academic philosophy from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, together with Husserl’s phenomenology, as significant early influences on his thought (Dooyeweerd 1984a). The details of Dooyeweerd’s engagement with neo-Kantian philosophy and phenomenology is beyond the scope of this thesis, but a few remarks concerning the broader intellectual context is useful.

Dooyeweerd’s major work, *De Wijsbegeerte der Wetsidee*, was published between 1935 and 1936. Its main elements had already been taking shape in the mid-1920s, a period during which neo-Kantian philosophy rapidly diminished in stature. This decline was closely connected to the political crisis brought on by the First World War, and the challenge this event posed to key elements of neo-Kantian thought, namely rationality, historical progress and the value of liberal democracy (see Beiser 2013). If Heidegger’s existential phenomenology represented one kind of response to the failures of neo-Kantianism,<sup>93</sup> Dooyeweerd’s neo-Calvinist philosophy could perhaps be viewed as another. Dooyeweerd attempted to identify the intellectual currents that contributed to the contemporary crisis and presented the philosophy of the cosmonomic idea as an alternative to what he identified as the main culprit, namely, a rampant “historicism”, rooted in philosophical humanism (see Dooyeweerd 1968). The neo-Calvinism of Abraham Kuyper proved to be decisive in articulating this alternative.

### 1.1 The origins of ‘Calvinistic’ philosophy

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<sup>93</sup> Peter E. Gordon’s *Continental divide: Heidegger, Cassirer, Davos* (2010) gives an insightful account of this intellectual changing of the guard with reference to the debate between Heidegger and the leading neo-Kantian, Ernst Cassirer, at Davos in 1929.

Herman Dooyeweerd was born and raised within this neo-Calvinist sphere of influence and devoted his professional life to elaborating its intellectual foundations. He was raised in a Kuyperian home in Amsterdam, attended a neo-Calvinist high school in the close vicinity of the Free University, where he studied and earned a doctorate in law in 1917. He subsequently worked for a number of years as the deputy director of the Kuyper Institute, which acted as research institute affiliated to the Anti-Revolutionary Party. Finally, he served as professor at his alma mater from 1926 to 1965 (Wolters 1985: 2).

Kuyper's understanding of Calvinism<sup>94</sup> is decisive for the philosophy of the cosmonomic idea in two distinct, but inter-related ways. First, as Dooyeweerd acknowledged, the philosophy of the cosmonomic idea had to be understood as "the fruit of the Calvinistic awakening in Holland" as led by Abraham Kuyper (Dooyeweerd 1984a: 523). In this sense, Kuyper's concept of Calvinism as a "life-system" provides the historical condition of possibility for a "Calvinistic" or Christian philosophy as developed by Dooyeweerd.<sup>95</sup> Secondly, a number of specific elements in Dooyeweerd's concept of philosophy directly build upon the tenets of Calvinism as expounded by Kuyper. It is therefore necessary to examine Kuyper's views on Calvinism in some detail. For this purpose, I focus on Kuyper's *Lectures on Calvinism*, which were delivered upon invitation at the Princeton theological seminary in New Jersey in 1898. The content of these lectures in some ways provide the kernel for many of the most distinctive aspects of Dooyeweerd's philosophy.

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<sup>94</sup> As Conradie notes, there is scholarly disagreement as to what extent Kuyper presents us with an accurate account of the principles of Calvinism, but this is not important for the present argument.

<sup>95</sup> Dooyeweerd rejects the term "Calvinistic philosophy" even though he acknowledges that his philosophy was the fruit of the Calvinistic re-awakening in the Netherlands; he prefers to refer to the philosophy of the cosmonomic idea as "Christian philosophy" without any further qualification, because it is in his view based on the only possible understanding of the Christian ground motive as it appears in Scripture (Dooyeweerd 1969: 524).

### 1.1.1 Calvinism as a “life-system”

How does Calvinism, understood as a “life-system”, give rise to the idea of ‘Calvinistic philosophy’? Kuyper appealed to Calvinism as a civilizational force that can be historically, politically and philosophically located. The origins of this movement were theological, but in Kuyper’s summation, from these theological roots are born in due course a particular church order, a unique conception of political and social life, and a particular interpretation of morality, art and science. Moreover, in his *Lectures on Calvinism* (1931), Kuyper argues that historically and comparatively speaking, Calvinism wields a superior civilizing force and credits it with continually pushing human society to a higher stage of development (Kuyper 1931: 32–41).

According to Kuyper, Calvinism’s civilizational power derives from the fact that it is a “life-system” comparable to that of Paganism, Islamism and Romanism. A life-system is characterized by a particular conception of three fundamental relations: man’s relation to God, man’s relation to man, and man’s relation to the world. On the basis of these three fundamental relations as determined by Calvinism, Kuyper elaborates a Calvinistic understanding of religion, politics and science in three separate lectures; these respective conceptions are intimately linked and continually refer back to the three fundamental relations. Kuyper’s views on Calvinism and religion, as well as Calvinism and science are of crucial importance for the notion of Calvinistic philosophy. In order to arrive at the latter, we first need to consider the Calvinistic understanding of man’s relation to God and man’s relation to the world in more detail.

For Kuyper, the nature of our relation to God, also provides the key to understanding our relation to the world. Calvinism as life-system is first of all conditioned on the idea that humankind stands in a direct, or unmediated relation to God, or in Kuyper’s words,

“[Calvinism] proclaims the exalted thought that, although standing in high majesty above the creature, God enters *into immediate fellowship with the creature*, as God the Holy Spirit” (Kuyper 1931: 21). This idea of course recalls a central tenet of the Protestant Reformation, namely the direct communion between God and the soul of the believer, and the rejection of the mediating role of the church; although acknowledging the role of Luther and Protestantism more generally, Kuyper claims for Calvin the clearest insight into this principle (Kuyper 1931: 21–22).

Beyond the narrower concern with the soul of the believer, this notion of “immediate fellowship with God” also implies a particular way of understanding our secular engagements. For Kuyper, “immediate fellowship” entails that God is also our constant companion as we engage in worldly activities; it entails “the persuasion that the whole of a man's life is to be lived as in *the Divine Presence*” (Kuyper 1931: 25). This means that,

[w]herever man may stand, whatever he may do, to whatever he may apply his hand, in agriculture, in commerce, and in industry, or his mind, in the world of art, and science, he is, in whatsoever it may be, constantly standing before the face of his God, he is employed in the service of his God, he has strictly to obey his God, and above all, he has to aim at the glory of his God (Kuyper 1898: 53).

In other words, in terms of our relation to God, Calvinism holds that God is present in every aspect of our lives, and we are required to serve God in everything that we do, including in the realm of scientific investigation.

It should be clear from the above that the nature of our relation to God also conditions our relation to the world. In placing humankind “before the face of God”, Calvinism recognises the world as a divine creation,

and has at once placed to the front the great principle that there is a *particular grace* which works Salvation, and also a *common grace* by which God, maintaining the life of the world, relaxes the curse which rests upon it, arrests its process of corruption, and thus allows the untrammelled development of our life in which to glorify Himself as Creator (Kuyper 1931: 30).

For Kuyper, in other words, Calvinism allows for a degree of emancipation in our relation to the world without sacrificing the glory due to God. He explains the Calvinistic position by distinguishing it from the Catholic one. According to the latter, as Kuyper views it, the sinful nature of the world calls for the dominion of the church over all spheres of life; this amounts to an overstretching of the church’s powers, which stifles the full development of art, science and commerce. In addition to the notion of *particular grace*, which applies to humankind’s individual salvation through Christ, Calvinism introduces the notion of *common grace*, through which God mitigates the sinfulness of the world. As Dooyeweerd explains: “Through common grace the spread of sin is held at bay and the universal demonization of humankind is restrained so that everywhere sparks of God’s Light of might, goodness, truth, righteousness, and beauty may shine even in cultures directed by apostasy” (Dooyeweerd 2012: 37). This means we can appreciate the world independent from the church and still view worldly pursuits such as science, art and commerce as opportunities to serve God. Kuyper summarises the point as follows:

Thus domestic life regained its independence, trade and commerce realized their strength in liberty, art and science were set free from every ecclesiastical bond and restored to their

own inspirations, and man began to understand the subjection of all nature with its hidden forces and treasures to himself as a holy duty, imposed upon him by the original ordinances of Paradise: “Have dominion over them” (Kuyper 1931: 30).<sup>96</sup>

The doctrine of humankind’s unmediated relation to God, together with the doctrine of common grace thus set the stage for a Calvinistic conception of science as a realm with independent value and yet pursued in proximity to God.

In describing the “subjection of all nature with its hidden forces and treasures” to humankind as a “holy duty”, it would seem that Calvinism legitimises and even calls for technical mastery over nature. The question inadvertently arises as to how this holy duty to subject the world should be distinguished from what is typically viewed as a central theme of the ‘modern project’, that is, the drive to subject nature and society by means of instrumental rationality. Kuyper writes that “in order to subdue the earth, a knowledge of the earth was indispensable, knowledge of its oceans, of its nature, and of the attributes and laws of this nature” (Kuyper 1931: 130).

Kuyper would perhaps object that in contrast to the modernist view, according to which the human subject imposes order on nature (see Bauman 1992: 1–26), Calvinism holds that humankind “discovers” order in nature and society as imposed by God. Nevertheless, the Calvinist call to “subject” nature implies an active disposition, and the boundary between respecting a given order and *making* this order seems tenuous at best. This question is pertinent to the broader objectives of this study, for as we saw in Chapter 4, Herman Strauss wholeheartedly accepted a view of science as power of nature, subject to the proper principles as revealed by Scripture. The ambiguity between respecting and making order becomes even more pertinent in light of what has been described as the

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<sup>96</sup> See Milbank (2006) for a critical discussion of this interpretation of Genesis.

“modernist” impulses behind the apartheid project (see Posel 2012; Goosen 2015: 202–301).

Before I present Kuyper’s explicit views on Calvinism and science, it is first necessary to consider his discussion of Calvinism and religion. With the word “religion”, Kuyper is referring to the practice of *worship*. On this score he once more claims a leading position for Calvinism and argues for the peculiar strength of its religious organisation. In trying to account for the remarkable influence and vitality of Calvinist religion, Kuyper identifies three topics for investigation, namely, “religion as such”, “the life of the church”, and “practical life” (Kuyper 1931: 41–43). His discussion of “religion as such” and “practical life” is of particular significance for our investigation of the possibility of Calvinistic philosophy. I begin with Kuyper’s discussion of “religion as such”.

Kuyper identifies four questions that serve to clarify the Calvinist position on “religion as such”:

1. Does Religion exist for the sake of *God*, or for *Man*? 2. Must it operate *directly* or *mediately*?
3. Can it *remain partial* in its operations or has it to embrace the *whole* of our personal being and existence? and, 4. Can it bear a normal, or must it reveal an *abnormal*, *i.e.*, a soteriological character? [*sic*] (Kuyper 1931: 43).

Each one of these questions is important for understanding the philosophy of the cosmological idea. I discuss each in turn.

In treating the first question, Kuyper begins by elaborating the position of “modern religious philosophy” which he characterizes as religion as existing for the sake of man; in

this view, the religious disposition is awakened in humankind as it confronts an implacable cosmos; religion is taken up as a way of influencing the veiled, mystical power that nature attests to. This is religion “fostered for man's sake, aiming at his safety, his liberty, his elevation, and partly also at his triumph over death” (Kuyper 1931: 44).<sup>97</sup> Against this instrumental understanding of religion, Kuyper contrasts the Calvinistic conception: here religion exists for the sake of God. In this view religion is not a contingent possibility arising from the human experience, one possible disposition amongst others, or an intellectual choice; God imbues all of nature with religion, including humankind; all of creation is religious by its very existence:

It is not God who exists for the sake of His creation; – the creation exists for the sake of God. For, as the Scripture says, He has created all things for Himself. ... For this reason God even impressed a religious expression on the whole of unconscious nature, – on plants, on animals and also on children ... “The Heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament sheweth His handiwork.” “Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings Thou hast ordained praise” (Kuyper 1931: 45).

In other words, to exist is to worship God. From this follows the fundamental principle of Calvinism, namely, the sovereignty of God over the whole cosmos. In terms of this principle, God has created everything with a law or “ordinance” for its existence; each thing conforms to a law, a way of being, as an expression of God’s will. This notion will be of fundamental importance for the philosophy of the cosmomic idea. I return to this point further below.

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<sup>97</sup> “It matters not whether the Lama priest confines the evil spirits in his jugs, whether the nature-gods of the Orient are invoked to afford shelter against the forces of nature, whether the loftier gods of Greece are worshipped in their ascendancy above nature, or whether, finally, idealistic philosophy presents the spirit of man himself as the real object of adoration” (Kuyper 1898: 44).

Humankind, as the culmination of God's creation, expresses the religious character of creation in the highest form. As Kuyper explains, this is not because humankind chooses to be religious, but because God implants a sense of the divine in man:

God Himself *makes* man religious by means of the *sensus divinitatis*, i.e. the sense of the Divine, which He causes to strike the chords of the harp of the soul ... the heart is to be understood not as an organ of feeling but as that point from which God acts and from which he acts on the understanding" (Kuyper 1931: 46).

As Conradie (1960: 14) notes, from this it follows that it is impossible to consider any aspect of our existence as being neutral or indifferent towards religion; religious expression is constitutive of our existence as such, and therefore all our engagements with the world will necessarily bear this religious imprint, including philosophical thought. This idea made a notable impression on Dooyeweerd, who commented that it destroyed the anthropological concept of man (Conradie 1960: 14). Calvinism thus effects a fundamental reversal, according to which religion is no longer conceived of as one possible activity taken up by humankind, but as the creational substrate from which man acts. As we will see in due course, Kuyper's notion of the heart as the "point from which God acts and from which he acts on the understanding" is of central importance for Dooyeweerd's conception of Calvinistic philosophy.

This understanding of religion has implications for the very possibility of atheism. If God implants us with a sense of the divine, the modern rejection of God, expressed during the French Revolution with the slogan, "no God, no master", is still a form of religious expression, albeit negative (Kuyper 1931: 23).

In light of the above, it is clear why in response to the second question, namely whether religion operates directly or mediately, Kuyper emphatically answers for the former. Since God implants a sense of the divine in man, religion can only consist in an unmediated communion with God; neither the church nor any other person can mediate between God and humankind.

The answer to Kuyper's third question, namely whether religion can remain *partial* in its operations or whether it must embrace the whole of our personal existence, should also be clear. Since God *makes* humankind religious, and since God acts directly upon the understanding via the heart – understood as the central unity of our existence – our whole being, all our faculties “must be pervaded by the *sensus divinitatis* ...” (Kuyper 1931: 52).

The implications of this idea for a Calvinistic notion of science or philosophy now comes into view. Kuyper associates the *partial* understanding of religion with the contemporary tendency to exclude religion from the realm of the intellect: “Religion is excluded from science, and its authority from the domain of public life; henceforth the inner chamber,<sup>98</sup> the cell for prayer, and the secrecy of the heart should be its exclusive dwelling place” (Kuyper 1931: 50). The Calvinistic understanding stands in strict opposition to this view, by demanding that all aspects of our worldly existence, including science, should speak of our devotion to God. In other words, religion is universal in its application (Kuyper 1931: 53).

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<sup>98</sup> “Inner chamber” resonates with *binnekamer* as encountered in Strauss's letter to Stoker, discussed in Chapter 4. Kuyper here criticises modernism's sequestering of religion to the private sphere of human existence. If Strauss was familiar with the *Stone Lectures*, he may have been echoing Kuyper in his letter to Stoker.

This conception of religion follows from the idea that all of existence, including humankind, bear a religious stamp by virtue of being God's creation; belief in and the worship of God is constitutive of creation. In other words, our religious character is not something we can shed at will; we can reject God, but this will still be a religious act – the worship of a false god. The notion that God implants us with a sense of the divine, is of crucial importance for understanding Dooyeweerd's concept of philosophy, because as we will see, it enables Dooyeweerd to establish the religious substrate as common to *all* philosophies.

Finally, Kuyper asks whether religion can bear a normal character, or whether it must reveal an *abnormal* character, i.e. a creation in need of salvation? Conradie explains Kuyper's question in the following terms: "If we consider man as normal, his religion is a slow process of development from the most primitive stages to its present status as the 'unconscious feeling for an unknown Infinite', and sin itself is explained in terms of an evolution from a lower to higher moral position" (Conradie 1960: 15). According to the "abnormalist" view, which Kuyper associates with Calvinism, humankind was created with a pure religion, that is, expressing a religious nature as God intended. In this view, the religions of pagan communities are not to be seen as a "normal" stage of development, but as a result of the fall into sin. Therefore, the Calvinistic (abnormalist) view conceives of religion as soteriological, that is, our proper relation to God has been disturbed and can only be restored by means of a radical regeneration of humankind. Regeneration or *palingenesis* is dependent on the revelation of scripture, because in our fallen, abnormal state, our immediate communion with God is lost. Our abnormal, unregenerate state accordingly permeates all aspects of our existence: "all life, which includes the life of thought, is affected by original sin, and all life, also the life of thought, must be regenerated by God's special grace" (Conradie 1960: 16).

This point brings us to Kuyper's explicit discussion of Calvinism and science. It should be clear from the above that science, or the realm of the intellect more generally, cannot be excluded from the purview of religion. However, all human activities bear the corrupting mark of sin, including science. But as we have seen, the doctrine of *common grace* mitigates this corruption, and therefore even a "corrupted" science or philosophy (ancient Greek philosophy for example) is not without value. The Calvinist, however, must strive towards the regeneration promised by God's *special grace*, also in the realm of science and thought. For Kuyper, this means that there will be two kinds of science: "the one rooted in the unregenerate heart, the other in the regenerate" (Conradie 1960: 17). This division reflects the "antithesis" or "principal conflict", that is, "the powerful conflict between those who cling to the confession of the Triune God and His Word, and those who seek the solution of the world-problem in Deism, Pantheism and Naturalism" (Kuyper 1931: 131).

We must note, however, that the principle conflict does not amount to a conflict between *faith* and *science*. For Kuyper, all science starts from faith; the conflict is rooted in the radical difference between the Calvinist confession on the one hand, and those who put their faith in deism, pantheism and naturalism on the other hand – between the "abnormalists" and "normalists".

The "normalist" view is characterized by its 'faith' in the consistency and exclusive validity of material explanations, and the supposed refusal to entertain any thought of creation *ex nihilo*. The "abnormalist" position, in direct contradiction, proclaims God as the sovereign creator and opposes any thought that would threaten to blur the boundary between creation and evolution. As Kuyper summarises the point, "[n]ot faith and science therefore, but *two scientific systems* or if you choose, two scientific elaborations, are opposed to each other, *each having its own faith*" (Kuyper 1931: 133). This conflict entails a radical difference at the level of *self-consciousness*, that is, between the consciousness of those who

believe and those who do not believe. Our consciousness “beams forth” in our words and deeds and is therefore also reflected in science and demonstration (Kuyper 1931: 30). As Brümmer puts it, this “change of consciousness [*bewusynsverandering*] entails that the thought of the reborn person rests on the Scriptural principles that have been chiselled onto his consciousness” (Brümmer 2017: 156). This argument expresses the deepest rationale for the founding of the Free University, since Calvinists (“abnormalists”) should not be forced to accept the “science” of the normalist position but should be *free* to study in a way that is true to their “consciousness”. Kuyper finds authority for his position in the words of Christ: “Except a man be born again, he *cannot see* the kingdom of God”, and the apostle Paul: “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God” (Kuyper 1931: 137). “Natural man” here refers to someone who has not received the Holy Spirit. As I will show in Chapter 7, the notion of the “natural man” came to have a particular resonance for the Bloemfontein neo-Calvinists as they tried to articulate a neo-Calvinist approach to the “native question”.

Calvinism as a “life-system” thus engenders a Calvinistic understanding of science and philosophy. The radical contention of this understanding is that “*all* science is rooted in faith, and that the *whole* scale of Christian sciences ... must be contrasted with the *whole* scale of non-Christian or apostate sciences” (Conradie 1960: 17). In terms of this conception, Calvinistic philosophy is not to be distinguished from German Idealism, for example, on the basis of a distinction between a philosophy informed by faith and a philosophy informed by reason; instead *both* Calvinistic philosophy and German Idealism are seen as rooted in faith, the difference being that the former reflects the faith of the believer seeking regeneration and the latter the degenerate faith of the unbeliever. This conflict between the regenerate and the unregenerate heart – the antithesis – explains at the most basic level the possibility of Calvinistic philosophy.

### 1.1.2 The creation order and cultural development

Kuyper's understanding of Calvinism contains at least two further elements that were crucial for the development of Dooyeweerd's philosophy, namely, the idea of creational ordinances and the concept of cultural development that follows from it. As seen earlier, the principle of God's sovereignty involves the idea that the whole of creation is an expression of God's sovereign will. For Kuyper, this means that God has created everything as conforming to a law or ordinance for its existence:

Everything that has been created was, in its creation, furnished by God with an unchangeable law of its existence. And because God has fully ordained such laws and ordinances for all life, therefore the Calvinist demands that all life be consecrated to His service, in strict obedience (Kuyper 1931: 53).

And as Kuyper later makes clear, these "laws" and "ordinances" are precisely what since the Enlightenment has been described as the "laws of nature" – with an important qualification:

There is no life outside us in Nature, without such divine ordinances, – ordinances which are called the laws of Nature – a term which we are willing to accept, provided we understand thereby, not laws originating *from* Nature, but laws imposed *upon* Nature (Kuyper 1931: 70).

Important to note here is that for Kuyper, these ordinances extend beyond what we might ordinarily think of as the "laws of Nature":

And even so are there ordinances of God, in logic, to regulate our thoughts; ordinances of God for our imagination, in the domain of aesthetics; and so, also, strict ordinances of

God for the whole of human life in the *domain of morals* ... just as the ordinance of God determines the course of the smallest asteroid, as well as the orbit of the mightiest star, so also these moral ordinances of God descend to the smallest and most particular details, stating to us what in every case is to be considered as the will of God (Kuyper 1931: 70).

In other words, for Kuyper, there is in principle no difference between a moral ordinance for human action and the “natural law” that describes the moon’s orbit around the earth. Both are an expression of God’s will: “as a Calvinist looks upon God’s decree as the foundation and origin of the natural laws, in the same manner also he finds in it the firm foundation and the origin of every moral and spiritual law” (Kuyper 1931: 115).

Dooyeweerd explicitly invoked this principle in calling his philosophy “the philosophy of the *cosmonomic* idea”, or as in the original Dutch, *De Wijsbegeerte der Wetsidee*, which literally translates to “the philosophy of *the idea of law*”. Starting from this foundation, Dooyeweerd developed a sophisticated ontology through which he aimed to give a systematic account of earthly reality as conditioned by law. This is also the sense in which Dooyeweerd’s philosophy is described as “transcendental”, namely, it is transcendental in so far as earthly reality, or creation is understood as being subject to, or governed by God’s ordinances.

Dooyeweerd’s conception of philosophy as a systematic account of reality as conditioned by creational law is in a further sense indebted to Kuyper’s understanding of Calvinism. Kuyper conceives of God’s ordinances, or “laws of nature” as constituting a unified and stable system; it is the stability and fixed order of God’s creation which makes possible ‘science’ in the true sense of the word. Kuyper notes that science, properly understood, entails the step by which we transcend the empirical observation of individual phenomena and “reach *the thought* that governs the whole constellation of phenomena” [emphasis in

the original] (Kuyper 1931: 112–113). It is only through a “faith in the organic interconnection of the Universe” that science is able to go beyond specific empirical phenomena towards an understanding of the general law that governs the whole (Kuyper 1931: 115–116). Kuyper conceives of this whole in architectonic terms: “Thus you recognize that the cosmos, instead of being a heap of stones, loosely thrown together, on the contrary presents to our mind a monumental building erected in a severely consistent style” (Kuyper 1931: 114).

Importantly, Kuyper also assigns a temporal dimension to this cosmic order, namely by describing it as the unfolding of God’s divine plan. In this regard Kuyper seems to have been influenced by 19<sup>th</sup> century German Idealism, as can be seen in his contention that Calvinists “have always maintained that the whole formed one organic programme of the entire creation and the entire history” (Kuyper 1931: 115).<sup>99</sup> In other words, the unity, order and stability of the cosmos is at once a grand, interconnected structure as well as the historical unfolding God’s will. With this conception Kuyper erases the boundary between the “natural” and the “human” sciences, setting in their place a unified order that comprehends the whole of existence as the realisation of God’s providence: “both these, the natural as well as the spiritual laws, [form] together one high order, which exists according to God’s command and wherein God’s counsel will be accomplished in the consummation of His eternal, all-embracing plan.” In Kuyper’s vision, the fixed order of the whole includes ordinances for human action, so that no fundamental distinction exist between the “laws” that govern natural processes, for example, and the “laws” that govern human action: “it forces upon us the confession that there must be stability and regularity

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<sup>99</sup> Dooyeweerd was critical of this organological bent in Kuyper’s thought. See Paul (2010) for an interesting discussion of this issue in the context of Dutch society.

ruling over everything” (Kuyper 1931: 114). It is only this stability and regularity which transforms a loose chronicle of human actions into *history* proper.

As we shall see, Dooyeweerd was wary of Kuyper’s reference to “organic programmes of history” in so far as he thought they betrayed the infiltration of non-Calvinistic ideas drawn from German Idealist thinkers. Dooyeweerd also drew a connection between these organicist ideas and the rise of fascism in Germany (see Paul 2010). Dooyeweerd consequently developed a more sophisticated understanding of the role of God’s ordinances in human action, but nevertheless did not abandon Kuyper’s basic idea that human action was subjected to order by God’s ordinances, and that this normativity for human action was structurally related to the laws that governed ‘natural’ processes.

This brings us finally to Kuyper’s conception of cultural development, which, as Wolters notes, would form the basis of Dooyeweerd’s technical philosophy of history (Wolters 1985: 8). In keeping with his view of the unity, stability and order of the cosmos as conforming to divine providence, Kuyper insists that Calvinism as a worldview yields a unique civilizing power and advances human development to a higher stage (Kuyper 1931: 32–40). As Wolters notes, “[b]asic to Kuyper’s vision and to his whole program of action was a positive appreciation of the historical advance of human culture and society” (Wolters 1985: 7). The doctrine of *common grace*, as discussed earlier, allows Kuyper to view developments in technology, science, commerce and industry as part of God’s divine creation. Humankind is called upon to participate actively and take responsibility for the unfolding of God’s plan. As Wolters comments, “[h]uman civilization, indeed the whole course of history, is a response to God’s call for the human actualization of the possibilities and potencies latent in creation” (Wolters 1985: 8).

In keeping with the idea of God's creational ordinances and the doctrine of the antithesis, however, it is the duty of Calvinists to oppose the distortions brought by secularism, and to participate in this task in obedience to God's will; in other words, in Kuyper's vision, there is a normative course of human and cultural development, and Calvinism leads the way in this process. We are now in a position to understand what was at stake for Dooyeweerd in articulating a comprehensive Calvinist philosophical system.

## **2. The philosophy of the cosmonomic idea**

Dooyeweerd studied law at the Free University in Amsterdam, where he obtained his PhD in 1917. In 1922 he accepted the position of deputy director at the Kuyper Institute in The Hague, where he undertook research for the Anti-Revolutionary Party. His earliest published work from this period attests to a growing interest in the question concerning the foundation of Calvinist political and legal theory.

As Chaplin notes, Dooyeweerd's early work was a response to the widespread sense of cultural and political crisis in continental Europe during the 1920s and 1930s. Dooyeweerd attributed this crisis to a "deeper spiritual vacuum" wrought by humanist philosophy and thus looked to Kuyper's interpretation of Calvinism in his ambitious attempt to reform the academy and the polity on a Christian basis. Dooyeweerd's inaugural address in the faculty of law at the Free University in 1926 reveals his growing realisation that a comprehensive, underlying philosophical conception, rooted in the Calvinistic worldview, was essential to the articulation of a Calvinistic legal or political theory – or any scientific theory for that matter. Kuyper's elaboration of the antithesis and his conception of creational law proved to be critical in the search for a foundation of this kind, and was clearly reflected in the philosophical system that Dooyeweerd ultimately expounded in his

major work, *De Wijsbegeerte der Wetsidee* (1935–1936), later revised and translated into English as *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* (1953–1958).

In order to follow the arguments of the Bloemfontein neo-Calvinists we need to understand Dooyeweerd's philosophy of cultural development in the context of his entire philosophical system. It is useful to begin with two central elements of Kuyper's neo-Calvinism: first, the idea of the antithesis and secondly, the idea of the creation order. The first comes to the fore in Dooyeweerd's contention that *all* philosophy is determined by fundamental, pre-theoretical religious presuppositions, and the second becomes apparent in Dooyeweerd's ontology, which gives a detailed, complex account of reality as conditioned by creational law in a way that accounts for the interconnectedness of reality as well as the irreducible diversity of existents. These two elements are indissolubly connected in the sense that, according to Dooyeweerd, any given philosophical ontology will in a very specific sense give expression to a pre-theoretical religious commitment.

Dooyeweerd therefore begins the first part of the *New Critique* with an argument that is intended to prove, by way of rigorous philosophical argumentation that all philosophy is determined by religious pre-suppositions; he refers to this argument as the *transcendental critique of theoretical thought*, and he intends it to establish the "inner point of connection" between philosophy and religion. Having established this connection, he argues for the "supra-individual" nature of this religious entanglement, that is, it constitutes a shared spiritual commitment that manifests in culture; he refers to this shared expression of an ultimate religious commitment as a *religious ground motive*. A religious ground motive in turn translates into what Dooyeweerd calls a "philosophical Idea". Dooyeweerd presents his own ontology as the philosophical expression of a particular ground-Idea, which is a translation of what he calls the *biblical ground motive*.

In the sections that follow, I present Dooyeweerd's transcendental critique in more detail and then proceed to a discussion of his philosophical ontology. It needs to be emphasised that the philosophy of the cosmonomic idea constitutes an elaborate and intricate system; it is difficult to explicate any single feature of this system in isolation from the others. I therefore apologise to the reader in advance if this introduction at times seems to be concerned with matters the relevance of which may not be immediately apparent.

## 2.1 The transcendental critique

Dooyeweerd's systematic philosophy begins with an enquiry into the nature of theoretical thought; specifically, he asks, what makes theoretical thought *possible*, or how is it possible to think theoretically?

In order to understand this question, it is helpful to recall the ancient Greek origins of the word 'theory'. As Adriana Cavarero reminds us, "[t]heory' is derived from the noun *theoria*, which signifies contemplation and pertains to the human experience of seeing, to the field of vision" (Cavarero 2002: 506). Cavarero argues that Greek philosophy founds the meaning of "theory" on the experience of sight: "Transferring the experience of the bodily eye to that of the mind, *theoria* absolutizes the self-contained circuit between [the] permanence of the object and the *now* of the gaze. Frozen in an immobile presence, mental images come, in this fashion, to constitute the specific spectacle of *theoria*" (Cavarero 2002: 508). Importantly, the meaning of theoretical contemplation is also established in opposition to active public life; the life of the mind, or *bios theoretikos* is distinguished from the *bios politikos* by its withdrawal from participation in the unpredictable sphere of human affairs in order to contemplate a lasting, universal and stable order: As Cavarero puts it, "theory' deals [...] with the solitary vision of another worldly, abstract, universal, and, most of all, stable order of objects" (Cavarero 2002: 506). Dooyeweerd explicitly

acknowledges the significance of this conceptual legacy of Greek thought for his understanding of the theoretic attitude (see Dooyeweerd 1976: 1–2) and it also becomes apparent in the many visual metaphors that feature in his transcendental critique of theoretical thought.<sup>100</sup>

For Dooyeweerd, theoretical thought is characterized by what he calls the antithetic “*gegenstand*-relation”. As Hart (1985: 143) points out, this German term commonly refers to the relation by which a subject intentionally grasps an object. Dooyeweerd, however, uses this term to distinguish theoretical thought from the subject-object relation. Dooyeweerd explains this distinction by means of contrasting theoretical thought from “pre-theoretical naïve experience”. In naïve experience, we experience reality – entities, institutions, events – in their integral coherence; in theoretical thought we intentionally “break up”, or dissect, reality in order to reveal a different dimension of the human horizon of experience. Instead of grasping an “object” as it functions within our naïve experience, theoretical thought grasps, by means of an abstraction, an enduring underlying structure in terms of which integral reality functions (Dooyeweerd 1948: 41). Dooyeweerd puts it as follows: “This theoretical attitude of thought and experience does not correspond to reality as it gives itself to our non-theoretic experience of every day. It is the result of theoretical abstraction by means of which we lift the modal aspects out of the ontic systasis of reality in order to get them in our analytical *look*” [my emphasis] (Dooyeweerd 1976: 3).

In theoretical thought, we isolate and separate the different aspects in which a concrete entity, for example, a bird functions: the bird occupies space (spatial aspect), it moves from

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<sup>100</sup> For example: “Theoretical view of empirical reality is always dominated by philosophical theory. For the basic problem of every theoretical view is that of the mutual relation of several aspects of reality. [...] Its solution presupposes a total-view of the aspects, that is, a *philosophical view* of their *enduring modal structure* (Dooyeweerd 1948: 40).

one place to another (movement) and is subject to the processes of organic life (biotic aspect). The isolated aspects each open on to a different perspective on reality, or put differently, each aspect reveals a different mode in which reality functions. Together, these aspects furnish us with the “plastic” experience of everyday experience.

Dooyeweerd identifies fifteen different aspects and argues that all existents function in all fifteen aspects. I discuss Dooyeweerd’s theory of modal aspects in more detail below. For the moment it is only necessary to note that in the theoretical attitude the aspects are “lifted” from their functioning in reality and separated from each other by means of an intentional act.

From the foregoing it should be clear that Dooyeweerd’s understanding of theoretical thought is in essential continuity with the Greek philosophical tradition in so far as it involves an act of abstraction by which we bring into view a different dimension of experience, in which the experience of sight provides the conceptual framework for grasping a stable order as removed from the flux of everyday reality.<sup>101</sup> In spite of this continuity, Dooyeweerd’s modal aspects are clearly not ideas in the Platonic sense; he stresses the abstract, artificial nature of the *gegenstand*-relation. In other words, the modal aspects do not *exist* separately from reality, their isolation is brought about by our act of thought. Nevertheless, this act of thought still confronts us with the problems traditionally associated with the separation between the stable, orderly realm of theory, and the practical realm of experience. As Dooyeweerd notes reality resists being dissected in this way, and therefore the resulting theoretical conception is inadequate. Differently put, the theoretical

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<sup>101</sup> Dooyeweerd (1976) in acknowledging the debt of his conception of the ‘*gegenstand*’ to Greek philosophy emphasises the important differences introduced by his conception of the modal aspects. I would argue however that the importance of the notion of *theoria* as pertaining to vision and the notion of order and stability it makes possible is no less fundamental for Dooyeweerd’s conception.

act through which the different aspects are identified, sacrifices the inter-modal coherence which characterizes their concrete functioning. We gain access to the theoretically separated modal aspects at the price of their integral relation to each other. As Hart summarises:

In short, *theoretical* knowledge for Dooyeweerd grasped what he called a *Gegenstand*, an abstracted, isolated aspect of reality which, because of its theoretical isolation, exists in tension with the reality to which this conceptual *Gegenstand* refers. Everyday knowledge, by contrast, maintains the integrality of our experience which we appropriate by means of what he called a *naïve* concept of an *object* of our thought. (Hart 1985: 144)

It is important to note the following: the antithetical “*gegenstand*-relation” is “artificial” and the product of an “act of abstraction”, but it is not *arbitrary*. We could say that, slightly modifying Hegel’s meaning, the “*gegenstand*-relation” involves a kind of “determinate negation”. Dooyeweerd describes the theoretic attitude as one that “produces an *antithetical relation* in which the *logical aspect of our thought* is opposed to *non-logical aspects of reality*”. He notes that in this relation “the non-logical aspect opposes a resistance to every effort of our understanding to comprehend it in a logical concept” (Dooyeweerd 1948: 29). This description involves a curious vacillation between the activity of a subject and a “resistance” that seemingly emanates from “material” the subject is “acting” upon. The theoretic attitude “breaks-up” reality, but reality “breaks-up” in a non-arbitrary, *determinate* way. The theoretic attitude breaks up reality into determinate “modal aspects” and the coherence of these aspects is indirectly revealed by the “resistance” they offer to our act of abstraction. The theoretic attitude is thus at once active and passive. Dooyeweerd used the image of light passing through a prism and breaking up into its constitutive, coloured wavelengths to describe the dissection that is brought about by the theoretic attitude. This

image perfectly captures the determinate nature of the antithetical relation. When theoretic thought abstracts from naïve experience, the product is not arbitrary, but represents a determinate structure, that is reality as conditioned by different modes of being.<sup>102</sup>

The problem for philosophy as a discipline, according to Dooyeweerd, is how to form a theoretical concept of the modal aspects in their interconnectedness, or as he puts it, how can we accomplish a *theoretical* inter-modal synthesis of the differentiated aspects. The objective is to give a theoretical account of the coherence and diversity we encounter in naïve experience; the antithetical relation presents us with different ways of talking about the nature of reality: the challenge for philosophy is to give a theoretical description of how these different modalities cohere with one another.

An example of such a “synthesis” might be a physicist who explains reality in terms of the properties and movements of elemental physical particles. In this view, life, history, feelings, thought, culture, society can all be explained by physics. For Dooyeweerd, this kind of synthesis, which proceeds from one of the abstracted aspects, namely, the *physical* aspect, entails an untenable reduction of created reality, for it completely leaves out all the other modalities of being. Each aspect is irreducible to any other aspect, and the challenge for philosophy is to elaborate a theoretical concept of the interrelation between aspects without sacrificing this irreducible uniqueness. Any attempt to accomplish the synthesis by means of a particular aspect will have serious deficiencies; the synthetic theoretical

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<sup>102</sup> Dooyeweerd arguably offers a *phenomenological* description of the character of theoretic thought that has much in common with Hegel’s attempt in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* to displace the epistemological problem from the concern over the relationship between thought and reality to an investigation of the relationship between objects (*Gegenstände*) for consciousness. Hiller summarises Hegel’s position as follows: “Since there is no standpoint outside knowing, and hence no standpoint from which the truth of knowledge can be judged, the only way to begin is by treating all forms of knowing as if they are true. For this reason Hegel says that he will expose ‘how knowledge makes its appearance in all its forms’...” (Hiller 1999: 8-12).

conception cannot successfully be derived from any single aspect found within temporal reality, since no single aspect discloses a view of totality. In other words, philosophy requires a perspective that transcends the viewpoint of any particular aspect.

Arriving at this problem, Dooyeweerd turns to Immanuel Kant, to whom he attributes the important critical insight that the theoretical synthesis requires critical self-reflection. Dooyeweerd credits Kant with the insight that “[o]nly when [philosophical thought] is directed toward the thinking self does it gain a concentric focus on the unity of a consciousness which must lie at the base of all the diversity of the aspects of experience” (Dooyeweerd 2013: 17). At this stage it helps to recall Dooyeweerd’s depiction of naïve experience as characterized by its unbroken coherence: the selfhood understood as a “unity of consciousness” correlates with reality experienced as an integral whole. Dooyeweerd describes it as follows: “Human selfhood functions, to be sure, in all the modal aspects of the temporal horizon of human experience but it is nonetheless a *root-unity* which simultaneously *transcends* all these aspects” (Dooyeweerd 2013: 17).

In Dooyeweerd’s view, Kant reaches this realisation but stops short of discovering its full implications: Kant ultimately ascribes the theoretical synthesis to a *logical* act of the self, and not the self as functioning in all the aspects. The result, according to Dooyeweerd, is the famous separation between the phenomenal and the noumenal, through which the theoretically cognisable world is limited to the world of appearances as conditioned by the *a priori* intuitions of time and space and the categories of understanding, whereas the self as a free, moral agent is cloistered in the inaccessible realm of the noumenal. In other words, Kant is also guilty of seeking the synthesis in one aspect of reality, namely the logical aspect, and as a consequence he introduces an unbridgeable gap between the cognisable realm of appearance (the proper object of study for science), and the normative realm of

freedom. In Kant, this unbridgeable divide between the realm of freedom and the realm of nature starkly reveals what Dooyeweerd describes as the humanist ground motive of the dialectic between nature and freedom. I will return to this point shortly.

For Dooyeweerd, the impasse reached by Kant, strikingly illustrates that the self in its radical unity cannot be reduced to a logical function as Kant attempted by introducing the notion of the “transcendental unity of apperception”. This leads Dooyeweerd to the conclusion that the starting point for the inter-modal synthesis cannot be found in theoretical thought as such. What is required, according to Dooyeweerd, is “a central point of reference in the sense of a *root-unity* of human existence, one that genuinely *transcends* the modal coherence of temporal aspects” (Dooyeweerd 2013: 20). This “root-unity” is also described by Dooyeweerd as the “selfhood”, understood here as the “individual center of human existence” (Dooyeweerd 2013: 19). The selfhood, however, can only transcend the modal coherence of temporal aspects by virtue of a relation to something beyond itself. Dooyeweerd describes this relation as follows:

[T]he concentration of theoretical thought (itself caught up in the temporal diversity of the modal aspects) upon the self (as the root-unity both of our horizon of experience and of our temporal existence) is possible only in a simultaneous concentration upon the real or supposed origin of all that is relative (Dooyeweerd 2013: 20).

Dooyeweerd is here paraphrasing Kuyper, reflecting on the possibility of understanding the cosmos as a whole: “You must step out of the cosmos, and in order to do this you must have a starting point ... in the non-cosmos. And this is altogether impossible as long as sin confines you with your consciousness to the cosmos” (Kuyper quoted in Conradie 1960: 38).

Radical self-reflection leads to the realisation that the root-unity that defines the self refers to an origin beyond the self's temporal existence. Dooyeweerd summarises the point as follows: "In other words, the selfhood is the religious center of human existence which does in fact transcend the modal diversity of the temporal horizon, because by nature it concentrates all that is relative upon the absolute" (Dooyeweerd 2013: 21).

At this point, it serves to recall Kuyper's notion of the *sense of the divine* which is implanted in each person by God. Kuyper invokes the biblical notion of the *heart* as the central unity of human existence and describes it as the point at which God prevails upon the understanding. Dooyeweerd's notion of the integral selfhood recalls the notion of the "heart" as invoked by Kuyper. This sense of the divine is the point of contact between God and man, and it is this contact with the absolute that draws together the self into a root-unity, allowing it to transcend the modal diversity of reality. Simply put, "self-knowledge is dependent on the knowledge of God" (Dooyeweerd 2013: 21).

Following Kuyper, Dooyeweerd maintains that the religious center of our existence is the point at which we are either claimed by God, or turn away from God by putting our faith in some aspect of temporal reality. It is worth quoting Dooyeweerd at length on this point:

The fall into sin has turned this self-knowledge and knowledge of God into an apostate direction and obscured the image of God in the mirror of the self. But the religious nature of the center, or the heart, of human existence has not been lost as a result. Instead, the innate drive of the selfhood to seek its origin now asserts itself in the absolutization of that which is relative, of something in creation. Humankind searches for itself and its origin within the horizon of time. The darkened mirror of the root (*radix*) of our existence transforms the divine image into idols, false gods, to which the self *surrenders* in an

imagined encounter in which it believes it can find *rest*. Even those who believe in all sincerity that they have broken with all religion and have no need for it continue to be in the grip of those idols, to which they devote all their energies. Human selfhood by nature points beyond itself’ (Dooyeweerd 2013: 21–22).

Thus, Dooyeweerd incorporates the antithesis into the transcendental critique of theoretic thought. True self-knowledge, the condition on which we are able to grasp the theoretically abstracted aspects in an all-encompassing theory, is only possible when the self seeks its “rest” in God. The self that seeks rest in an aspect of created reality (e.g. physics), adopts an idolatrous position, which obscures our view of totality and produces a distorted theoretical perspective.

Theoretical thought, however, cannot find its deepest point of departure within the self alone:

The “I” is not self-enclosed like a windowless monad. It is only an “I” in the central communal relation of the “we” and in its existent relation to the “Thou” of its divine origin. In the “we,” the “I” also steps outside of itself, in order to find itself and its origin in the existence of the human-rooted community. This root-community is of a spiritual kind, in the pregnant religious sense of the word, and is only made effective by a community spirit which as the central dynamic driving force gives human existence its final direction in its *religious ground-motive* (Dooyeweerd 2013: 22)

In other words, our ultimate religious commitments (religious *a priori*) ultimately take a communal shape, through which they provide a directional force in human life. Dooyeweerd calls these driving forces “religious ground motives”, described by Chaplin as a “comprehensive, pretheoretical [*siz*] and supraindividual [*siz*] religious vision that

profoundly shapes all aspects of the cultural period of which it is characteristic” (Chaplin 2011: 43). Theoretical thought, in its attempt to acquire an all-encompassing view of totality will therefore necessarily be directed by an ultimate, pre-theoretical religious presupposition that manifests as a supra-individual, direction-giving cultural force. The different religious ground motives reflect Kuyper’s “principle conflict” or the antithesis: on the one hand there is the “biblical ground motive”, which for all practical purposes is rooted in the Calvinist confession, and on the other, the apostate ground motive, which under the corrupting influence of sin adopts a false idol in temporal reality. Philosophical thought therefore inescapably finds its deepest starting point in one of the two poles of the antithesis.

It is necessary briefly to consider the contents of the religious ground motives as Dooyeweerd describes them. Dooyeweerd identifies the biblical ground motive with the fundamental scriptural theme of “creation, fall and redemption through Jesus Christ in the communion of the Holy Spirit” (Dooyeweerd 2012: 28). “Creation” captures the notion that “God, the Creator, reveals himself as the absolute, complete, and integral origin of all things” (Dooyeweerd 2012: 28). This encapsulates the idea that all of creation is subject to God’s divine law and exists only by virtue of God’s absolute sovereignty. The creation motive also underpins the biblical understanding of humanity’s relation to God. God, as sovereign creator, creates man in his image and implants him with a sense of the divine – the human heart is “the concentration point or religious unity of the whole creation” (Chaplin 2011: 47). In terms of the creation motive, God calls on humanity to exercise dominion over all of creation in accordance with divine law. Furthermore, humankind is created as a spiritually unified community, “governed and maintained by a religious spirit that works in it as a central force” (Chaplin 2011: 48). In other words, as Chaplin notes,

human culture issues from a religious ground motive in so far as humankind is created as religious beings.

The motive of the fall denotes a rupture in humankind's relationship with God. The fall is essentially "a rebellion against the reign of his law, the original act of apostasy" (Chaplin 2011: 48). Humankind's rebellion against God distorts its relation with God, with other humans and with the rest of creation. In their distorted relation with their creator, humans lose true self-knowledge, "as an 'apostate ground motive' seizes the heart. Such a ground motive 'forces a man to see himself in the image of his idol' and this idolatry is the root of all false conceptions of reality" (Dooyeweerd quoted in Chaplin 2011: 47). By rebelling against God, humankind also ruptures the unity of the religious community, which gives rise to conflicting spiritual communities; furthermore, because God's creation is concentrated in humankind, the whole of creation is affected by the damaging effects of the fall (Dooyeweerd 2012: 36). However, as we have seen in the discussion of neo-Calvinism, under the doctrine of *common grace*, the corruption of sin is mitigated, and God maintains creation by means of his sovereign law.

Finally, the motive of redemption derives from God's intervention in the form of Jesus Christ, who by his sacrifice brings restoration to the fallen world. "Redemption means 'the rebirth of man, and in him, of the entire created temporal world which finds in man its center'" (Dooyeweerd quoted in Chaplin 2011: 49). As Chaplin notes, redemption is not universal or automatic; God's intervention in the figure of Jesus Christ "introduces a radical spiritual battle, or 'antithesis,' within the human race between the spirit of faith and the spirit of apostasy" (Chaplin 2011: 49). The notion of the "antithesis" is by now familiar; here we can see how for Dooyeweerd, as for Kuyper, the redemptive work of Christ calls on humankind to take an active stance against the spirit of apostasy. As Chaplin further

points out, the “antithesis” does not entail a divide between a community of believers and a community of non-believers, but rather entails a conflict seated in the heart of each human being, Christians and non-believers alike. Together, the religious convictions of the biblical ground motive (creation, fall and redemption) constitute the most fundamental starting point of Dooyeweerd’s systematic philosophy.

Dooyeweerd shows, by means of a detailed analysis of the history of philosophy, that the apostate motive in fact takes three different forms, each of which is characterized by a central “religious dialectic” and gains dominance in different periods of European cultural and intellectual history, namely: the form/matter motive of ancient Greek philosophy, the nature/grace motive that characterizes the synthesis between Greek philosophy and the Christian religion, and finally the nature/freedom motive that characterizes the humanist ground motive. The apostate motives exhibit a ‘religious dialectic’ in the sense that they are characterized by alternating attempts to assign primacy to one of two dialectically opposed poles in reflecting on the ultimate nature of reality.

The Greek motive vacillates between assigning primacy to “matter” as seen in the pre-Platonic philosophy which emphasises the flux and chaos of nature, and “form”, which reaches its most famous articulation in Plato’s theory of the forms. The nature/grace motive involves a synthesis of the biblical motive and the matter/form motive, seen in the dialectic tension between natural reason and revelation by the grace of God. The humanist nature/freedom motive oscillates between the “science ideal”, which is characterized by a mechanistic, deterministic explanation of reality at the expense of freedom, and the “personality ideal” which emphasises unbounded powers of the human personality at the expense of all normative limitations of human action. For Dooyeweerd, the humanist motive achieves its most exemplary and sophisticated articulation in the transcendental

philosophy of Kant, which posits an unbridgeable divide between the deterministic, phenomenal realm of nature, and human freedom which is entrusted to the inaccessible realm of the noumenal. In Dooyeweerd's account, all humanist philosophy after Kant has veered towards one of these poles.

The apostate ground motives are 'dialectical' in the sense that an emphasis on one pole of the opposition by necessity results in a 'correction' towards the opposite pole, leading to a never-ending oscillation in which neither pole ever succeeds in gaining primacy. Philosophical thought that is directed by an apostate ground motive, also referred to as "immanence philosophy" (Dooyeweerd 1948), will be constrained by the religious dialectic it is caught up in. The biblical ground motive, by contrast, is not characterized by such a dialectic tension; this is due to its specific religious contents, namely, the Christian belief in creation, fall and salvation.

By virtue of this argument, Dooyeweerd believes he has rigorously proven that all philosophy is unavoidably informed by religious presuppositions. In presenting the philosophy of the cosmogenic idea as "Calvinistic", Dooyeweerd makes the self-reflexive claim that his own thought is directed by the *biblical ground motive*, in other words, that his philosophical labours are already informed by the insights that emanate from this religious force. This element of self-reflexivity is striking for its debt to Hegel, who also sought to locate his own thought within the dialectical process he described.

The transcendental critique has drawn critical reactions both from inside and outside Reformational circles.<sup>103</sup> It lies outside the scope of this thesis to examine these critical

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<sup>103</sup> See Kock (1973) for a survey of earlier criticism. Strauss (1973) presented a significant challenge to the transcendental critique, to which Dooyeweerd (1976) responded sharply in the last article he published before his death. See Zuidervaart (2004) for a more recent critical, yet sympathetic treatment.

reactions or develop an independent critique. Three issues that are relevant to the objectives of the thesis must, however, be noted briefly.

First, the transcendental critique seems to require the theory of the modal aspects in order to pose the problem of the theoretical inter-modal synthesis, which then leads to the discovery of the inner point of contact between philosophy and religion. In other words, the argument seems to be a *petitio principii*: the transcendental critique can only be valid if we accept the theory of the modal aspects, and the theory of the modal aspects presuppose the results of the transcendental critique.

Secondly, a question arises from the fact that Dooyeweerd presents the *critique* as the fruit of the biblical ground motive: he is thereby clearly suggesting that the philosophy of the cosmonomic idea issues from the regenerate heart; but one could justifiably ask, is the philosophy the fruit of the regenerate heart, or is the regenerate heart here the fruit of a philosophy in search of legitimation? It could be argued that the transcendental critique has the structure of a narrative that tells the story of its own origins: the transcendental critique inexorably leads to the discovery of the ground motives, of which the 'biblical ground motive' then retro-actively authorises the transcendental critique.

At the risk of seeming to diverge from my stated aim not to interpret or critique Dooyeweerd's philosophy, but because the following has direct bearing on the way his thought was adopted by Strauss and others in the service of a political project, it is worth bearing in mind here that one of Dooyeweerd's main objectives with the transcendental critique is to establish the *legitimacy* of Calvinistic philosophy, that is, to establish by what right it can be called philosophy. Following Jacques Derrida, we can identify in the transcendental critique an interpretative violence resembling the paradox that haunts the

founding of the law. The transcendental critique “proves” the existence of the supra-individual religious motive that “directs” the transcendental critique in the same way that the law narrates the story of its own foundation (see Derrida 1992). The “religious ground motive” can thus be considered 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”. Put differently, the philosophy of the cosmological idea founds itself by inventing a foundation capable of giving birth to itself. We may well ask: could a philosophy that proposes to discover an integral epistemological foundation for all theoretical thought (the Christian ground motive) ever conceive of itself as anything but an expression of that very same foundation?

If the comparison with the problem of political foundation above seems unwarranted here, we need only to recall that Dooyeweerd was in the first place a legal philosopher, and that the initial impetus for his work was a crisis in *politics*. As I show in Chapter 7, the way that Dooyeweerd here implicitly deals with the problem of foundation and the related problem of authority, would prove significant for the political thought of his Bloemfontein adherents. Having presented Dooyeweerd’s argument for the religiously determined nature of all philosophy, we must now proceed to a discussion of Dooyeweerd’s ontology.

## **2.2 The transcendental ground-Ideas**

Religious ground motives direct culture and thought, but they are not philosophical theories; instead, they generate fundamental theoretical notions that give direction to philosophical thought (Chaplin 2011: 44).<sup>104</sup> In Chaplin’s striking description, the ground-Idea “acts, as it were, as an epistemological transformer or discursive transformer,

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<sup>104</sup> Chaplin notes that Dooyeweerd’s ground-Ideas seem akin to MacIntyre’s notion of first principles (Chaplin 2011: 338).

changing the pretheoretical [*sic*] current of religious presuppositions into the different current of theory” (Chaplin 2011: 44). The philosophical enterprise unfolds as an elaboration of these fundamental theoretical ideas. Dooyeweerd argues that since all philosophy is in the final instance directed by one of the religious ground motives, any particular philosophy will reveal its dependence on a particular ground-Idea. The biblical ground motive “generates” the philosophical ground-Ideas of meaning, time and law, which in turn determine the intricate architecture of Dooyeweerd’s systematic concepts. I briefly discuss each below.

### *Meaning*

Chaplin gives the following succinct explanation of what Dooyeweerd understands by meaning: “Meaning here denotes the *radically dependent nature of created reality*” [emphasis in original] (Chaplin 2011: 51). This essentially means that reality is radically non-self-sufficient, that is, it exists only in so far as it points to something beyond itself. In Dooyeweerd’s words: “As meaning, reality points towards its Origin, the Creator, without whom the creature sinks into nothingness” (Dooyeweerd 1984a: 97).<sup>105</sup> Dooyeweerd refers to the cosmos in its totality as “the realm of meaning”, but he also refers to “meaning structures” within the totality (Chaplin 2011: 52). The next section discusses these “meaning structures” in detail.

### *Time*

In the philosophy of the cosmonomic idea “time” is used somewhat idiosyncratically. For Dooyeweerd, time describes the organisation of the cosmic order. The cosmos is an ordered totality, and this order is characterized by its temporal unfolding. In this respect,

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<sup>105</sup> See Chaplin 2011: 338–339, notes 65–68, for further references and discussion on the notion of “meaning”.

Dooyeweerd refers to “cosmic time”. Importantly, within “cosmic time”, Dooyeweerd distinguishes between a “law-side” and a “subject-side”. The subject-side denotes our ordinary conception of time as duration: time as witnessed in the passing of the seasons, in the gradual transformation of the built and natural environment and in the aging process of living creatures. The law-side, on the other hand, denotes the underlying structure in terms of which time as duration takes place. As Chaplin explains: “The law-side is the ordering framework that establishes the diversity of reality and the coherence within this diversity, that is, time as order” (Chaplin 2011: 52). The things and events we encounter in our naïve experience appear as they do by virtue of the underlying time order. Put differently, time as duration is *subject* to time as order, hence the terminology, “law-side” and “subject-side”. The ageing process in living creatures offers a good example of this relation: on the subject-side, humans for example age in different ways and their life-spans differ, but those aspects which the biological course of all human lives have in common is determined by the universal time order, that is, the *law-side*. As Chaplin notes, “[t]he two sides of time are inseparable correlates” (Chaplin 2011: 52). What is no doubt attractive about the conception of a correlation between “law” and temporality is the way it seems to be instantiated in our everyday experience of the orderly, law-bound processes of change as visible in physical phenomena, chemical reactions and organisms.

Anticipating the issues that will be taken up later, we need to point out that for Dooyeweerd the correlation between law-side and subject-side is not limited to natural processes, but, echoing Kuyper, he extends it to those spheres of life that we ordinarily think of as subject to contingency, for example historical processes.

*Law*

The last of the fundamental philosophical categories that emanate from the biblical ground motive, is that of *law*. Dooyeweerd's Idea of law explicitly relies on the tenets of Calvinism as elaborated by Kuyper: in this view, all of reality is subject to divine law. Dooyeweerd, however, elaborates this relation with great sophistication. Chaplin distinguishes three features of Dooyeweerd's conception of law: first, creatureliness and law pre-suppose each other. No phenomenon exists outside of the law; existence means to conform to divine law. As Chaplin puts it: "Law is not a frustration on creaturely existence but its existential foundation" (Chaplin 2011: 53). Furthermore, existents are unique by virtue of the unique law that holds for each. In other words, the diversity of existents is a function of the law-conforming nature of reality. Secondly, law does not exist independently from reality but rather "underlies and permeates" it (Chaplin 2011: 53). This means that the law-side can only be known in its "indissoluble correlation" with the subject-side. Lastly, the actualisation of divine law exists only as a potential. For example, the potential for a cross-fertilisation between two species of plants exists as a function of divine law, but this potential only actualises if and when these species happen to come into proximity. Since all of reality is governed by divine law, even the development of new medical treatments, for example, can be seen as the temporal actualisation of a divine creation order.

It should be clear that the three ground-Ideas of meaning, time and law are intimately related. Van der Hoeven describes this relation as follows:

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* (quoted in Chaplin 2011: 53).

We are now in a position to consider Dooyeweerd's systematic ontology, which is to be understood as a philosophical conception that is rooted in the biblical ground motive and given theoretical form through the mediation of the Ideas of meaning, time and law.

### **2.3 The theory of the modal aspects**

The transcendental ground-Ideas furnish a picture of reality as a differentiated order in which diversity and totality constitute an interconnected totality, manifesting as the indissoluble correlation between law and that which exists in terms of this law. Dooyeweerd's philosophical ontology is an attempt to dissect this correlation in a way that accounts for the diversity as well as the interrelatedness of reality.

Dooyeweerd makes a distinction between the cosmos understood as an interconnected totality, and the diversity of structures that constitute this totality. In this regard he respectively refers to the "totality of meaning" and the "specialty of meaning". Within the "specialty of meaning", he distinguishes between "modal structures" and "typical structures", which together make up the "two fundamental and interlocking axes" around which subjective reality is governed (Chaplin 2011: 55). Typical structures refer to the individual things, events and relationships that are found within the world; I will follow Chaplin (2011) in referring collectively to these as *existents*.

The modal structures or modal aspects were briefly mentioned above in the exposition of the transcendental critique. As noted, the modal aspects or law-spheres refer to the distinct ways in which all existents unavoidably function, that is, according to Dooyeweerd all

existents reveal different modes of being.<sup>106</sup> Chaplin notes that the chief intellectual objective of the theory of the modal aspects was to combat the tendency towards reductionism in the various academic disciplines, for as we shall see, each modal aspect reveals a different aspect of created reality, which is fundamentally irreducible to any other aspect, and yet also reveals an interconnectedness with all the other aspects (Chaplin 2011: 59–61).

As noted above, Dooyeweerd describes the ordered nature of reality in terms of the idea of time; we also took note of the distinction between time order and time duration, alternatively rendered as law-side and subject-side. Naïve experience is to encounter the correlation between law-side and subject-side in its seamless entanglement. The distinction between law-side and subject-side can only come into view by means of the theoretical act that “lifts” the aspects from their integral function as encountered in naïve experience. As noted earlier, Dooyeweerd depicts the relation between cosmic time and the modal aspects with the image of light refracting through a prism. Cosmic time, in its integral coherence, is like white light; in the same way that refracted white light is revealed to be made up of a number of colours when it passes through a prism, cosmic time can theoretically be channelled to reveal the different elements of its constitution. The theoretical act isolates the aspects, and this allows us to describe the unique structure of each law-sphere as well as its interrelation with all the other law-spheres.

Dooyeweerd identifies fifteen modal aspects, namely: numerical, spatial, kinematic, physical, biotic, psychic, logical, historical, lingual, social, economic, aesthetic, juridical,

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<sup>106</sup> A discussion of the origins of this theory is beyond the scope of this thesis. Wolters (1985) and Chaplin (2011: 56) consider possible influences on Dooyeweerd’s conception. Dooyeweerd considered it to be a unique contribution to systematic philosophy and claims it was the fruit of a sudden intuition during an evening stroll on the dunes outside The Hague (see Henderson 1994).

ethical, and pistic (confessional). Each modal aspect describes a distinct mode of an existent's being. Put differently, each individual existent appears as being subject to each of the modal aspects. This is best explained by an example. A horse is an example of an individual existent and can be described as functioning within each of the listed modal aspects: it can be counted (numerical), it occupies a space (spatial), it can move from one place to another (kinematic), it expends energy (physical), it is subject to the processes of organic life (biotic), it feels hunger (psychic), it can become the object of a logical distinction between horse and saddle (logical), it can play a part in a war effort (historical), it can be named (lingual), it could be a gift (social), it can be bought or sold (economic), it can become the subject of a painting (aesthetic), it can be someone's rightful property (juridical), it can be the object of an owner's love (ethical) and finally, the horse can be the subject of a rider's belief that the horse will not throw them off. It will be noted that the horse functions differently in the logical aspect and onwards: from this point it only functions as an *object* from the perspective of human subjectivity, whereas in the pre-logical modes the horse is still a subject – it has number, occupies space, moves, expends energy and feels. From the logical aspect onwards, the horse does not function as a subject, that is, it does not make logical distinctions, engage in historical action, use language, etcetera; instead it functions as an object for human subjects.

Chaplin notes the following key characteristics of the modal aspects. First, they are “mutually irreducible” (Chaplin 2011). Dooyeweerd explains this as follows: “Every modal aspect of temporal reality has its proper sphere of laws, irreducible to those of other modal aspects, and in this sense it is sovereign in its own orbit” (Dooyeweerd 1984a: 102). In other words, each law-sphere determines an individual existent in a unique way. Explained in terms of the example above, this means that the horse's functioning in the psychic law-sphere cannot be reduced to the laws that determine its functioning in the physical law

sphere; the horse cannot be reduced to a series of physical reactions, it is also a creature that feels hunger and pain. Each law-sphere or modal aspect constitutes an irreplaceable and unique piece of the puzzle, as it were.

The second characteristic of the modal aspects is their “order of succession”. Chaplin explains:

The modal aspects do not exist in an arbitrary juxtaposition but exhibit a sequential structure, a cumulative and increasingly complex order of “prior and posterior” from the numerical aspect through to the pistical aspect. Each aspect builds on the foundation of the preceding ones and is in turn the foundation of the following ones; the “earlier” aspects “found” the “later” ones (Chaplin 2011: 57).

This sequential structure, and the rising complexity it entails is apparent from the example of the horse: it can be shown that the “biotic” existence of the horse pre-supposes its physical existence.

Within the modal order of succession, Dooyeweerd distinguishes between the “foundational direction” and the “transcendental direction”. The foundational direction considers the aspects in terms of how each aspect builds upon the previous aspect, starting with the numerical aspect and ending with the pistical aspect. The transcendental direction involves examining the aspects from the perspective of the pistical aspect, which is positioned, as it were, on the boundary between created reality and the absolute; from this standpoint we see all of creation as “directed towards the religious root of our cosmos” (Dooyeweerd 1984b: 53–54, 186–188).

Each modal aspect reveals an irreducible core meaning which cannot be derived from any other aspect (Chaplin 2011: 58). Dooyeweerd variously refers to this core as the “nuclear moment,” “meaning nucleus,” or “meaning kernel.” Chaplin provides the following table of the fifteen aspects in their order of succession and paired with their respective nuclear moments (2011: 59):

Aspects in order of succession	Respective nuclear moments
Numerical aspect:	<i>discrete quantity</i>
Spatial aspect:	<i>dimensional continuous extension</i>
Kinematic aspect:	<i>movement</i>
Physical aspect:	<i>energy</i>
Biotic aspect:	<i>life</i>
Psychic aspect:	<i>feeling or emotion</i>
Logical aspect:	<i>analytical distinction</i>
Historical aspect:	<i>mastery or control</i>
Lingual aspect:	<i>symbolic signification</i>
Social aspect:	<i>intercourse</i>
Economic aspect:	<i>frugality</i>
Aesthetic aspect:	<i>harmony</i>
Juridical aspect:	<i>retribution</i>
Ethical aspect:	<i>love</i>
Faith/pistic aspect:	<i>certitude</i>

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to engage in a critical examination of how Dooyeweerd arrives at these “meaning kernels” beyond noting that he does so in the process of an

exhaustive engagement with the history of ideas as well as the full range of academic disciplines. For example, he arrives at the core meaning of the numerical aspect through an investigation of the basic concepts of mathematics. It is sufficient to emphasise at this point that in terms of the theory of the modal aspects, all existents (things, an institution or event) are the tangible expressions of modal law. All the “natural laws” that a scientist may bring to bear on the description of the planetary movements, for example, will in some sense be a function of the irreducible core meanings of the modal aspects as they condition each individual existent. Dooyeweerd furthermore develops an intricate account of how the different aspects relate to each other. As Chaplin emphasises, the different modal aspects are *internally* related to form a complex, interwoven and coherent whole, or as Chaplin puts it, “the coherence among them is not an ordered juxtaposition but a mutual interpenetration” (Chaplin 2011: 58)

In light of the broader objectives of this study, the most meaningful way to further explain the interconnected functioning of the modal order is with reference to Dooyeweerd’s philosophy of history. This will serve a double purpose, since I will argue that it is also Dooyeweerd’s philosophy of history that provides the key to understanding the Bloemfontein neo-Calvinist’s approach to the “native question”.

### **3. Dooyeweerd’s philosophy of history**

At this point it serves to first recall the comprehensive scope of Kuyper’s understanding of the creation order. In Kuyper’s view even individual human actions were to be conceived as governed by God’s ordinances. The problem presented by Kuyper’s view is how to reconcile the notion of an all-encompassing normative order with human freedom. How can we conceive of human action as conditioned by divine order without lapsing into

determinism? In response to this problem, Dooyeweerd elaborates Kuyper's position in terms of a distinction between modal *laws* and modal *norms*.

In terms of the theory of modal aspects, *all* of reality is governed by modal "laws". The laws associated with the first six modal aspects (see diagram above) are characterised by the fact that they are "realized in the facts without human intervention" (Chaplin 2011: 62). The laws of thermodynamics, for example, are associated with the physical law-sphere; the mathematical equation,  $2 + 2 = 4$ , is an expression of a modal law functioning in the numerical aspect, and the biological laws involved in cell differentiation are seated in the biotic aspect. The modal laws of the pre-logical aspects thus appear in the familiar guise of what we commonly refer to as the laws of nature.

In contrast to pre-logical modal aspects, the logical aspect and each of the aspects that follow, are applicable to the sphere of human *action*; that is, they condition logical, historical, lingual, social, juridical, economic, aesthetic, ethical and religious *acts*, as performed by human subjects; here the notion of a law-governed creation order becomes problematic. A juridical decision, for example, or the creative choices of an artist, are not so easily conceived of in terms of the "irresistibility"<sup>107</sup> characteristic of  $2 + 2 = 4$ . Dooyeweerd maintains, nonetheless, that all of reality, including human action, is subject to "laws" which are intrinsic to the structure of the modal order.

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<sup>107</sup> Hannah Arendt has used the word "irresistible" in a related context. Discussing Jefferson's famous "We hold these truths to be self-evident" in the American Declaration of Independence, Arendt contends that "[Jefferson] knew very well that the statement 'All men are created equal', could not possibly possess the same power to compel as the statement that two times two make four, for the former is indeed a statement of reason ... which stands in need of agreement, unless one assumes that human reason is divinely informed to recognize certain truths as self-evident; the latter, on the contrary, ... is 'irresistible'" (Arendt 1990: 193).

The “laws” contained in the logical and post-logical aspects, however, function differently from those given by the pre-logical aspects. In the logical and post-logical aspects, modal laws are not “realised in fact”; they require human intervention, that is, they require “the human capacity for intentional, imaginative deliberation, initiation and action”; Dooyeweerd marks this difference by referring to these modal laws as “norms” or “normative principles” (Chaplin 2011: 62). As Conradie notes, these norms are part of the structure of each law-sphere as created by God, but “they must be *discovered, explicated, applied*, that is, *positivised*” [emphasis in original] (Conradie 1960: 79). Strauss refers to this state of affairs as “ontic normativity” (Strauss 2011).

The first of the “normative” law-spheres is the logical aspect. Logical principles such as the law of identity, the law of non-contradiction and the law of the excluded middle, are “norms”, which are founded in the structure of the logical aspect, and they condition logical thought in the same way that laws founded in the numerical, physical or biotic sphere govern the laws of mathematics, physics or biological processes. However, unlike biotic laws, logical principles do not realise as a matter of fact – human subjects must discover and positivise them, and significantly, they can be positivised in an incorrect way, that is, it is always possible for humans to act in a logically *anti-normative* way. As Dooyeweerd explains:

We experience a logical contradiction when an argument avails itself of two propositions which exclude one another in a logical sense. In this case we posit that this mode of reasoning is illogical; and this statement implies a normative evaluation, since it implies the validity of a fundamental logical norm of thought which forbids such contradictions (Dooyeweerd 1968: 96).

This principle applies for all the law-spheres following the logical aspect:

Now it is indisputable that in all experiential aspects which are based on the logical [those aspects that follow the logical aspect in the modal order], an analogy of this normative logical contrast is found. ... I refer to the contrasts: polite-impolite, decent-indecent, and other such contrasts which function in the aspect of conventional social discourse; to the contrast: linguistically right or wrong, which we meet with the linguistic aspect of experience; to the contrasts: aesthetic-unaesthetic, economic-uneconomic, lawful-unlawful, moral-immoral, believing-unbelieving, which occur respectively in the aesthetic, economic, juridical, moral and in the faith aspects of our experiential horizon (Dooyeweerd 1968: 96).

In other words, this fundamental “normative contrast”, expressed in the logical aspect by the opposition, logical/illogical, is established – by analogy – to be present in all the post-logical aspects, and thus yields norms analogous to logical principles for all the normative modal law-spheres, for human subjects to discover and “positivise”.

The distinction between “laws” and “norms” thus creates the space for human freedom and forms the basis for a philosophy of history. The critical point here is that in “positivizing” the norms contained in the post-logical aspects, human beings actively *participate* in God’s creation order. In order to understand the nature of this participation, and its relation to a philosophy of history, we need to understand how the different modal aspects “mutually interpenetrate” each other.

We need to recall that the modal order as Dooyeweerd describes it, is a “temporal order”. This means, to put it as simply as possible, that the integration of the modal aspects has a temporal dimension: each aspect, starting from the numerical aspect, serves as a foundation on which the next aspect builds. In other words, the integration of aspects

reveals an architectural structure that increases in complexity. Space builds on number, movement builds on space, etc; an organism cannot reveal its biological aspect in isolation from all the preceding aspects. Dooyeweerd describes this order of succession as the foundational direction of time. The modal order, however, also reveals a transcendental direction. This implies another perspective on this temporal organization: later aspects in the modal order are able to augment or deepen the meaning of the foundational aspects of existence. For example, the aesthetic mode of existence enhances the lingual mode of existence when language progresses beyond functional communication to the production of literature; when a community builds a dam in a river to act as a reservoir in the dry season, the economic dimension of existence (frugal use of resources) enhances the community's ability to survive (its functioning in the biotic aspect). The meaning of the river is thus deepened or augmented; a new possibility is disclosed, and this deepened meaning derives from the transcendental unfolding of the modal order. Another example would be the invention of the telescope. At the most basic level our sensory experience is characterized by a logical aspect, that is, we distinguish between and identify different entities. The telescope, however, allows us to form a *theoretical* view of the relations between the earth, sun and moon, that is, to form a conception of the relations between these objects which is not accessible to our *unmodified* sensory experience. The logical "aspect" of our experience is thus augmented or deepened: our experience of reality as a set of logical relations between discrete entities comes to include a theoretical view of space which extends far beyond what is available to sensory experience. The disclosure of this possibility is intimately linked to the invention of the telescope as a form of "mastery" or power. In each of these instances, Dooyeweerd would argue, human action "positivises" modal norms.

It is important to note that this “process of disclosure” is mediated by human action. In other words, the action of transforming the environment, thereby revealing previously undisclosed possibilities within the creation order, is an instance of humans participating in an order, which is conceived as a dynamic process. Dooyeweerd refers to this process as the “opening process” [*ontsluitingsproces*]; it is not arbitrary or relative, its possibilities are given by the modal order itself (Chaplin 2011: 73–74). Humans participate in this process when they “positivise” modal norms. As McIntire puts it, “[p]ositivisation, that is, the actualizing of modal norms is ‘a dynamic process which occurs in a noticeably temporal order’” (McIntire 1985: 98).

The historical aspect plays a special role in the process of disclosure. We will recall that Dooyeweerd describes the meaning kernel (the irreducible meaning moment) of the historical aspect as “control” or “mastery” [*beheersing* in Dutch]. “Mastery” in its original modal meaning, we learn, means “formation according to a free project”; this in turn, Dooyeweerd points out, is the meaning of “culture” as it is used in the historical sciences as opposed to the natural sciences (Dooyeweerd 1984b: 195). In this way, Dooyeweerd aims to establish that the modal meaning of the historical aspect (“mastery”) can effectively also be designated as “culture”. As he puts it, “there can be no question of an historical aspect of experience apart from the cultural one” (Dooyeweerd 1984b: 196). Dooyeweerd states:

If the meaning-nucleus of the cultural modality is only to be found in control or mastery we must establish that this nuclear moment, as such, implies a vocation and task which can only be accomplished in a successive cultural development of mankind in its temporal social existence (Dooyeweerd 1984b: 196).

The “vocation and task” accomplished through “cultural development” is nothing other than the dynamic “opening process” or process of disclosure referred to above. In other words, humanity’s participation in the unfolding of God’s creation order is conditioned by the meaning kernel of the historical aspect, that is, “mastery” or formation according to a free project. Put differently, it is the historical aspect of existence that mediates humankind’s participation in the unfolding of God’s creation. Without “mastery” or “formative control”, the positivisation of the modal norms would be inconceivable (Dooyeweerd 1984b: 190). This means that the development of technology, the development of forms of political organization, the development of science, as well as the development of the arts are all predicated on the historical aspect of existence. The example of the building of the reservoir above shows how formative control allows for the “development” of economic, social and political life.

We need to emphasise, however, that for Dooyeweerd the historical aspect does not amount to a “historicism”, according to which all development is contingent and relative. In his view development proceeds by means of the disclosure of possibilities given in the creation order by means of the positivisation of modal norms, and it presupposes human freedom. Indeed, as Chaplin notes, the normative possibilities within the creation order are the condition of possibility of human freedom (2011: 75).

As noted above, the *normative* nature of the possibilities given by the logical and post-logical aspects, as opposed to the “irresistible” nature of the laws contained in the pre-logical spheres, however, entails that norms can also be actualized in an *anti-normative* way. Human freedom means that we can engage in acts of formative control that realise anti-normative ends, that is, which do not reveal God’s will for the unfolding of creation. In other words, “development” can proceed in a skewed or distorted way. Furthermore, the idea that

cultural development involves a process of disclosure assumes that it is possible to compare two different societies in terms of their relative state of “openness”. I return to this point below; for the moment is only necessary to note that, in terms of this theory, Dooyeweerd refers to the *normative* realization of possibilities as the “Christian Idea of cultural development” and describes it as an earthly task: humankind must actively bring about (Christian) development. From the above it should be clear that the philosophy of the cosmonomic idea describes a dynamic temporal process in which human freedom plays a central part. The theory of the modal aspects is in some sense an attempt to present this temporal process in spatial terms, that is, to freeze the flow of experience, and to reveal the harmonious and eternal structure that make it possible.

I now return to the question of “anti-normative” development. As noted above, development is a task, and this task can be accomplished in accordance with the norms that are given by the creation order. These norms may be “discovered” by an analysis of the modal structure of reality. For example, within the logical sphere, the meaning kernel of analytical distinction furnishes the possibility of logical or illogical acts, that is, at the most basic level, we can either identify correctly or incorrectly. Philosophers are able to further develop this basic normative distinction into the complex rules of symbolic logic. In an analogical way, the historical aspect also reveals normative principles for historical action. Formative control, or mastery, cannot be exercised arbitrarily, it must follow the norms which can be discovered within the historical aspect. For Dooyeweerd these norms are integration, individuation and differentiation. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to give a full exposition of how Dooyeweerd arrives at these norms, except to note that each

of these terms occurs in prior law spheres and takes on “analogical” meaning in the historical aspect.<sup>108</sup> I give McIntire’s summary of the meaning of each of these terms:

Integration refers to the need for human societies and civilizations to cohere as wholes as they go through manifold changes throughout their history [...] Individuation means the process of forming new entities in the course of history, like new social structures such as states, churches, and so on [...] differentiation in society is the process by which the modal aspects, each with its specific norms, come to expression in such a way that one is separated from the next and each serves as a qualifying function in at least one distinct social structure (McIntire 1985: 102).

As an example of differentiation, we can refer to the separation of church and state during the Reformation, during which, in Dooyeweerd’s terms, the state emerged as a public legal order, qualified by juridical aspect, in distinction from the church, which is qualified by the faith aspect. As McIntire (1985: 102) points out, Dooyeweerd’s view of normative cultural development to a significant extent reflected the development of Dutch society up until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, which had differentiated into “a state, a church, a free industrial or trade-life, free associations, a free unfolding of fine arts, a scientific community, etc. (Dooyeweerd 1984c: 261).

The notion of normative cultural development cannot be divorced from the question of religious direction, that is, from the influence of the various religious ground motives on human cultural activity. According to this view, the Christian Idea of cultural development is the fruit of the Christian ground motive. Differentiation, individuation and integration are norms that *ought* to be actualized, because they belong to “the Divine world-order”. A

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<sup>108</sup> See Strauss 2011; 2014 in this regard.

culture directed by the humanist ground motive will, according to Dooyeweerd's theory, typically develop in a distorted way, for example: humanist culture, lacking the integral perspective of the Christian ground motive might typically conceive of development in narrowly biological terms. A theory of development that is rooted in the biotic aspect might explain human civilization in terms of a race struggle, in which the biologically superior races must prevail over the weaker races by virtue of an inexorable "natural process". Dooyeweerd's philosophy of history, especially as articulated after the Second World War, was an explicit attempt to counter reductive, totalizing philosophies of history, which in his view lay at the roots of totalitarian atrocities (see Dooyeweerd 1968).

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to critically investigate Dooyeweerd's theory of cultural development on its own terms.<sup>109</sup> In Chapter 7, however, I will investigate in detail how this theory was appropriated by the Bloemfontein neo-Calvinists in their attempt to apply Dooyeweerd's philosophy of history to the "native question" in South Africa. With this in mind, it is necessary to briefly explore Dooyeweerd's relation to what Hannah Arendt has referred to as the "modern concept of history" (see Arendt 2006: 41-90).

Dooyeweerd wished to strictly distinguish his philosophy of history from "historicism".

For Dooyeweerd, historicism involved making

... the historical viewpoint the all-encompassing one, absorbing all other aspects of the human experiential horizon. ... All our scientific, philosophical, ethical, aesthetic, political and religious standards and conceptions are viewed as the expression of the mind of a particular culture or civilization. ... History has no windows looking out into eternity (Dooyeweerd 1968: 62).

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<sup>109</sup> For a critical but sympathetic account, see McIntire 1985.

In spite of Dooyeweerd's avowed rejection of historicism, he does attach considerable importance to the historical aspect in his conception of the dynamic unfolding of created reality. And as McIntire notes, "by conceiving of his philosophy of history as an idea of cultural development, Dooyeweerd put himself fully in the mainstream of modern European thought" (McIntire 1985: 97). Hegel's influence is evident and Dooyeweerd indeed credits him with discovering the "laws" of differentiation, individuation and integration. McIntire accordingly notes that Dooyeweerd could "readily [be] classified as a 'speculative' philosopher of history" (McIntire 1985: 81).

Hannah Arendt offers a compelling interpretation of the origins of this "mainstream" of European historical thought (see Arendt 2006: 41-90). It is beyond the scope of the thesis to present Arendt's account of the development of modern historical consciousness in full. It is sufficient to show that Dooyeweerd's conception of history reflects two key elements in Arendt's account, namely, "thinking in terms of processes, on the one hand, and the conviction, on the other, that I know only what I myself have made" (Arendt 2006: 88).<sup>110</sup>

The process-thinking in Dooyeweerd's account is evident from the very notion of the "opening process" [*ontsluitingsproces*], which clearly describes a gradual development according to which new historical possibilities are temporally realised, each dynamically building on the previous. Dooyeweerd's conception of the way humans drive this process is also typical of the modern concept of history. The process of disclosure is mediated by humans acting in the manner of "formative control", or as Marx put it "men *make* history"

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<sup>110</sup> The second element is strikingly reflected in Dooyeweerd's transcendental critique of theoretical thought, where theoretical thought is characterized as the product of an *act* of abstraction (see Dooyeweerd 1948: 31). Dooyeweerd here explicitly makes the possibility of knowledge dependent on the artificial nature of the *gegenstand*-relation.

[my emphasis] (Marx 2019: 480).<sup>111</sup> “Formative control” relates to the process-quality of history in so far as it “always seeks new roads in such a way that what precedes fructifies that which follows, and thus a certain continuity is preserved in cultural development” (Dooyeweerd 1984b: 198).

We may further note that what we would ordinarily describe as “politics” seems to be subsumed under the historical aspect. For Dooyeweerd, “mastery” or “formative control” is the key term in political history. As he puts it, “mastery over persons is an essential requirement in the leading figures who are called ‘formers of history’ and who give positive content to the cultural principles proper” and “culture appears in mastery over persons by giving cultural form to their social existence” (Dooyeweerd 1984b: 198). The process-thinking involved in Dooyeweerd’s account, that is, the idea that cultural development involves a progressive disclosure of meaning that is typically only available to the retrospective view of the historian, coupled with the notion of action as “formative control”, begets the possibility of conceiving the “opening process” as the *aim* of political action.<sup>112</sup> In other words, the “formers of history” must shape culture in such a way as to facilitate the process of disclosure. In this respect also, Dooyeweerd’s concept of history is clearly modern: it derives “politics from history, ... political conscience from historical consciousness” (Arendt 2006: 79). Arendt summarizes the dangers of this development as follows:

The danger of transforming the unknown and unknowable “higher aims” into planned and willed intentions was that meaning and meaningfulness were transformed into ends – which

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<sup>111</sup> Marx seemed to realise, however, that “making” history did not involve “mastery”: “Men make their own history, but not of their own free will; not under circumstances they themselves have chosen but under the given and inherited circumstances with which they are directly confronted (Marx 2019: 480).

<sup>112</sup> I have adapted this interpretation of Dooyeweerd from Arendt’s discussion of Marx (Arendt 2006: 77–78).

is what happened when Marx took the Hegelian meaning of all history – the progressive unfolding and actualization of the idea of Freedom – to be an end of human action, and when furthermore, in accordance with tradition, viewed this ultimate “end” as the end-product of a manufacturing process (Arendt 2006: 78).

Arendt’s point is also applicable to Dooyeweerd. His conception of history involves a remarkable synthesis between the “cultural mandate” of Genesis and the modern understanding of history as process, which leads to the notion that humans *ought* to facilitate the unfolding of history according to a certain pattern. The unknown and unknowable “higher aims” of God’s creation order could thus be conceived as a legitimate terrain for human action in the guise of “formative control”. The above characterization of Dooyeweerd’s philosophy of history is important for the argument I present in the chapters that follow.

The South African intellectual context in which Dooyeweerd was received was indebted to the philosophical legacy of British Imperial rule, that is, British Idealism. The “speculative” notion of cultural development – the concept of history as development or process – would thus have been familiar to South African ears. Similarly familiar would have been the expediency of this notion to locate white “civilization” within a contemporary course of development, namely, at the vanguard of the developmental process, spreading progress and “civilization”. Importantly, however, the notion of “Christian development”, here strongly associated with Dutch Protestant culture and distinguished from idolatrous humanism, would also have resonated with organic intellectuals in the process of constructing the cultural scaffolding for a modern Afrikaner identity in opposition to a “liberal” British Imperialism. In other words, we can see how the need for a new principle of order, coupled with the modernist requirement of an

epistemological foundation for a national culture, as well as the need for an organic link to the Afrikaner past, would all have been answered by a “Calvinist” philosophy of development.<sup>113</sup> In the chapters that follow I show how the “process of disclosure”, conceived as normative historical task, resonated with the Bloemfontein neo-Calvinists’ conceptualization of the apartheid idea.

#### **4. Conclusion**

South Africa in the 1930s evinced a widespread sense of crisis (see Chapter 1), a crisis that set the scene for an articulation of Afrikaner identity in terms of a series of oppositional differences: modernism and liberalism, Afrikaans and English, native and civilized, black and white. It was in this context that Dooyeweerd’s notion of “Christian philosophy” and the idea of a fundamental antithesis between the Biblical religious ground motive, and an apostate ground motive was received. Christian philosophy linked the Calvinist tradition to a singular epistemology as well as a normative vision of society. Kuyper had already invested this tradition with social and political meaning: modernism, liberalism and communism were all considered manifestations of “humanist” apostasy. This fundamental opposition was more than amenable to the historical antagonisms that had shaped the politics of early 20<sup>th</sup> century South Africa. British Imperialism, modernism and liberalism were readily, if not always accurately, lumped together as the enemy of Afrikaner nationalism, and neo-Calvinist theology was able to provide a theological basis for this antagonism. Dooyeweerd’s philosophy developed Kuyper’s neo-Calvinism into a sophisticated systematic philosophy and its philosophy of history in particular would resonate with intellectuals such as Herman Strauss and E.A. Venter. The philosophy of

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<sup>113</sup> Accounts of the development of Afrikaner nationalism often point the way in which organic intellectuals appealed to the history of the “volk” in their attempt to define the nation (see e.g. Dubow 1995). These accounts however seldom reflect on the concept of history that is operative in these appeals. The understanding of history as “process” that is implied by these appeals is almost never critically considered.

the cosmonomic idea would become the dominant philosophical orientation at the University of the Free State from the late 1950s until at least 1994. The chapter that follows investigates its early reception at the University College of the Orange Free State.

## Chapter 6

### How Dooyeweerd came to Bloemfontein, 1942–1958<sup>114</sup>

Ons moet ons Vaderland oor die hele front vul, onderwerp en beheers sodat ons volk 'n sieraad in Sy Skepping kan word. Op elke lewensterrein moet ons buig, want Hy gee ons alles wat ons nodig het om Sy opdrag uit te voer. Hy stel die grense en lê die bande; ons moet net gehoorsaam organiseer.

– Herman Strauss, *Instellings en Organisasies tot Eer van God*, p. 12.

... every letter that I receive from you is a tonic to me. I know what fine work you do as a lecturer in Bloemfontein and I know that I can always fully count on you as a brother-in-arms for our ideals.

– Herman Dooyeweerd, Letter to H.J. Strauss, 1 Julie 1950.

In the preceding chapters I provided a succinct account of Dooyeweerd's philosophy of the cosmonomic idea and its debt to Kuyper's understanding of Calvinism as life-system. This allows us now to turn our attention to the sustained efforts by the Bloemfontein neo-Calvinists – most prominently H.J. Strauss and E.A. Venter – to secure an institutional footing for “Christian philosophy”<sup>115</sup> at the University College of the Orange Free State (UCOVS) from the mid-1940s onwards. We shall also see how these efforts articulated with the elaboration of apartheid.

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<sup>114</sup> With acknowledgement and appreciation to Andrew Nash.

<sup>115</sup> Following the example of the Bloemfontein neo-Calvinists, I will throughout this chapter use the terms “Christian philosophy” and “Christian science” to refer to their philosophical orientation, which, as previously mentioned, draws in great measure from the philosophy of the cosmonomic idea as elaborated by Dooyeweerd.

The main objectives of this chapter are: first, to reconstruct an account of how Christian philosophy was institutionalised at UCOFS – later the University of the Orange Free State; secondly, to elucidate how the adherents of Christian philosophy conceived of the institutional dimension of this intellectual orientation, and finally, to uncover some of the practical measures they took to realise that conception in the context of their respective academic departments and the institution more broadly. In pursuing these objectives, I also draw attention to how key elements of Dooyeweerd’s philosophy took on a different emphasis in the writings of his Bloemfontein adherents, a difference which arguably reflected the political context of Afrikaner nationalism in general, and the increasing significance of the apartheid idea in particular.

I have for the most part proceeded chronologically in reconstructing, on the basis of archival sources, an account of how Christian philosophy was introduced to and became the guiding intellectual framework at two departments at the UCOFS and UOFS (the department of philosophy and the department of political philosophy) in the 1940s and early 1950s, while situating these events in the context of contemporary political developments. This reconstruction is largely drawn from H.J. Strauss’s personal correspondence during this period. The letters present a revealing picture of his ambitions, his thought and his struggles, as well as offer some insight into the relationship between his intellectual and religious convictions, and his political commitments. Notable correspondents include the Dutch neo-Calvinist scholars, Dirk Vollenhoven, J.P.A. Mekkes, and perhaps most significantly, Dooyeweerd himself. Locally the Stellenbosch theologian, F.J.M. Potgieter, appeared to have been a trusted collaborator and confidant.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Potgieter obtained his doctorate from the Free University in October 1939 and Strauss’s correspondence reveals that he had known Potgieter during the time they were both in Amsterdam. Potgieter later served as the DRC minister in the town of Steynsburg during the period when Strauss had been a teacher there. Potgieter contributed to the collection *Koers in die krisis* in the 1940s and became a prominent exponent of neo-Calvinist theology at the Stellenbosch seminary.

Regarding political figures, a single letter to former minister and later State President, C.R. Swart, reveals much about Strauss's institutional position and the intersection between his politics and his duties as a lecturer at the time.

The available primary sources also reveal how Strauss and Venter actively pursued the advancement of Christian philosophy, not only at UCOFS and UOFS, but more broadly within South African society. This included efforts to secure the appointment of like-minded lecturers; assisting students to pursue post-graduate studies at the Free University in Amsterdam; establishing a publishing company, and generally mobilising a network of so-called *medestanders* through a number of organisations. A highlight in the endeavour to advance Christian philosophy was a visit by Dooyeweerd himself to the UOFS campus in early 1951. Correspondence between Strauss and Dooyeweerd around this time offers a revealing glimpse into the relationship between the men and its broader significance for the Bloemfontein neo-Calvinists.

I elucidate the narrative that emerges from the archival material further by referring to pertinent publications by H.J. Strauss and E.A. Venter. These writings shed further light on how they viewed their task as “Christian scientists” and to what extent this conception was drawn from the philosophy of the cosmonomic idea.

Throughout the chapter, I attempt to make explicit how Strauss and Venter, in their pursuit of promoting “Christian philosophy” in the South African academic context articulated with some of the salient themes of Afrikaner nationalism in general (e.g. the struggle against imperialism, liberalism and communism), and with apartheid ideology in particular. I argue that this articulation was made possible by the principle of division that Dooyeweerd, via Kuyper, introduced with the notion that theoretical thought proceeds

from a religious starting point. I attempt to show, however, that the Bloemfontein neo-Calvinists reduced Dooyeweerd's intricate argument to a crude functionalism, which allowed for the facile categorisation and villainization of any number of philosophical (and political) positions as being "apostate" and therefore anti-normative.

### **1. Gaining a foothold for Christian philosophy, 1942–1952**

In this section I focus on the founding phase of the institutionalisation of neo-Calvinist philosophy at the UOFS, beginning with Strauss's appointment in 1942 and ending with the appointment of E.A. Venter in 1952.

Christian philosophy became institutionalised at the University College of the Orange Free State during the period that the concept of apartheid crystallised as the official racial policy of the National Party. The apartheid idea was first defended in parliament in 1944, adopted as the official racial policy of the NP in 1945, and developed into a comprehensive policy of apartheid by the Sauer Commission in 1947. The NP won the general election in 1948, and soon thereafter set about to consolidate the party's electoral gains, while embarking on a legislative programme to realise its racial policy.

The fortunes of the University College mirrored these national developments. As we saw in Chapter 3, the GUC had become a site for Afrikaner nationalist mobilisation as early as the 1920s; this struggle manifested in an intense struggle over the language of instruction, which involved members of both the senate and council. By the 1940s the nationalists had managed to gain the advantage, and the policy of bilingualism established in the 1930s began to be phased out in favour of unilingual Afrikaans instruction. In 1946, H. Van der Merwe Scholtz, a key figure among the nationalist contingent in the 1930s, became the rector of the University College. Under his leadership, the "Afrikanerization" of the

institution gained momentum. The acclaimed novelist and historian, Karel Schoeman, a student at UOFS during the late 1950s, had first-hand experience of the consequences of this process. As Schoeman notes, from the 1940s onward, appointments at UCOFS and UOFS were increasingly made on the basis of the candidates being Afrikaans-speaking, specifically, Afrikaans-speaking men with the “right” political and church affiliations:

This opened the door to a considerable phalanx of mediocrity, third-ratedness and general inanity that under the guise of “Afrikaansness” ended up in positions which they never should have held, with a concomitant lowering of standards (Schoeman 2002: 261).

It was in this context that the institution gained its independence from the University of South Africa and became a fully-fledged university on the basis of its own Act of Parliament. This development triggered a period of growth for the university: student numbers rose, academic provision and offerings was increased, the teaching body expanded, and the campus underwent significant physical expansion. The ascendancy of Afrikaner nationalism meant that the ideological struggles of the 1930s and 1940s largely dissipated as a nationalist hegemony settled over the country and the institution; the University of the Orange Free State now donned the mantle of *volksuniversiteit* (University of the Free State 2006: 161-164).

It was against this backdrop that Herman Strauss took up the cause for Calvinist philosophy at the institution. As we shall see, however, Strauss’s commitment to Calvinist philosophy did not necessarily align him with other prominent nationalists at the institution; indeed, Strauss emphatically distanced himself from the “*volksnasionisme*” of N. Diederichs, P. Meyer, H.G. Stoker and G. Cronjé.

Strauss's efforts to establish Christian philosophy at UCOFS should be viewed within the larger context of the reception of neo-Calvinism in South Africa. To briefly recall the contents of Chapter 1: neo-Calvinism became a factor in Afrikaner nationalist ideology during the 1930s when a group of northern intellectuals articulated an organic link between Kuyper's notion of the Calvinist world- and life-view and the history of the Afrikaner *volk*. Calvinism was designated as the spiritual and intellectual heritage of the Afrikaner and became a key ingredient in this group's conception of the Afrikaner's national identity.

Dooyeweerd's elaboration of the philosophy of the cosmonomic idea provided a sophisticated foundation for this larger cultural project. Through his elaboration of Kuyper's notion of the antithesis, Dooyeweerd made it possible to speak of Christian philosophy, Christian science and Christian culture in a highly determined way. The foundational character of Dooyeweerd's philosophy gave the Calvinist-nationalist grouping considerable scope for ideological mobilisation. The notion of Christian science, in particular, rendered schools and universities important strategic targets. In Chapter 4, we saw how Herman Strauss's invocation of a vaguely defined "Boer-Calvinism", developed into a more or less articulate commitment to Calvinist philosophy as elaborated by Dooyeweerd. Upon his return to South Africa from his European studies, Strauss launched himself into this Calvinist action; and this meant gaining a foothold for Christian philosophy and science at UCOFS.

Karel Schoeman remembers the political philosophy lectures as the only place where he was unavoidably confronted with staunch Afrikaner nationalism. He specifically recalls a "*weißglühende* intellectual who stared out over our heads with gleaming eyes and an ecstatic facial expression while he compulsively held forth on Abraham Kuyper's concept of

sphere sovereignty” (Schoeman 2002: 267). There can be little doubt that the “white-hot” intellectual in question was Herman Strauss.

Strauss was first appointed as a lecturer – in the department of philosophy – in 1942. His ambitions for Christian philosophy were set free when he became the *de facto* head of a new, autonomous department of political philosophy in 1946, and his position was consolidated after being promoted to professor in 1950. The appointment of E.A. Venter – under irregular circumstances<sup>117</sup> – as head of the department of philosophy in 1952 marked a further step forward for Christian philosophy at the institution; this development would arguably lay the groundwork for its continued prominence in the department until the 1990s.

The period 1942–1954, during which Christian philosophy became entrenched at two departments at the University of the Free State, could be aptly summarised by the title of a 1953 publication by Herman Strauss: *Christelike Wetenskap: Roeping en Stryd*<sup>118</sup> (1953). In the introduction, Strauss grounds the notion of Christian science in the “antithesis” as elaborated by Kuyper and Dooyeweerd:

In the heart our whole life is either turned towards God or away from him. Here the ways of life [*lewensweë*] part either for or against Christ, because from the heart of man issues all the evils, and out of this erupts the ferocious battle between belief and unbelief; a religious battle that rages over the entire harvest field [*oesland*], and it changes into a battle ground on which belief and unbelief is radically opposed in all sectors. ... The clash between belief and unbelief therefore also propagates itself to the battle ground of scientific thought, where

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<sup>117</sup> I discuss the circumstances surrounding Venter’s appointment in detail later in this chapter.

<sup>118</sup> In English: *Christian Science: Calling and Struggle*.

christian [*sic*] and humanist each employ their own weapons; respectively for and against Christ (Strauss 1953: 11, 16).

For Strauss, this implied a special responsibility:

Every next generation spends the most impressionable period of human life in our educational institutions, from which in addition our leaders and experts with regards to all fields of life make their appearance. Which Christian parent should not be concerned about the scientific influence to which his children are exposed? We are responsible to God for the education given to the children of the Covenant, and therefore it is Christian duty to continuously cast a watchful eye over the content of the education and the course of science in our fatherland (Strauss 1953: 14).

These were the main outlines of Strauss's calling and struggle.

Strauss's practical commitment to the Calvinist cause dates back to at least February 1939. Still living in Amsterdam at the time, he wrote to J. De W. Keyter, professor in sociology at UCOFS, to "request" the latter's "cooperation" in advancing the philosophy of the cosmomic idea. Keyter, as noted in Chapter 3, counted among the prominent nationalists at the College during the intensified ideological mobilisation of the 1930s. Strauss would have known him in this capacity, and may have considered him an influential ally for his future endeavours. His request reads as follows:

About the seriousness of the matter, I know, I don't have to say much. [Calvinistic philosophy] today enjoys the attention of everyone who feels and acknowledges the need

for an authentic<sup>119</sup> Christian philosophy. This philosophy of the cosmonomic idea ... is as you know still in the infant years of its development and calls for collaborators in every terrain of science. Nevertheless, the trailblazers have drawn the main lines fairly clearly and it is no longer impossible to independently reach a decision for or against it. This decision is of course only as concerns the most fundamental points of departure and presuppositions, which must then give way to healthy differences of opinion as concerns the more secondary matters.

Strauss proceeds to recommend J.M. Spier's *Inleiding in de Wijsbegeerte der Wetsidee*<sup>120</sup> (he presumptuously adds that his father-in-law, D.F.M. Malherbe, would not mind lending Keyter his personal copy) and expresses the hope that Keyter would have no objection to "cooperation". Strauss also casually informs Keyter that Dooyeweerd has yet to work out the implications of his philosophy for pedagogy, the implication apparently being that Keyter, who had published a book on education and teaching in 1936,<sup>121</sup> might prove most "cooperative" by exploring this line of enquiry.

The 1939 letter to Keyter already reveals the main contours of Strauss's lifelong campaign for Christian philosophy: the firm conviction concerning the authentically Christian nature of Dooyeweerd's philosophy; the impression that it is of the utmost importance to contribute to the development of this "infant" philosophy by recruiting collaborators from all the academic disciplines, and, most importantly the fundamental importance for all "scientists" to choose either for or against Christian philosophy. The tone of Strauss's

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<sup>119</sup> I have used "authentic" to translate the Afrikaans word "*eië*" used by Strauss. "*Eië*" can be directly translated into English as "own", which would lead to the awkward formulation of an "own Christian philosophy". I take Strauss's meaning to be that this "Christian philosophy" will be authentically 'Christian', a Christian philosophy emanating from authentic Christian roots, as opposed to Christian philosophy corrupted by humanist or scholastic influences.

<sup>120</sup> Strauss does not provide biographical details in the letter, but he is presumably referring to Spier's 1938 publication, *Een inleiding in de Wijsbegeerte der Wetsidee* (see Spier 1938).

<sup>121</sup> See Keyter 1936.

letter is presumptuous and even manipulative, rendering hollow his simultaneous efforts at deference towards his former professor. Strauss conspiratorially draws in Keyter by attributing to him a knowledge of the “seriousness” of the matter, as if their common interests have already been established; he then shrewdly suggests that anyone who would claim ignorance about Calvinistic philosophy does not “feel” and “acknowledge” the need for Christian philosophy. His reference to reaching a “decision” as concerns the most fundamental points of departure invokes the notion of the “antithesis”, the “principal conflict” between belief and unbelief; with this comment he is not too subtly suggesting to Keyter that it is incumbent upon him, as a Christian, to choose correctly in this regard. The rather brazen rhetorical tactics of Strauss’s letter may well be attributable to his relative youth as well as to a genuine excitement brought on by his recent intellectual awakening. As we shall see, however, this strident proselytising for Christian philosophy was to remain a key feature of his future academic career.

Strauss’s ambition to “serve the *volke* at His feet” became a reality in 1942, when he was appointed as a lecturer at the GUC. Strauss was responsible for several courses offered by the department of philosophy and the department of sociology. The department of philosophy, headed by G.H.T. Malan, presented the courses in political philosophy, which were now assigned to Strauss.

The GUC yearbook of 1943 confirms that Strauss soon started to incorporate neo-Calvinist texts into the political philosophy curriculum. From 1943 onwards the prescribed literature for the first year includes *Die Moderne Staat* (1941), a monograph by the Potchefstroom neo-Calvinist political scientist, L.J. du Plessis and for the second year, an

early work by Dooyeweerd, namely, *Crisis in de Humanistische Staatsleer*. J.M. Spier's introduction to the philosophy of the cosmonomic idea is listed as additional reading.<sup>122</sup>

*Crisis in de Humanistische Staatsleer* was first published in 1931 and preceded the publication of Dooyeweerd's magnum opus *De Wijsbegeerte der Wetsidee* by a number of years. In the preface of the former Dooyeweerd explains that this text was intended to "put forward the foundations of a modern Calvinist view of the state", and that as such it did not as yet amount to a "worked-out theory of the state". He notes however that the text did make "public for the first time a more systematic account of the fundamentals of the theory of knowledge and the view of reality that I have worked out at length in my forthcoming work *De Wijsbegeerte der Wetsidee*" (Dooyeweerd 2010: ix). In other words, this text, more than providing a particular theory of the state, would have served as an introduction for students into the philosophical foundations of Dooyeweerd's political theory.

Spier's book would have offered a relatively accessible introduction to Dooyeweerd's thought, but it may have also served Strauss's activist purposes.<sup>123</sup> Johannes Marinus Spier (1902–1971) was a Reformed minister from the Netherlands and his interpretation of Dooyeweerd was stamped by his occupation. Zuidervaart (2004: 73) notes that Spier emphasised Dooyeweerd's "fideistic" side (more apparent in his writings prior to 1940), and describes Spier's prose as "simplistic", "combative" and as lacking the "subtleties of Dooyeweerd's transcendental critique" (2004: 72). Judging from Strauss's tone in the letter to Keyter, the combative and simplistic character of Spier's work would have appealed to him, and his reading of Dooyeweerd may have been inflected by Spier's approach.

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<sup>122</sup> The text recommended to Keyter in the letter of 1939.

<sup>123</sup> Spier's book was later translated into Afrikaans by H.J. Strauss and his son, D.F.M. Strauss, and published by the *Suid-Afrikaanse Calvinistiese Uitgewersmaatskappy* (SACUM) to serve as a prescribed work for philosophy students.

It is difficult to establish how Herman Strauss engaged the neo-Calvinist cause in the classroom during his early years as lecturer, but a slim publication from 1944 with the title *Instellings en Organisasies tot Eer van God*,<sup>124</sup> already hints at which elements in Dooyeweerd's thought appealed most to Strauss. The publication also offers insight into how Strauss viewed his educational task as a proponent of Christian science. It also provides a glimpse of Strauss's early attempts at an articulation between his Afrikaner nationalist sympathies and the Reformational thought of Kuyper and Dooyeweerd.

The book, or pamphlet rather, formed part of the so-called *Ossewareeks*,<sup>125</sup> edited by H.G. Stoker and J.D. Vorster.<sup>126</sup> The title page describes the purpose of the series as follows:

This series treats our *volk* [nation] in its broadest layers, and in full correspondence with the life-view of our Calvinist *Voortrekkervoorouers* [Voortrekker forefathers], in a principled [*prinsipiële*] and contained manner, theoretical and practical issues of current interest on the various terrains of our *volkslewe* [national life], on which the *Trek* must continue.

This booklet, despite its modest size, is important in so far as it already shows to what extent Strauss embraced Dooyeweerd's philosophical rendition of the neo-Calvinist notion of the "creation order", in particular as it relates to the cultural activities of individuals and institutions. In the booklet, Strauss also unequivocally states his views regarding the role of science and education from a Calvinist perspective.

The main purpose of the text is apparently to present a neo-Calvinist account of different societal institutions and organisations, and their relation to one another, with specific

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<sup>124</sup> In English literally, *Institutions and Organisations in honour of God*.

<sup>125</sup> In English literally, *The Oxwagon-series*.

<sup>126</sup> With further editorial assistance from J.D. du Toit (Totius), E.E. van Rooyen, J.F. Mentz and J.C. van Rooy. The editorial associates were all connected with the Potchefstroom grouping of neo-Calvinists.

reference to their place in the life of the Boer people. For the purposes of this chapter, it is not necessary to discuss Strauss's understanding of institutions and organisations in detail; the essential idea, which Strauss derives from Kuyper and Dooyeweerd, is that key societal institutions, which include the state, the church and the family, are instituted by God as part of His creation order. In other words, these institutions are created by God and as such they have a particular character and function. Each of these institutions must act according to its own unique "calling",<sup>127</sup> in harmonious co-operation with other institutions, and taking care not to overstep the bounds of its particular sphere of authority. Throughout the text, Strauss repeatedly and emphatically draws attention to the "laws and norms" that govern societal institutions, as well as other areas of culture, namely the arts, the economy, language and science.<sup>128</sup> He gives the following description of the creation order as he understands it:

[T]hese norms and laws form a grand and wonderfully coherent unity, notwithstanding their variety and uniqueness. [God's] norms and laws do not clash with each other, because He is a God of order. For us, who are fallen creatures, it indeed looks different, because *we* have been struck by the Fall, whilst these norms for all our life-terrains have remained good and well. The yardsticks according to which we must measure our labour, are thus flawless (Strauss 1944: 11).

It would not be an exaggeration to say that, considered in its entirety, the text from which this quote derives testifies to an almost neurotic preoccupation with various figures of order: in several instances Strauss states that the Lord is a "God of order". This order is described in terms of laws and norms, but also in terms of boundaries and borders. God's

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<sup>127</sup> In Dooyeweerd's conception, these institutions are "entities" functioning within all of the modal law spheres, but functioning according to a specific normative "structural principle" – what Strauss here refers to as a "calling".

<sup>128</sup> These areas are clearly recognisable as deriving from Dooyeweerd's theory of the modal aspects.

order encompasses both the proper, orderly differentiation between the various societal institutions, as well as the laws and norms that internally govern these institutions. It is important to note that, for Strauss, the proper differentiation between institutions does not entail their independence or isolation from each other, but is rather a condition for their harmonious co-operation. Strauss writes:

Proper order is one of the highest demands that is made upon the nation and the societal forms internal to the nation [*binnevolkse samelewingsvorme*]. Indeed, our Creator is a God of order, and the God-praising order must be maintained by every organisation within its own ranks. ... The nature of the institutions' and organisations' authority is directly conferred by God and not from the state or a neighbour; it is mutually distinct in accordance with their diversity of calling, and therefore also the means of exercising authority and maintaining order varies from instance to instance. (Strauss 1944: 15)

The inevitable counterpart of this obsession with law and order is an equally emphatic fixation on the evils of acting in disobedience to these laws and norms or disregarding these divinely ordained boundaries. As is to be expected, transgression in this respect amounts to sin:

The essence of sin is man's individual and even organised disobedience to the Divine laws and norms for every institution, every organisation and every area of culture (Strauss 1944: 14).

Transgression takes place whenever the Divine laws and norms for an organisation are disregarded, but also when the laws and norms of one institution are incorrectly applied to another (Strauss 1944: 17). This preoccupation with boundaries and borders is often associated with the political struggles of Afrikanerdom. For instance, Strauss states that

when the state's unique form of coercive authority is applied within a *cultural* organisation, that organisation is violating divine ordinances and is guilty of sinful boundary-violation [*sondige grensoorskryding*]: "He is then an *imperialist* who takes another's things" [my emphasis] (Strauss 1944: 17). In the context of Afrikaner nationalism, the reference to a thieving imperialist would have clearly signalled the British Empire, who in the nationalist imagination is guilty of taking the Afrikaner's country. On several other occasions "British Liberalism" is blamed for its disintegrating effect on the Afrikaner *volk*; in these instances, he argues that "British Liberalism" tried to isolate and separate the various interlocking cultural institutions and organisations from one another, disregarding the special unity between these institutions as established by God's all-encompassing, sovereign authority. Liberalism, according to Strauss, invests each sphere of life with its own false god, and thus robs the *volk* of the power vested in the divine interdependence between all spheres of social life.

The notion of a divinely ordered social world leads to a particular understanding of the cultural mission of the *volk*: God has granted the *volk* a grand and rich cultural landscape and the *volk* is compelled to seize control of this "cultural tillage" [*kultuurakkers*]: "We must fill, subject and control all of this tillage" (Strauss 1944: 22). This task must be carried out in accordance with the divine laws and norms, in obedience to God's demand for order: "Thus the culture-work [*kultuurwerk*] of our *volk* is accomplished in obedience, with the realisation that true culture can be nothing else than the fulfilment of His eternally sovereign norms for all areas of life" (Strauss 1944: 23).

This understanding of culture gives rise to a particular conception of science and education: "[Educational institutions] are called upon to ensure that the Scriptural principles for all life-terrains are unearthed in faithful obedience, in order that science can

wholly guide the *volk* in its cultural task” (Strauss 1944: 22). The notion that Scriptural principles govern all life-terrains is typical of Kuyperian neo-Calvinism. Dooyeweerd, as we have seen, develops this neo-Calvinist tenet into a systematic philosophy, which allows him to elaborate philosophically the norms that govern human action as they function in the different modal spheres. Dooyeweerd’s philosophy may then also be viewed as a prime example of “unearthing” the Scriptural principles, that is, of translating Scriptural principles into the language of philosophy and science.

There can be little doubt that this is how Herman Strauss viewed his own task as Christian philosopher when he started his academic career in 1942, namely, as someone who in “faithful obedience” would endeavour to participate in the divinely ordained process of cultural disclosure, guiding the *volk* in fulfilling its cultural task.

Strauss’s ambitions also surface in his correspondence from this period. A letter addressed to a Staff Sergeant J.J. Strauss (addressed as “cousin”)<sup>129</sup> dating from 1944 further testifies to Strauss’s intention to spread the Calvinist worldview, but perhaps also to the relative eccentricity of his ideas in relation to the more everyday concerns of the *volk*. Evidently, Strauss had previously<sup>130</sup> written to his cousin on the topic of a comprehensive Calvinist education. In his reply, S/Sgt. Strauss admits to feeling the “serious need” for the apostate “masses” to return to the beliefs and traditions of their forefathers and expresses his admiration for Strauss’s industriousness in this respect. He also expresses his scepticism about his cousin’s ambitions, confessing that he believes this task too great for one man.

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<sup>129</sup> J.J. Strauss appears to have been a cousin of H.J. Strauss, since the latter addresses him as “neef”. The return address is given as: 131893(V) S/Sgt. Strauss, J.J. “Q” Stores. E.T.C. Sonderwater, which suggests that he was a staff sergeant in the South African Armed Forces, stationed at the Zonderwater detention camp, which was used by the Allied forces to host prisoners of war from the North and East African fronts. Details in the letter allow us to estimate his age at more or less 54.

<sup>130</sup> He refers to an earlier letter from Strauss, which could not be located in the collection.

He goes on to speculate that although “a leader” may yet be able to mobilise the masses on the basis of Christian belief, there was “now no longer time” for an “all-embracing Calvinist education”.

It appears that S/Sgt. Strauss was more attuned to the attitudes of his compatriots than his ambitious, academically-inclined cousin. By all accounts H.J. Strauss’s path to a position of influence at UCOFS was for some time far from guaranteed and judging by Strauss’s own account, Christian philosophy was met with scepticism and resistance from fellow faculty members.

It is worth recalling that like other higher education institutions in South Africa, the intellectual culture at UCOFS was shaped by its status as a former colonial university within the British sphere of influence. As such, the institution mirrored intellectual trends in Britain. The appointment of the analytical philosopher, G.H.T. Malan in 1940 perhaps reflected the rising stature of analytical philosophy in Britain since the 1920s and the attendant decline of British Idealism. By the mid-1940s, the positivist conviction that science proceeded from a neutral perspective, that it was unaffected by philosophical presuppositions or political or economic concerns, was ascendant in Britain and the countries in its sphere of influence. Positivism also played its part in South Africa, and not only among those that were branded as “liberal”. Chris Allsobrook (2014: 95–117) has shown that positivism was a significant ingredient in the modernism that underlay the apartheid project. It should therefore not be surprising that Strauss, brandishing the neo-Calvinist argument that all science was determined by religious presuppositions, found resistance even amongst fellow nationalists. His explicitly religious angle may even have appeared as a liability to some of those intent on a modernising project.

Writing to his cousin in 1944 Strauss seemed to be aware of the precariousness of his position, as is suggested by his mentioning that he was one of the youngest members of faculty, and therefore “modest” in his outward actions, aware of the need to “patiently wait on the years and the ripeness that comes with the years”. Two years later he would complain to the Dutch Reformational scholar, J.P.A. Mekkes about the negative response to Christian science from fellow members of the Dutch Reformed Church and the “neutrally schooled personnel of our universities” who, according to Strauss, protest that they are good Christians who go to church on Sundays, but then feel “offended” when confronted with Christian science. “Neutrally schooled” refers to someone who does not subscribe to, or is unaware of the Kuyperian notion of the antithesis, the fundamental conflict between belief and unbelief.

Based on the limited information available, it seems that Keyter had not been won over by Strauss’s request for “cooperation” in 1939. At some point between 1942 and 1946 Keyter intervened in a way that, according to D.F.M. Strauss and as explained below, nearly brought his father’s career at UCOVS to a premature end. As Pavlich (2014: 156) notes, Keyter counted among a group of Stellenbosch-trained sociologists (which included H.F. Verwoerd) who developed “a problem-solving, administrative sociology focused on state-defined issues regarding racial and social order”. This sociological approach was heavily indebted to a positivist, value-free conception of science – the epitome of the “neutral humanist” orientation that Strauss so vehemently opposed in the name of Christian science. By all accounts, Keyter rejected the idea of Christian science, and therefore contrived to terminate Strauss’s appointment by relieving him of the sociology lectures that made up half of his teaching responsibilities.<sup>131</sup> G.H.T Malan, however, reportedly

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<sup>131</sup> Strauss briefly refers to Keyter as a “humanist” in a 1952 letter to Dooyeweerd. D.F.M. Strauss relates an episode where, during a meeting of the faculty board, Keyter voiced his scepticism about Christian science, in reaction to which Herman Strauss challenged him to a public debate, but apparently Keyter declined. It is

believed that the institution was intellectually enriched by the presence of opposing views (Strauss 2013: 79; E-mail from D.F.M. Strauss, 29 August 2017). Therefore, in response to Keyter's actions, Malan increased Strauss's lectures in political philosophy, in the process not only preventing his dismissal, but also paving the way for Strauss to become the head of an independent department of political philosophy. The GUC yearbooks for 1944 and 1945 confirm that Strauss's teaching duties in the department of sociology were reduced in 1945, but not entirely suspended; Strauss remains listed in the yearbook as the lecturer for one "exam paper"<sup>132</sup> in sociology until the end of 1947. This change in Strauss's prospects is confirmed by a letter to Dooyeweerd dated 6 December 1945, where Strauss reports that starting in the new year (1946), his responsibilities will be limited to political philosophy, with the possible exception of one class in sociology. He makes no reference, however, to any conflicts with colleagues or any other reasons for the changes.

A letter to J.P.A. Mekkes from the following year, ostensibly intended to update the latter on the fortunes of Christian science in South Africa, sheds further light on Strauss's position at the time. Strauss explains that he has the status of a senior lecturer, but practically does the job of a professor, by virtue of being in charge of an entire department. He then adds: "This does not bother me, since I can now gradually put in place my own curriculum and *make Calvinism the beginning and end of political theory at UCOVS*" [my emphasis] (PV337/29/05/1946).

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uncertain when exactly this transpired; the reference to a faculty board meeting suggests this may have occurred much later, since it seems unlikely that a young temporary lecturer would have challenged a senior professor in a faculty board meeting. I relate the incident here as an illustration of the enduring perception of Strauss's commitment to Christian science (E-mail from D.F.M. Strauss, 29 August 2017).

<sup>132</sup> An "exam paper" listed in the yearbook seems to have been the equivalent of what is today referred to as "modules".

It thus appears that whatever had transpired between him and Keyter had inadvertently given Strauss considerable institutional autonomy and handed him the perfect opportunity to establish Christian philosophy as the basis of his curriculum. In other words, if D.F.M. Strauss's account as related to him by his father is accurate, Keyter's actions were indirectly responsible for the creation of an independent department of political philosophy, and by extension the institutionalisation of Christian philosophy – the very thing Keyter in all likelihood sought to oppose.<sup>133</sup>

This gain apparently did not mean that Strauss would encounter no further obstacles. The details are scant, but the correspondence dating from these early years leaves one with the impression that Strauss continuously fought an uphill battle in gaining acceptance of Christian philosophy among his colleagues. His letters to Dooyeweerd and other neo-Calvinist thinkers are always in part reports on the progress of the local “Calvinistic action”, and he often refers to his engagement on campus as one of “struggle” [*stryd*].

It nevertheless appears that by 1946 he had started to organise a network of scholars in Bloemfontein that by his reckoning had sufficiently proven their commitment to Christian philosophy. In the same letter that he complains to Mekkes about the negative attitudes of his “neutrally schooled” colleagues, Strauss recommends a number of “younger” scholars<sup>134</sup> for membership in the *Vereniging voor Calvinistiese Wijsbegeerte* (VCW), describing

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<sup>133</sup> The official history of the UFS suggests that the tension between Strauss and Keyter was a contributing factor in the restructuring of two faculties in 1945 (University of the Free State 2006: 106). Up until 1945, philosophy was located in the faculty of arts. In 1945, however, a new faculty of philosophy and social sciences was formed under the deanship of Keyter, which meant that from 1945 Strauss fell under Keyter's authority. Looking at the available evidence, it seems possible that this restructuring was indeed intended to subject philosophy, and therefore Strauss, to Keyter's authority.

<sup>134</sup> The scholars Strauss recommended to Mekkes would indeed prove to become valuable collaborators. They included the two brothers, ds. P. De B. Kock and ds. F.A Kock, both ministers from the Orange Free State; ds. F.N. van Niekerk, a minister based in Durban (later Dundee), and J.C. Lombard, a theology student at Stellenbosch. P. De B. Kock would go on to complete a doctorate under Strauss's supervision in 1954 (see Kock 1954) and later became head of the department of philosophy (1968); J.C. Lombard would

them as follows: "... they are not doubtful or still to be 'converted', but indeed *initiated*, and therefore I would like to see them become members ...” [my emphasis]. Strauss’s language in referring to the proposed members – they are not “doubtful”, they have been “initiated”<sup>135</sup> – coupled with the dismissive references to the “neutrally schooled” staff of the university, affords a clear sense of the stark conflict Strauss erects between those on the inside and those on the outside, a theme that is already present in the 1939 letter to Keyter. In the letter to Mekkes we can see how the intricate philosophical arguments of Dooyeweerd and Kuyper are bent towards a less nuanced and more functional distinction between the initiated and the apostate, between friend and enemy – in other words, bent for ideological purposes in the service of a fledgling in-group.

A letter from 1947 offers further insight into Strauss’s views of his colleagues, specifically those in the natural sciences. Once again writing to Mekkes, Strauss bemoans the harm being done in the schools by “Evolution-dogma”; his displeasure is palpable as he informs Mekkes that both lecturers in animal science at UCOVS are “evolutionists” and strongly supported by the department of psychology. He then writes: “And of course there are many ‘innocent evolutionists’, men of science who do not even know that the sickness has been grafted on to them and who yet have nothing else at the root of their scientific view.” This is yet further evidence of the disparaging view Strauss took of his “neutrally schooled” colleagues, and the sharp binary he constructed between Christian scientists and the rest.

We should probably not underestimate to what extent Strauss may have been ridiculed in turn by his “neutrally schooled” colleagues. As noted earlier, positivism was gaining dominance in the natural and human sciences, and this may have spawned equally harsh

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become head of the department of bible studies at UOFS. F.N. van Niekerk was another graduate of GUC and a contemporary of Strauss and a trusted correspondent on political and theological issues.

<sup>135</sup> Strauss uses the Afrikaans word *‘ingeny’*.

judgements towards philosophical positions that questioned positivism's purported neutrality. A letter to Dooyeweerd in 1950 provides a glimpse of what Strauss was up against. He now writes as follows about the head of philosophy, G.H.T. Malan: "He is at the moment one of our bitterest opponents, also of me personally, at the University of the Free State. He openly makes fun of us, and especially with the theory of the law-spheres. This naturally always where I am not present" (PV337, letter to Dooyeweerd, 25/02/1950). Whatever the nature of Strauss and Malan's relationship had been in 1945 (when Malan had come to Strauss's rescue), Strauss's tone here suggests it had deteriorated significantly by 1950.

## **2. No longer in the cage**

Despite the challenges, Strauss made progress. In 1947 he reports to Mekkes that the number of students had considerably grown since he became solely responsible for political philosophy. He was now entrusted with 22 juniors, 17 seniors and two M.A. students. By May 1949 his position seemed to have strengthened further:

After seven years of struggle due to my Calvinistic convictions it has in the meantime under God's hand of blessing advanced to a point where my department this year carries 70 students of which 8 are post-graduate students. At the same time, I can report that the department in all likelihood will soon be conferred a higher status, that is to say, will become a chair in political philosophy (PV337, letter to Dooyeweerd, 24/05/1949).

What exactly contributed to this growth, and what reasons Strauss had to anticipate the department's rise in status, he does not mention to Dooyeweerd. Fourteen months later, however, on 21 September 1950, Strauss's dearest hopes were realised when he was promoted to the position of professor. This was no doubt the anticipated rise in status he

had mentioned to Dooyeweerd in May 1949. The professorship would not only have elevated the status of his department, it would also have conferred an increased legitimacy on Christian philosophy, which Strauss had sought to make the “beginning and end” of his curriculum. This event would thus appear to have marked a turning point in Strauss’s career, as well as in the institutionalisation of Christian philosophy at UCOFS.

The change in Strauss’s fortunes intersects with a significant moment in the operationalisation of apartheid ideology. This intersection is stunningly reflected in a single letter by Strauss on the day he received the news of his promotion. Before I discuss the details of this letter, it is necessary to briefly bring into view a pertinent political development of the period. Among the notable pieces of legislation passed by the NP as they began to give shape to apartheid following the 1948 election was the Suppression of Communism Act of 1950. As Dubow (2014: 37) notes, the immediate political consequence of this legislation was to drive the Communist Party underground. The legislation, however, also had significant ideological ramifications. As Norval notes, communism had long featured prominently in Afrikaner nationalist discourse as a concept drawing together any number of threats to the notion of the *volkseië*:

In communism, two frontiers central to the construction of Afrikaner nationalism were combined. They were the frontiers constituting the British, liberalism and foreignness as other, as well as the overtly racist construction of the black as enemy of the *volk*. Each of the constituent elements of the nationalist alliance articulated the communist threat in a particular manner and this facilitated the emergence of the NP as torchbearer against communism (Norval 1996: 136).

In other words, communism became a catch-all concept for those forces in opposition to which Afrikaner nationalism constructed itself. The logic of this discourse dictated that any organization or individual seen to be promoting equal economic, social or political rights, could be labelled as “communist”.

The Suppression of Communism Act was spearheaded by then minister of justice, Charles Robert Swart, a son of the Eastern Free State and notable early alumnus of Grey University College. Swart had also recently been named as the first chancellor of the newly independent University of the Orange Free State.

This brings us back to Strauss’s promotion to professor in September 1950. In what appears to have been a state of elation, he sat down to write a letter to C.R. Swart, then minister of education arts and science, minister of justice and newly appointed chancellor of the university. The relatively brief letter deserves to be quoted in full, since not only its specific content, but also the tone and context are charged with meaning.

Dear Adv. Swart

Since this morning I have hastened to arrive at this opportunity. For more than eighteen months I was a bird in a cage – until this morning at 11:30 when word of the promotion reached me.

By this route for the time being my deepest thanks, also on behalf of Heleen and her parents. I can only say thank you and then later show more proof of my gratitude. Never can we come close to reciprocating, but we will also never forget!

At this stage I don’t want to relate or summarise the whole history. No, for that we will, God willing, one day find a quiet moment.

I could be bothered with two matters during all these months and one of them was that ever since your forceful action, amongst others, against the Communists, I was never permitted to make contact with you. Circumstance after circumstance forbade it, but nothing could stop me from diligently observing it and treating it step by step in my classes. Towards Father and others I could voice my feelings.

Tonight I can speak out briefly and convey that we admire and appreciate your decisive action as Minister of Justice. Everyone who is in agreement about this will not write you a letter, but for the sake of encouragement and support I have to convey to you that there is

tremendous gratitude for your policy and resounding deeds all over, and that you are being prayed for in many homes with the honour and glory to God for having favoured our *volke* with you in that key office. Moreover I am no neutral person at the lectern, and you can be assured that our government policy and your policy in particular is still impressed upon the students, because it is principally correct. The law against Communism is in fact, principally tested, strength itself, because thereby was let go of the belief that all life- and political principles are equal. More than once I wanted to contribute or write something, but then I had to consider that perhaps I may create the impression of seeking favour. Thus the enemies would have interpreted it and compromised even your position.

Now I am no longer in the cage.

Of course be cautious and not directly act in a way that could appear sharp and attract attention – this I will remember. Moreover also follow your example in this: be humble and true to myself. Yes, the responsibility is now that much the greater and therefore the conscientious discharge of duties so much more imperative. And yet it will take self-control to gradually release everything that has accumulated.

Your difficult task still stays with us [*bly ons steeds by*] and we pray that in future you may always receive the necessary strength and wisdom in your vocation and calling. If I held a secret with which one could deprive especially the Communists of their breath, I would have revealed it to you a long time ago. Your containment of injustice and sin bestows joy.

To you and your home our warm regards and best wishes – also from Father and Mother.

With the utmost admiration

Yours (PV337, letter to Swart, 21/09/1950).

This letter constitutes a remarkable manifestation of the intersection between nationalist discourse, the ideological capture of the Afrikaans universities and the patronage networks of National Party leadership. On the face of it, this is a letter from one Afrikaner with the “correct” political and church affiliations thanking an ally in power for removing a stone from his path. As the contents of the letter shows Strauss wrote it on the day he received news of his promotion to professor, and it was first of all intended as a letter of gratitude to Swart, as can be seen from the first three paragraphs. It should be noted that Swart, in his capacity as minister of education had the final word of approval in granting professorships. Seen in this light, the letter is perhaps not entirely unprecedented, but the impression remains that Strauss had particular reason to be grateful.

The letter leaves much room for speculation, but a number of factors suggest that Swart's intervention was significant and outside of the norm. There is, first of all, Strauss's immense gratitude and obvious sense of indebtedness towards Swart, which would be difficult to explain in the absence of a special effort by Swart. Secondly, the admission that he took care not to contact Swart for fear of creating the impression that he curried favour, ironically exposes Strauss as already having had access to Swart's patronage. Swart's historical ties to the Orange Free State and the university ran deep, and the ties between Strauss and Swart may have stemmed from their mutual affiliation to membership of the National Party and the *Broederbond*.<sup>136</sup> It is in any event clear that the Swart and Strauss families were on an intimate footing – the references to “Father” and “Mother” – and that Strauss could count on a certain intimacy – “quiet moments” – between himself and the chancellor.

Strauss's correspondence dating from 1949 provides further context. The university council took the first steps towards raising the status of the department to a professorate in July 1949. Strauss was notified of these intentions, and also of the council's wish that he should complete his doctorate within the “foreseeable time” (PV337, letter from the registrar, 1 July 1949). The minister of education, however, rejected the council's first application in November 1949 (PV337, letter from registrar, 10/11/1949). Strauss was severely disappointed by this turn of events, but in the following year, the council made renewed attempts to secure the minister's approval. The rector (Scholtz) prepared a detailed motivation for the application, arguing for Strauss's promotion on the basis of the department's growing student numbers and Strauss's proven competence. Strauss was convinced that Scholtz, whom he viewed as an enemy, manipulated the figures to

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<sup>136</sup> Swart was a prominent member of the group that sided with D.F. Malan to form the *Gesuiwerde Nasionale Party* after Hertzog had joined forces with Smuts in 1934, and later served on the executive of the party in the OFS. He served on the university council from 1923 to 1933.

underplay the department's growth. Most tellingly, Strauss was anxious that between the rector and the registrar (George du Toit) they would delay submitting the application with the effect that the minister, C.R. Swart would not have the opportunity to peruse the motivating documents before it served before the advisory committee. Strauss took matters in his own hands by requesting the assistance of a certain J. Kriek,<sup>137</sup> who appears to have had access to Swart, and who judging by the letter had earlier signalled his willingness to help. Strauss implored Kriek to raise the minister's awareness about the matter and provided him with additional supporting documentation to personally hand to the minister if needs be (PV337, letter to Kriek, 22/09/1950). We know now, that by whatever means, the minister was eventually prevailed upon to approve the application. Strauss was convinced that the outcome came as a shock to his enemies.<sup>138</sup>

The available correspondence regrettably does not further clarify the nature of the relationship between Strauss and Swart – but it shows the degree to which Strauss attempted to influence the proceedings, stopping short of personally contacting the minister – for fear of raising suspicions, as we saw above. It bears noting that by the time of his promotion he had not completed his doctorate, as the council had subtly insisted.

If the circumstances surrounding the promotion remain opaque, the letter leaves little doubt as to the intersection between Strauss's politics and his occupation as a university lecturer. It bears reflecting back at this point to Strauss's remarks to the ANS leadership in 1937, when he advised against sending students to Germany for fear that the universities had been reduced to propaganda institutes for German National Socialism. Thirteen years

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<sup>137</sup> A certain J.C. Kriek served on the university council at the time.

<sup>138</sup> PV337, letter to Potgieter, 09/09/1950; PV337, letter to Van Niekerk, 11/10/1950.

later, we see Strauss dutifully informing the minister of justice of his scholarly commitment to NP policy.

Whether the irony of this reversal ever occurred to Strauss can only be guessed at. Based on his writings it appears that Strauss took very seriously the idea that he was participating in the unfolding of the creation order. As I argued in Chapter 5, Dooyeweerd's conception of history also accomplishes the conceptual move that allows for transforming the "higher aims" of history into the aims of political action. Political leaders (and scholars) are accordingly entrusted with the task of "Christian development". Strauss writes,

... our Creator sets the task, He gives the tillage and provides the tools with which we must do the work. But he gives even more, because in his creation order he also provides the prescriptions according to which we must till the land, if we want to be obediently active on every tith. From there the creation-ordinances for every life terrain, jointly in control of all that issues from your life when the Christian religion indentures the heart to Christ. From there also the *blueprints for every societal* form in subjection to which we may enjoy the wealth of the Christian marriage, the Christian family, the Christian church and the Christian state ... [my emphasis] (Strauss 1953: 22).

The idea of serving Christ, also in politics, clearly informed Strauss's actions. At the same time, he had appropriated the "confusion of action and making" that Arendt attributes to the modern concept of history (Hansen 1993: 118). Societal forms had *blueprints* which humans were compelled to discover and apply.

Strauss's specific interest in and praise for the Suppression of Communism Act is significant here. His remarks suggest that he viewed this legislation as far more than an instrument to combat political enemies – he saw it as nothing less than a vindication of

the neo-Calvinist idea that there exists a fundamental opposition between different world- and life-views: “The law against Communism is in fact, principally tested, strength itself, because thereby was let go of the belief that all life and political principles are equal” (PV337, letter to Swart, 21/09/1950). Different life and political principles – and culture more generally – are in the last instance determined by a radical religious antithesis. This notion of the religious antithesis stood at the center of Strauss’s concept of Christian philosophy and science, and it would appear that he viewed the government’s stance against communism as based on this more fundamental point of departure. As he later put it in *Christelike Wetenskap* (1953):

Pawned to godless communism, for example, man holds communist convictions across the entire line, and therefore every communist propagates his communist religion, his communist morality, his communist politics and also his communist science [...] for each field a harvest from the communist heart (Strauss 1953: 9).

For Strauss the Suppression of Communism Act worked both ways: not only did it allow him to approve of the government’s position as philosophically sound – his deepest philosophical convictions were thereby also effectively validated by the law of the land. This is also a clear instance of how, according to Norval (1996), the logic of anti-communist discourse functioned in the Afrikaner nationalist imagination: communism is articulated as a pernicious “life and political principle” that threatens the *volk*, but at the same time the *volk* is defined in *relation* to this threat. For Strauss the Suppression of Communism Act not only combatted communism; it also confirmed the fundamental and all-encompassing distinction between the Christian Afrikaner and the godless humanists.

In light of the argument in Chapter 5 and above concerning the shared origins of the Marxist notion of “making history” and Dooyeweerd’s notion of cultural development in the modern concept of history, the antithesis between the Christian religion and the “communist religion”, as described by Strauss, also takes on a different meaning. It could be argued that the common basis of this opposition is not the “religious” nature of both the “Christian worldview” and communism, but the *ideological* nature of both, in so far as both draw on philosophies of *history* that allow us to make “higher aims” into the goals of political action.

### **3. An indelible impression**

In late March 1951, a little more than six months after Strauss’s promotion to professor, the University of the Orange Free State’s ties to the philosophy of the cosmonomic idea was enhanced in the most tangible way, when Dooyeweerd himself had the opportunity to visit the campus and deliver two public lectures. Dooyeweerd travelled to South Africa in March 1951 as official representative of the Dutch Universities and the Free University of Amsterdam in particular, where he was rector. The purpose of his visit was to congratulate Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education on the occasion of its recognition as an independent university. In addition to Potchefstroom, Dooyeweerd visited Pretoria, Cape Town, Bloemfontein and Grahamstown. Dooyeweerd spent five days in the Strauss household and later described his visit to South Africa as a “fantastical dream from which I will only slowly awake”. Strauss wrote to Mrs Dooyeweerd on the day of her husband’s departure that Dooyeweerd’s visit had taken on a profound meaning for his own life as well as for those of his wife and children (PV337, letter to Mrs Dooyeweerd, 02/04/1951).

The correspondence between Strauss and Dooyeweerd provides little information as to the contents of the two public lectures that Dooyeweerd delivered in Bloemfontein, but in a letter of 18 June 1951 Strauss reported to Dooyeweerd that “the effect of your visit to Bloemfontein has thus far been very good. It is still being discussed by colleagues and your brash student has access to more hearts and minds than before” (PV337, letter to Dooyeweerd, 18/06/1951). To Mrs Dooyeweerd he wrote that “the impressions that [Dooyeweerd] left will be ... indelible – with friend and enemy” (PV337, letter to Mrs Dooyeweerd, 02/04/1951).

#### **4. Brother-in-arms**

Up until the early 1950s H.J. Strauss was the most prominent torchbearer for the philosophy of the cosmonomic idea at the University of the Orange Free State. His recurring denigration of his “neutrally schooled” colleagues suggests that he had little support among senior faculty members. This situation changed in 1952 when E.A. Venter replaced G.H.T. Malan as head of the department of philosophy.

Erasmus Albertus Venter (1914–1968) grew up in the town of Winburg in the Free State and obtained his BA degree (with distinctions in political philosophy and economics) at Grey University College in 1933, which made him a contemporary and classmate of H.J. Strauss, as well as a former student of Nico Diederichs. Venter continued his studies at the Dutch Reformed seminary in Stellenbosch and was a DRC minister in De Aar when he was approached for the position at his alma mater.

Venter’s appointment was controversial: the record shows that Venter was appointed one-sidedly by the council despite objections by the senate. This episode is significant, since it transpired relatively soon after the university was awarded its independent status and its

subsequent repositioning as a *volksuniversiteit*. The events leading to Venter's appointment are strong evidence of the extent to which, by the early 1950s, the political and ideological prerogatives of the *volksuniversiteit* outweighed strictly academic, and even procedural considerations.

During a meeting on 18 September 1951 the council considered the senate's recommendation of two candidates for the vacancy in the department of philosophy, namely, A.M.T Meyer and P.S. Dreyer. Both these candidates previously held positions at the University of Pretoria, and neither had any neo-Calvinist credentials. The executive committee of the council declined to offer the position to any of the two candidates. It was proposed instead that an *ad hoc* committee be tasked with finding a suitable candidate for this "important position". A committee exclusively made up of council members was elected for this undertaking: H. Van der Merwe Scholtz, J.F. Enslin (chairman of the council) and ds. H.S. Theron (representative of the DRC on the UOFS council).<sup>139</sup> During a meeting on 16 October 1951, the *ad hoc* committee unanimously recommended E.A. Venter for the position.<sup>140</sup> On 23 October 1951, the council elected to appoint Venter as head of the department of philosophy. At this point J.J. Dekker moved that the matter first be referred back to the senate for its recommendation, but the motion was denied. The senate objected to the fact that the council had appointed a committee from within its own ranks to seek out a candidate despite the fact that the faculty of humanities and the senate had already recommended two candidates that were approved by a majority of its respective members.<sup>141</sup> The faculty hereupon requested the senate to enquire from the council on what grounds the senate's recommendations were set aside. On 13 November 1951, the senate proposed that three representatives of the senate and three from the

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<sup>139</sup> Minutes of the council of the University of the Orange Free State, 18/09/1951.

<sup>140</sup> Minutes of the council of the University of the Orange Free State, 16/10/1951.

<sup>141</sup> Minutes of the council of the University of the Orange Free State, 23/10/1951.

council arrange to discuss the matter and draw up a report. This request was not granted. On 27 November 1951 the council invoked the statutes of the university as vesting the final powers of decision with council and advised the senate to abide by the outcome. Venter's appointment was final.

It is clear that the council used its powers to bypass the senate with the appointment of E.A. Venter, and it is remarkable that this should happen concerning the head of the department of philosophy – an “important position” as the record notes. The *ad hoc* committee's precise reasons for deciding on Venter were, however, not preserved with the council minutes. The council's apparent unwillingness to be transparent to the senate about their decision-making process leads one to think that formal academic requirements were not at the forefront of their reasoning. Venter's academic credentials were on the face of it impressive enough: in addition to his BA and BTh degrees, he had also completed MA and PhD degrees at the University of Cape Town, as well as MDiv and DD degrees at the then Potchefstroom University College for Christian Higher Education (PUC for CHE). The latter institution was of course a stronghold of neo-Calvinist thought – not to mention Afrikaner nationalist sentiment – with prominent nationalist ideologues like Hendrik Stoker and L.J. du Plessis counting amongst its faculty. This association, together with the fact that he was serving as a DRC minister at the time, may already have been ample recommendation for a philosophy professor at a burgeoning Afrikaner *volksuniversiteit*.

Strauss casts some light on this episode in a letter to F.J.M. Potgieter written shortly after Venter's appointment:

Rassie's appointment was a big surprise. Our Council followed a highly unusual procedure in the whole matter and the fact that they appointed a Calvinist based on the advice of men like Scholtz and Enslin, despite the fact that they have no sympathy for the orientation or my work, is evidence that P.W. de Lange's dance-action [*dans-aksie*] and your Winburg-meeting gave the abovementioned men a bigger fright than superficially suspected. After the council had set aside the unanimous recommendation of faculty and senate concerning Meyer and Dryer and named their own committee, Rev. H.S. Theron immediately indicated that it had to be a DRC minister. I too told him that Rassie<sup>142</sup> is the only man. They nominated him and risked a lot of trouble with the senate (PV337, letter to Potgieter, 31/10/1951).

We can surmise from this letter that the rector, Scholtz, and the chairman of the council, J.F. Enslin, were not sympathetic to Calvinist philosophy. The cryptic reference to P.W. de Lange's "dance-action" and the "Winburg-meeting" presumably meant something to Potgieter that could explain Scholtz and Enslin's actions, but reveals nothing more here. It is not clear when and how Strauss came by this information, or when he was in a position to recommend Venter to Theron. For his part, it seems that Theron was acting in the interests of the DRC. We further learn that Strauss was sufficiently acquainted with Venter to unequivocally recommend him to Theron.<sup>143</sup> Overall, the circumstances surrounding Venter's appointment makes it clear that those who pushed for his appointment did so for reasons that they were not willing to expose to scrutiny. These reasons had favourable consequences for Strauss, but apparently they did not intentionally serve the interests of Christian philosophy.

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<sup>142</sup> Short for "Erasmus", Venter's first name.

<sup>143</sup> Strauss knew Venter from their student days at GUC when they followed the BA degree course together (see Wessels 1975). Strauss writes warmly and admiringly of Venter as a student in the Foreword to a posthumously published collection of Venter's work (see Venter 1970).

Another factor may also have been in play: Serfontein (1979) names a professor E.A. Venter of Bloemfontein as a member of the Broederbond in his 1979 exposé of this secret organisation, titled *Brotherhood of Power*. As noted in Chapter 3, the Broederbond had long maintained a presence on the Bloemfontein campus, and as the literature shows, it was the *modus operandi* of the organisation to place its members in “important positions”. In this case, at least one member of the *ad hoc* committee that recommended Venter (H. Van der Merwe Scholtz) was a member of the Broederbond. It is thus possible that Venter had something to recommend him that made him acceptable to Enslin and Scholtz despite his Calvinist credentials. There is, however, no concrete evidence to support this line of argument.

Strauss may have had some insight into the matter, but apparently it left open the question of Venter’s philosophical affinities. In a letter to F.N. van Nierkerk dated 13 November 1951, no doubt written soon after the senate meeting referred to above, Strauss admits to being pleased about “Rassie’s” appointment and also expresses the hope that Venter will turn out to be a “strong supporter” of the philosophy of the cosmonomic idea. He then continues:

Story already doing the rounds that our Council appointed him precisely because he was opposed to Dooyeweerd – we will see what happens. This he must, however, know that he will suffer if he casts suspicion against the philosophy of the cosmonomic idea; really hope that he won’t be so foolish and by no means expect it (PV337, 13 November 1951).

These remarks seem strange considering the earlier letter to Potgieter. The fact that Strauss seems to have been uncertain about Venter’s position on the philosophy of the

cosmomic idea suggests that they had not recently been in close contact,<sup>144</sup> which raises the question as to why he would have recommended Venter so wholeheartedly to Theron. This once again leaves us with the suggestion that Venter had other qualities or connections to recommend him, which moreover made him acceptable to both the likes of Scholtz and Strauss.

It is difficult to explain Strauss's promise to make Venter "suffer" if he should cast suspicion against the philosophy of the cosmomic idea, for clearly Strauss was not yet in such a position of institutional strength – as we have seen, the appointment of a Calvinist was unexpected and surprised him. Seeing that Strauss knew the circumstances of Venter's appointment, it could be that he expected the newcomer to realise on which side his bread was buttered. It is also possible that this was simply a bit of bravado from Strauss for the benefit of his correspondent. Strauss's complaints to Dooyeweerd about G.H.T. Malan show that he had reason to wish for a more sympathetic colleague in the department of philosophy. The prospect of an old acquaintance from his student days taking Malan's place in the department of philosophy would naturally have been heartening to Strauss.

As it turned out, Venter proved himself to be an unwavering advocate for Christian philosophy. In February 1952 Strauss told J.C. Lombard:<sup>145</sup>

Had a very pleasurable conversation with Dr E.A. Venter and have already ordered his textbooks for Philosophy I, II and III from SACUM; primarily the works of Spier and

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<sup>144</sup> There is, for example no correspondence between Venter and Strauss among the latter's papers, which in light of the carefully preserved correspondence with other acquaintances, friends and colleagues, strongly suggest that he and Venter were not on an intimate footing – at least not before Venter's appointment, and not since their student days.

<sup>145</sup> Later a professor in Bible studies at UOFS.

Vollenhoven.<sup>146</sup> This is the foundation for his entire course in the BA, while the philosophy of the cosmomic idea will take up an entire exam paper for the MA (PV337, letter to J.C. Lombard, 25/02/1952).

By March 1952, Strauss describes him as a “welcome newcomer” and a “brother-in-arms” [*medestryder*] for Christian science” (PV337, letter to L. Spies, 03/03/1952), and in December 1952 describes him to Dooyeweerd as a “strong ally” of the philosophy of the cosmomic idea, under whose leadership the department of philosophy was sure to thrive (PV337, letter to Dooyeweerd, 06/12/1952). In May the following year he reported to Dooyeweerd that Venter’s appointment had given their cause a significant push forwards, judged by the substantial rise in the number of philosophy students, that is, from 30 to 80, with eight students enrolled for the MA degree (PV337, letter to Dooyeweerd, 09/05/1953).

The circumstances surrounding Venter’s appointment, that is, the council’s usurpation of the appointment process in direct conflict with the senate, suggests that the university’s governing body held specific expectations of the new head of the department of philosophy. The topic and argument of Venter’s inaugural lecture, delivered on 24 February 1954, may well have pleased those members of the council that pushed for his appointment. It was titled *The Crisis of Western Civilization* and Venter seized the opportunity to unequivocally state his philosophical and political allegiance. In keeping with the main outlines of Dooyeweerd’s thought, he identified “humanism” as the leading source of Western decline and prescribed (Reformed) Christian philosophy as the remedy. In the process, he also drew a connection between Christian philosophy and the ideology of

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<sup>146</sup> D.H.Th. Vollenhoven (1892–1978). Professor in philosophy at the Free University in Amsterdam, brother-in-law to and collaborator of Dooyeweerd.

apartheid. Echoing J.D. du Toit's (Totius) argument from 1944, Venter essentially argued that the policy of separate development respected and maintained the divine order of difference instituted by God. I return to a more detailed discussion of the lecture in the next chapter.

Thus, by 1954 both the department of philosophy and the department of political philosophy were headed by staunch proponents of "Christian philosophy", both of whom articulated a link between this philosophy and elements of Afrikaner nationalism. Both identified humanism as a dangerous apostate belief, and in Venter's case, the policy of separate development was presented as antidote to this pernicious threat.

### **5. A history of philosophy in Afrikaans**

In 1954, shortly after his appointment at UOFS, E.A. Venter published what was described as the first overview of the history of Western philosophy in Afrikaans, namely, *Die Ontwikkeling van Die Westerse Denke* ("The Development of Western Thought", 1954). With this slim volume, Venter acknowledged his immense debt to Dooyeweerd's transcendental critique, and proceeded to present the history of philosophy as the expression of the four religious ground motives as identified and described by Dooyeweerd.

Venter begins the book by presenting the conclusion of Dooyeweerd's transcendental critique, namely, the religiously determined nature of philosophical thought as an uncontested truth. In the same breath, he accuses "non-Christian" philosophy of dogmatism in their alleged belief in the "sovereignty" of human reason (Venter 1954: 7). The problems with Dooyeweerd's argument, notably, the circularity of the *critique*, were briefly discussed in Chapter 5; Venter's argument suffers from all the same problems, since he makes no attempt to critically engage Dooyeweerd's argument. He begins by succinctly

presenting the conclusions of Dooyeweerd's critique, declares them axiomatic and then proceeds to "apply" these insights to the history of philosophy. He describes the advantages of Dooyeweerd's method as follows:

The essential fecundity of the teaching of the ground motives will become abundantly clear in the application thereof in the pages that follow. At the least, the study of the history of philosophy is thereby remarkably simplified. Instead of the usual endless classifications and complicated systematics, all the multiplied thought constructions that arose over 26 centuries are finally categorized in four main directions. ... [W]estern philosophy is now placed – based on its historical dependence on these – in direct relation to the four respective leading cultural forces, the religious ground motives which were of decisive importance for the developmental course of theoretical thought. Philosophy ... in other words is considered in its intimate connection with civilizational development and with life and science (Venter 1953: 7).

Venter achieves this lofty objective in 126 pages, in which successive philosophers and philosophical movements are each neatly fitted into one of the four ground motives, namely, Greek, Thomist, Christian or humanist. In the foreword, Venter justifies the slimness of his volume with the argument that a reader who is confronted with a mass of details often struggles to obtain a satisfactory grasp on the whole (Venter 1954: 4).

Without explicitly mentioning it or elaborating the argument in detail, Venter places considerable emphasis on Dooyeweerd's philosophy of cultural development, that is, the idea that a given culture's institutions, societal organization, and political structures vary from those of other cultures based on their religious direction. "Every religion," writes Venter "seizes man in his heart and directs all the springs of life according to the firm ground of his faith. The religious direction of a people therefore also determines its

civilizational development and state” (Venter 1954: 89). Following Dooyeweerd, Venter, adopts the sharp distinction between the Christian and “apostate” motives, praising the Christian motives’ contributions to culture and civilization as exemplified by the legacy of John Calvin, and generally denigrating, if not demonizing the contributions of philosophers under the direction of apostate motives, with humanism in particular receiving the blame for what Venter sees as the contemporary decay of Western civilization (Venter 1954: 89–92).

The Christian religion as, in his view, revitalized by Calvin is credited with the development of a differentiated and specialized societal order, where family, church and state independently serve God – a mark of the Christian religion’s intimate connection with freedom. According to the principle of “sphere sovereignty” state, church, school, university and business are “free” to function according to their own principles and not dominated by each other. This is contrasted with countries under the influence of Roman Catholicism (the Thomist ground motive), which must necessarily, in Venter’s view, result in “unfree church states” with no hope of leading their people to “civilizational coming-of-age” [*beskawingsmondigheid*] (Venter 1954: 90).

In Venter’s abridged account, humanism, here exemplified by the mechanistic philosophy of Descartes, parasitically invades the space opened by Protestantism and gradually secularizes the freedom motive that came to the fore during the Protestant Reformation, developing it into a “religion of unbelief” (Venter 1954: 92).<sup>147</sup> Most noticeably, in Venter’s

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<sup>147</sup> Recent scholarship traces the Protestant Reformation and the major social, political and intellectual transformations that followed to debates within the late medieval Catholic church, to the effect that Descartes is already a product of these transformations rather than the founding figure Venter makes him out to be. Indeed, in many of these accounts, the Protestant Reformation itself is viewed as a key element in the development of precisely those aspects of modernity that Venter condemns (see Meiksins-Wood 2012).

account, humanism puts Western civilization on an inevitable course of decay and destruction; this is primarily due to humanism's tendency to naturalistically reduce all of reality to its smallest constituent parts, in which form they no longer exhibit any differentiation and become pliable for mechanistic determinism. In this sense there is, for Venter, no real distinction between Descartes, Hume, Kant or Hegel. They are each and every one exponents of the same idolatrous religious ground motive – which can only lead to ruin. As Venter puts it:

The demand for naturalistic equalization across the board must, if consistently applied, lead to civilizational decay. Not the atom bomb or the hydrogen bomb will bring about the downfall of Western civilization, neither the natural sciences nor modern technology. It is the humanistic levelling process that subtly but resolutely destroys Western civilization (Venter 1953: 100).

It is ironic that Venter was so concerned with the dangers of the humanistic “levelling process” in the context of an argument that resolutely eradicated the differences between different thinkers and ideas, on the basis of a notion of “cultural development” that allowed him to discount the “endless classifications” and “complicated systematics”, and not to mention economic and political factors.

Venter's reductionism was the main focus of a sharp critique by Johan Degenaar from University of Stellenbosch (Degenaar 1955). Degenaar reviewed Venter's book for *Die Gereformeerde Vaandel*, which led to a short-lived debate between him and Venter. The debate, however, brought to light the most salient philosophical and political problems with the philosophy of the cosmonomic idea, especially as it was appropriated by Venter

and Strauss. The gist of Degenaar's concise critique was contained in the following comment:

As soon as a thinker approaches a phenomenon that he intends to study with a determined norm, that phenomenon is necessarily violated [*verkerag*]. ... Dr Venter is not to be pardoned for this, and I am of the opinion that the entire Calvinist approach sins [*sondig*] in this respect and that it is because of this that so many thinkers find it absolutely unacceptable (Degenaar 1955: 20).

Degenaar's critique accuses Venter and the "Calvinist approach" of precisely that which Dooyeweerd claimed the philosophy of the cosmonomic idea avoided, that is, distorting our understanding of reality by casting it in a reductive theoretical framework.

For Degenaar, the idea of the ground motives does violence to phenomena by forcing them into a predetermined mold, but there is more to it. The related notions of "civilizational or cultural development" and "civilizational decay" occur repeatedly in Venter's text and run like a golden thread through the book: the study of the history of philosophy only makes sense when considered in its relation to cultural development, Venter tells us in the foreword (Venter 1955: 4). The idea of a force that inexorably runs its course, that guides the development of culture in a certain way (whether good or bad), that levels the differences between individual ideas, events and people, in order to fit them into a certain predetermined developmental course, recalls Arendt's account of the modern concept of history as considered in Chapter 5. In Venter's history of philosophy, we see how this concept of history lends itself to an increasing reliance on a single idea to explain the total range of phenomena.

## 6. Succession planning

Judging from Strauss's correspondence with Dooyeweerd and others, student numbers increased significantly in both departments during the early years of Strauss and Venter's leadership. The introduction of a course in state administration in 1952 further contributed to the growth in the department of political philosophy and the added workload and the rise in student numbers imposed the need for additional lecturers. This opportunity in turn added a new dimension to Strauss's efforts to entrench Christian philosophy.

Emboldened by his rise in status and the growth of his department, Strauss laid out his thinking about this matter in great detail in a letter to Dooyeweerd (PV337, letter to Dooyeweerd, 6/12/1952). The letter is primarily concerned with two former students of Strauss who had recently arrived in Amsterdam to further their studies at the Free University, namely P.H. Coetzee and C.A. Crause. With regards to Crause, Strauss had written an earlier letter of introduction to Dooyeweerd in which he laid out what he believed to be the best possible combination of subjects for Crause. Even from afar Strauss attempted to limit Crause's exposure to any ideas he deemed unsuitable – in this case a Prof. Donner whose approach to political philosophy Strauss seemingly did not approve of.

Paramount is that Mr Crause will enjoy the privilege of immersing himself in the philosophy of the cosmonomic idea – especially then also with respect to his intended disciplinary schooling. But here arises the question whether Prof. Donner's views do not have the potential to cause much confusion for a youthful person who is as yet not sufficiently philosophically grounded to identify mistakes. Therefore, if you expect annoyances from the corner of political science, we will be thankful if you could safeguard Mr Crause's path

by suggesting a different combination [of subjects]. (PV337, letter to Dooyeweerd, 9 August 1952).

Strauss was also unhappy with the recently arrived Coetzee's subjects, specifically that he was not enrolled for philosophy of law, Dooyeweerd's subject. Strauss was adamant that students who went to the Free University should have the opportunity to study under Dooyeweerd himself, and in the case of Coetzee, that he should follow the course in state administration. As Strauss then explains to Dooyeweerd, he would soon have to appoint a senior lecturer to administer the new course in state administration, and for this, he had Coetzee in mind. The stakes were high for Strauss: "If he does not qualify himself to this effect, our council will be forced to appoint a Pretoria-student and there they receive a purely humanistic training!!!" (PV337, letter to Dooyeweerd, 6 December 1952).

Strauss had similar plans for Crause, whom he earmarked for another lectureship when the department was eventually able to differentiate further into separate offerings in political philosophy and international law – a measure with which Strauss hoped to gain influence over students from the faculty of law.<sup>148</sup> He summarised the envisioned future structure of the department as follows:

Eventually I foresee at least two professorates, namely one in Political Philosophy [*Staatsleer*] and one in State Administration with a senior lecturer in each. Yes, and now I already must try to ensure that here four positions are filled with men of a piece – graduates of the VU

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<sup>148</sup> In Dooyeweerd's theory of modal aspects, each aspect gives rise to a separate discipline, which is tasked with elaborating the discipline in terms of modal theory. The discipline of law would thus derive from the juridical aspect, as study of which would reveal the unique modal norms of this aspect and its normative meaning for the theory and practice of law. Strauss was no doubt bent upon introducing these ideas of Dooyeweerd to the faculty of law as well.

who all studied with you. Then we will, God willing, fashion more weapons for our fight against modern unbelief (PV337, letter to Dooyeweerd, 6 December 1952).

Things did not turn out quite as Strauss had hoped. In a letter of September 1954 Strauss refers to himself and Venter being caught up in a “tough battle” each to get a Calvinist appointed in their respective departments; we then learn in a letter of October 1954 that P.C. Fourie from the University of Pretoria was eventually successful. However, a second additional lectorate was soon approved, which around the same time was filled by F.J.H. Wessels, another former student of Strauss. Wessels completed his MA in 1953 and his PhD in 1957, both under the supervision of Strauss.

Strauss may have been unsuccessful in his designs to install two VU graduates in his department, but the appointment of Wessels suited his purposes just as well. Wessels eventually became professor in the department, where he remained a staunch supporter of the Reformational approach to political philosophy.<sup>149</sup> By 1976, another former PhD student of Strauss’s was senior lecturer in the department, namely, Louis van der Watt.<sup>150</sup>

Venter was also unsuccessful in securing a Calvinist in the department of philosophy. D.C. (Daantjie) Oosthuizen, a contemporary of Johan Degenaar at Stellenbosch and early critic of the apartheid regime, was appointed for a short period between 1955–1957.<sup>151</sup> Oosthuizen would have passed for a radical and irredeemable humanist in the eyes of

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<sup>149</sup> Wessels would later act as PhD supervisor to Lukas Daniël Barnard (1949–), better known as Niël Barnard, former head of South Africa’s National Intelligence Service from 1979 to 1992, mostly under the presidency of Strauss’s second cousin, PW Botha. In his PhD, Barnard (1973) thanked both Wessels and Strauss for their role in introducing him to the Christian world- and life-view and instilling in him the thirst for a Christian approach to political science.

<sup>150</sup> As was already pointed out above Van der Watt eventually entered politics as a member of the National Party and would go on to become the last administrator of the Orange Free State province before the democratic transition in 1994.

<sup>151</sup> Nash (2009) discusses the early thought of Oosthuizen in detail.

Venter and Strauss. Their negative view of Oosthuizen is confirmed by a letter from Strauss to F.J.M. Potgieter written in March 1955. The letter makes clear Venter's objections to Oosthuizen at the time ("he is an existentialist"),<sup>152</sup> as well as the overall polarisation between Strauss and Venter on the one hand, and J. De W. Keyter and his following on the other. From this letter it appears that by 1955 the Christian philosophers were a small minority on the faculty and struggled to get fellow Calvinists appointed (PV337, letter to Potgieter, 09/03/1955).

Disaster struck on 15 July 1958 when Venter suffered a massive "episode" brought on by high blood pressure, which left him incapable of performing his duties as before (PV337, letter to Heiberg, 31/08/1958). "[Y]ou will realise the cloud under which we live here," Strauss tells P.J. Heiberg.<sup>153</sup> Venter's incapacitation was a significant blow for the prospects of Christian philosophy at UOFS and it appears that student numbers dramatically dropped in the period that followed. In late 1960 Strauss directly intervened to secure the temporary appointment of P. De B. Kock, who had completed his doctorate under Strauss in 1958. As Strauss reports to F.J.M. Potgieter, he had a "long talk" with the rector about the matter, in which he impressed upon him that Kock was the only suitable candidate for the position, given Venter's illness and the declining student numbers. This intervention had apparently contributed to the council's unanimous and unopposed decision to appoint Kock.

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<sup>152</sup> The negative view of Oosthuizen was also apparent from a letter to the famous DRC theologian and later influential critic of apartheid theology, Jaap Durand, written by Strauss shortly after Oosthuizen's departure in 1957: "God willing our council will tomorrow have decided on the successor to the O-o-o-s-t-h-ui-zen-*mens* [*sic*] who was here." This is followed by some remarks on the candidates and their supporters on the senate after which Strauss concludes that "in any event we are far better off than when O. [*sic*] was appointed" (PV337, letter to Durand, 18/11/1957).

<sup>153</sup> P.J. Heiberg completed a M.A. degree under the supervision of E.A. Venter in 1954. See Appendix A.

Strauss's long-time adversary, H. V.d. Merwe Scholtz stepped down as rector in 1959 and was replaced by P.W.G. Groenewoud. It seems that after initially being doubtful, Strauss was eventually pleased with Groenewoud's rectorship. Groenewoud was not an adherent of Christian science, but he also did not actively oppose it (as Scholtz had apparently done) (PV337, letter to Dooyeweerd, 22/07/1963). In June 1959 he wrote to Potgieter:

At the UOFS definitely a new tone – also with respect to the VCHO.<sup>154</sup> Think that the time is rife for a conversation between you and the new rector. With Prof. Scholtz and Mr. Enslin out of the way it will certainly now bear good fruit.

For the first time since my appointment, I now feel truly at home and happy. Moreover, I may now for the first time do recruitment work on behalf of the university at schools. In the past week already, I visited the *platteland* [countryside] for five days, and that also means something for our Calvinist action (PV337, 10/06/1959).

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to recount in detail the further history of the “Calvinist action” at the University of the Orange Free State, and, later, of the University of the Free State – except to note that P.De B. Kock would eventually become head of the department of philosophy (circa 1968), and would in turn be succeeded in this position by D.F.M. (Danie) Strauss, H.J. Strauss's son, in 1977. D.F.M. Strauss would go on to become a noted scholar in the Reformational tradition and would retain his position in the department until 1994. The “happy” years that started for Strauss in 1959 would reach a climax when he became Dean of the Faculty of Humanities in 1968. He served in this position until 1977.

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<sup>154</sup> *Vereniging vir Christelike Hoër Onderrys* (Association for Christian Higher Education). This organisation was founded in 1948 to promote the development of “Christian education” and “Christian science” (see VCHO n.d.)

In the next chapter, I examine Venter and Strauss's philosophical articulation of apartheid ideology in detail.

## Chapter 7

### Christian philosophy and apartheid: in defence of Western civilization

In all these regions the people attained a high degree of development, but stopped there, and, remaining isolated, in no way proved a benefit to humanity at large. This applies more strongly still to the life of the colored races on the coast and in the interior of Africa – a far lower form of existence, reminding us not even of a lake but rather of pools and marshes.

– Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, p. 32.

Daarom moet u en u medestanders weet dat hier in Bloemfontein en in die Vrystaat ongetwyfeld duisende harte klop vir die reguit pad van republikenisme en apartheid met alles wat dit prinsipieel korrek vir ons hede en ons toekoms impliseer.<sup>155</sup>

– H.J. Strauss, letter to H.F. Verwoerd, 18 October 1954.

Op al die groot vrae waardeur ons volkslewe tans gekwel word, kan humanistiese wysbegeerte geen woord van bevryding spreek nie.<sup>156</sup>

– E.A. Venter, 1953.

The period during which neo-Calvinist philosophy became institutionalised at the University College of the Orange Free State roughly coincided with the elaboration of the theory of apartheid as a new “political myth” (Norval 1996). As was discussed earlier, Christian-nationalists had made their influence felt at the institution since the late 1920s and a direct association had formed with the department of philosophy by the mid-1930s. Nico Diederichs, an emerging Afrikaner nationalist intellectual and prominent member of

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<sup>155</sup> In English: Therefore you and your colleagues must know that here in Bloemfontein and in the Free State thousands of hearts undoubtedly beat for the straight road of republicanism and apartheid with everything that that in principle correctly implies for our present and our future.

<sup>156</sup> In English: On all the big questions by which our national life is currently beset, humanist philosophy can speak no word of liberation.

the *Afrikaner Broederbond* became head of the department in 1934 and played an influential role in mobilising Afrikaner students on a nationalist basis through the ANS. In addition, elements of his *volks*nationalist thinking were incorporated into the political theory curriculum.

From the mid-1930s, Afrikaner nationalism radicalized, in Norval's interpretation, due to the failure of segregation and "white unity" to offer a political salve to the social dislocation experienced by Afrikaners (Norval 1996). The United Party's decision to join the Second World War on the side of the Allied forces in 1939 further contributed to this process. Hertzog parted ways with Smuts and many Afrikaners joined the radically nationalist, extra-parliamentary *Ossewa Brandwag*. Within this climate of generalised anxiety, the conditions arose for the articulation of a new political myth and the elaboration of a new social imaginary (Norval 1996). It was under these circumstances that the theory of apartheid slowly gained prominence in Afrikaner nationalist thinking, conjoining the nationalist project's search for a political foundation with the ever-present racial question.<sup>157</sup>

As was also discussed earlier, by the time the University College of the Orange Free State gained autonomy from UNISA and became a fully-fledged university in 1950, the theory of apartheid had become an integral part of Christian-national ideology and the official policy of the governing National Party. The university, which now explicitly positioned itself as serving the educational needs of the Afrikaner people, also found itself coupled with the ideology and policy of apartheid.

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<sup>157</sup> See also Giliomee 2003b.

As noted in Chapter 1, intellectuals associated with the Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education articulated the neo-Calvinist stream of Christian-nationalism that was to make such an impression on H.J. Strauss. As the concept of apartheid gained importance within the nationalist discourse, Potchefstroom neo-Calvinists soon elaborated an influential philosophico-theological justification of apartheid that leaned heavily on the ideas of Abraham Kuyper. Notable among these intellectuals was the poet and theologian J.D. du Toit (Totius) who advanced a scriptural justification of apartheid in his address to the *volkskongres* in 1944.<sup>158</sup>

The Bloemfontein neo-Calvinist thinkers H.J. Strauss and E.A. Venter, although distinguishing themselves from the Potchefstroom group in important ways, can nevertheless be viewed as part of the same broad “Calvinist” wing of the nationalist movement. Unsurprisingly, the theory of apartheid – having become a key feature of Christian-nationalism more generally and having already found a particular neo-Calvinist articulation in the work of J.D. du Toit – also started to figure in the work of Strauss and Venter during the 1950s. Both attempted to ground a philosophical justification of apartheid in Christian philosophy. This chapter investigates Strauss and Venter’s attempt to ground a philosophical justification of apartheid in the philosophy of the cosmonomic idea.

The philosophy of the cosmonomic idea was able to resolve, for Strauss, the tension implied by the notion of a “scientific Boer”. The philosophy of the cosmonomic idea allowed him to reject the decadence of modernity, without relinquishing the formative

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<sup>158</sup> During the 1930s and 1940s the *Broederbond* organised several “congresses of the *volk*” [*volkskongresse*] through its cultural front, the *Federasie van Afrikaner Kultuurverenigings* (FAK). A *volkskongres* devoted to the poor white question was held in 1934 and an economic *volkskongres* was held in 1939. These events were an opportunity for Afrikaner intellectuals to address the *volk* on these topics by means of public addresses.

power of knowledge. It allowed Strauss to be a “Boer”, rooted in the Calvinism of his forefathers, and yet equipped to serve the modern *volk*. In this Chapter I show how Christian philosophy was able to contribute to the developing political myth of apartheid. As Dubow (2014: 16) notes, “[a]lthough apartheid was a theory about how to treat blacks, it was in the first instance a theory that emerged out of discussions about the nature and God-given tasks of Afrikaners”. Or, as Norval (1996) explained it, apartheid emerged as a new political myth to suture the Afrikaners’ experience of social dislocation. The Bloemfontein neo-Calvinists contributed to this discourse as academic *philosophers* and found in the philosophy of the cosmonomic idea a conceptual framework to do so.

The bulk of the writings I discuss in this chapter was published in the 1950s. This burst of writing can perhaps be explained by the particular problems the NP faced after coming to power in 1948. As Roos (2024) notes, the apartheid state did not immediately set to work in implementing the political “geography of apartheid”, that is, the programme of separate development that sought to displace the black populace into separate ethnic states. Its more immediate concern during the 1950s was the increasing resistance to racial segregation, which manifested in waves of labour and civic protests, starting with the Black gold miners’ strike in 1946. This spirit of protest led to the Defiance Campaign in 1952 and the Congress of the People in 1955, where the Freedom Charter was adopted (Roos 2024: 8). Strauss and Venter’s arguments in support of white supremacy and territorial segregation repeatedly refer to resistance from black people, and their arguments to some degree reflect the rising demands of the protesting black populace. In other words, it could be argued that the proliferation of these writings in the 1950s reflects the Afrikaner elite’s concern at the time with rising resistance against the state.

This chapter inadvertently makes a limited contribution to the literature dealing with the elaboration of the theory of apartheid, to the extent that the arguments by Strauss and Venter can be distinguished from those of the prominent Potchefstroom neo-Calvinists, as well as from the *volks*nationalist and biological race theorists. This is, however, not the main objective of the chapter, and I make no claim as to judging the social or political reach of the Bloemfontein neo-Calvinists more generally. The fact that they held teaching positions at a higher education institution of course means that in the very least they exerted influence over their students, and this can be confirmed by the master's and doctoral theses<sup>159</sup> they supervised as well as through archival material related to at least one former student who later became a prominent anti-apartheid theologian, namely, Jaap Durand.<sup>160</sup> In recalling his first encounter with the philosophy of the cosmonomic idea at UOFS in the early 1950s, Durand mentions his discomfort when he realised that Venter and Strauss were using this philosophy to support the policy of apartheid. Durand recalls the considerable respect he had for his teachers and his sense that it was inappropriate for him, as a young student, to question his learned professors (Durand 2016: 21). Even though Durand would go on to reject Strauss's and Venter's justification of apartheid, his account nevertheless speaks to the kind of influence these lecturers had over students and the difficulty involved in questioning their positions. In this sense, Durand's account is suggestive of the degree to which Strauss and Venter may have contributed to the construction of the apartheid social imaginary.<sup>161</sup> It is, however, not my intention to confirm or trace this influence; the main objective is to investigate the articulation between a particular philosophical discourse and apartheid discourse.

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<sup>159</sup> See Appendix A for details.

<sup>160</sup> As noted in earlier chapters, correspondence in Strauss's archival papers suggests that Durand and Strauss had a close relationship, a suggestion which is confirmed by Durand (2016).

<sup>161</sup> One one occasion Strauss responded to a letter from Durand's father, a teacher, in which he asked Strauss to explain to him the basis for apartheid. Strauss obliged with an argument similar to the one I refer to below; in his response he mentions that "Japie" is already familiar with the arguments and should be able to explain further (PV337/06/12/1956).

I begin by briefly introducing the earliest known neo-Calvinist justification of apartheid, as put forward by J.D. du Toit (Totius) at the 1944 *volkskongres*. I then reconstruct the main philosophical argument on which the Bloemfontein neo-Calvinists based their justification of white supremacy in general, and apartheid in particular. This argument appears in different versions in the work of both Strauss and Venter between 1950 and 1973, and revolves around the relation Dooyeweerd posits between religious ground motives, philosophy and culture. I conclude with a discussion of E.A. Venter's inaugural lecture, delivered in 1954, which most explicitly draws a connection between the task of Christian philosophy and the objectives of the apartheid state.

It should be noted at the outset that Dooyeweerd himself explicitly voiced his skepticism regarding the South African political situation, and certainly did not himself elaborate any justification of white supremacy (see Dooyeweerd 1984c: 497). In his philosophy of culture, however, he developed a theory that Strauss and Venter would draw on to elaborate a justification of apartheid.

### **1. Calvinism and the “native question”**

The neo-Calvinist elaboration of the apartheid idea first came to prominence at the *volkskongres* on racial policy held in Bloemfontein on 29 and 30 September 1944. As Dubow (1995: 258) notes, J.D. du Toit's keynote address, “The Religious Basis of our Race Policy” was a “seminal moment” in the elaboration of a scriptural justification of apartheid.

Around this time, the topic of Calvinism and the *native* question surfaced in correspondence between Herman Strauss and his cousin, S/Sgt J.J. Strauss. The latter had respectfully voiced his scepticism about the prospects of an “all-embracing Calvinist education” and suggested that South Africa faced more pressing issues:

Amidst the massive political changes, which now has the world on the ledge, there is *one*, that for us as South Africans, threatens like a huge fire, and is perhaps of less importance to other parts of the world. Namely: *native equalisation* [*naturelle gelykstelling*] [emphasis original].

S/Sgt Strauss's remarks should be contextualised with reference to the changing nature of segregationist policy in the 1940s, as well as increased pressure on white supremacy from broad-based African organisations. As Giliomee notes, the "liberal vision" for South Africa at this time started to reject the idea of separate cultures developing independently and proposed "an open or common society and implicitly accepted racial integration" (Giliomee 2003: 447); the Smuts government, though far from embracing the liberal vision, yet "indicated an enhanced sense of government responsibility towards Africans and a more concrete recognition of their citizenship" (2003: 451). At the same time, the ANC entered a period of revitalisation; the African Congress Youth League was formally founded in 1944, which attracted talented individuals like Anton Lembede, Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo and Walter Sisulu. Then leader of the ANC, Dr A.B. Xuma, rejected white trusteeship and demanded common citizenship (Giliomee 2003a: 452).

In his reply to his cousin's letter on 26 September, only three days before the opening of the *volkskongres* on racial policy, Herman Strauss sought to assure his cousin that his commitment to Calvinist principles by no means meant that the dangers of "native equalisation" did not concern him – to the contrary. It is worth quoting Strauss's response at length:

It is principles that guide life; it is principles that allow plans to take form and crystallise in practice with respect to the solutions to all kinds of problems. Therefore, also those that in South Africa, for example, are supporters of a policy of total equalisation, allow themselves

to be guided by certain conceptions and principles. Against these false tenets we must propose others, and the only ones I can propose are those of the traditional views in our Fatherland; *those of Calvinism* [my emphasis]. Precisely with these tenets will we call those heretics [*dwaalleraars*] [*sic*] to a halt, and will we realise plans in practical politics which will amount to *everything but equalisation*.

Strauss's response to his cousin shows that by 1944, he was already willing to draw on the "Calvinism" of his forefathers in search of a solution to the racial question that would uphold white supremacy. He concludes his response by affirming their "shared ideal and aspiration" to "safeguard South Africa for the white sons of the land" (PV337, letter to J.J. Strauss, 26/09/1944). Strauss, however, does not yet mention any specific "Calvinist" principle that would counter *geelykstelling*.

The *volkskongres* on racial policy, which took place shortly thereafter, was clearly also a response to the political developments mentioned above, and J.D. du Toit's address was in all likelihood the first time that a supposedly "Calvinist" justification of apartheid was publicly disseminated. Dubow (1995: 259) points out that the core of Du Toit's argument derived from the ideas of Abraham Kuyper, in particular, the latter's notion of God as "the Great Divider" as well as the crucial concepts of pluriformity and diversity.

Du Toit prominently invoked the Biblical story of Babel, in which God intervenes by causing the builders of the tower to speak in different languages, thus preventing them from forming a single nation. From this story, Du Toit derived the idea that God wills the existence of a pluriformity of nations: the Boers, having embarked on the Great Trek to form a separate nation, did so in obedience to God's will. Dubow, quoting from Du Toit's address, summarises the main conclusions as follows:

“First, what God has joined together, man must not separate. This is the core of our plea for the unity of the people [*volksseenheid*].” Second, “we should not bring together that which God has separated. In pluriformity the counsel of God is realised. The higher unity lies in Christ and is spiritual in character. Thus there can be no *equalising* [*gehykstelling*] and no *miscegenation* [*verbastering*]” (Dubow 1995: 258–259).

As Dubow notes, this interpretation of the story of Babel was to remain a key point of reference in subsequent theological justifications of apartheid. The prominence of Kuyper’s ideas in Du Toit’s argument seems to add evidence to revisionist historical scholarship which questions the so-called “Calvinist” and “frontier paradigms” associated with the liberal tradition of historiography; it confirms André du Toit’s suggestion that “Calvinist” justifications of racial difference entered Afrikaner thought relatively late, and did not represent a continuity with a “primitive Calvinism” that had developed on the frontier (see Du Toit 1983, 1985; Keegan 1996).

The Bloemfontein neo-Calvinists were part of the broader neo-Calvinist grouping centered at Potchefstroom, but they would elaborate a unique justification for apartheid that was more specifically based on the philosophy of the cosmonomic idea, in particular Dooyeweerd’s theory of cultural development.

Strauss makes a link between the “native question” and Dooyeweerd’s philosophy of cultural development in a letter to J.P.A. Mekkes in 1947, three years before his first publication on the topic (PV337, letter to Mekkes, 06/03/1947).<sup>162</sup> The letter reveals much

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<sup>162</sup> Geoffrey Cronjé published his most significant contribution to the topic, *Regverdige Rasse-Apartheid*, in 1947.

about Strauss's overall views on the "native question" during this decisive period in South African politics. It presents Strauss in a seemingly unguarded mood, speaking his mind to a trusted colleague, and therefore provides a valuable point of reference to interpret his subsequent publications on the subject.

Strauss initiates the topic by noting how pervasive the *native* question had become in South African politics at this time, especially since the country's policies had drawn scrutiny at a recent meeting of the UN. Strauss does not give details, but he was likely referring to the 1946 General Assembly of the UN, at which India had laid a complaint against South Africa for its treatment of Indian people.

Strauss expresses his dissatisfaction with several aspects of the situation: the "Liberalists" in the Smuts government cannot be trusted with the matter; the National Party opposition lacks the correct "principial vision"; white employers in all sections of the economy are unwilling to consider territorial segregation for fear of being deprived of "so-called cheap labour"; India and Russia complicate matters by providing material and political support to the blacks in South Africa; the "world" is "wrongly informed" of the "Afrikaner position", and worst of all for Strauss, a future National Party government is also destined to botch the issue, in so far as they are "drenched in parliamentary liberal democracy" and lacking in a "Scriptural vision" (PV337, letter to Mekkes, 06/03/1947).

In view of all of this, Strauss despairs of the future of white civilization in South Africa: current plans to separate white and black on the terrain of labour, education and social intercourse are made in ignorance of the fact that,

the civilizations of primitive nations will not remain undisclosed forever. The native demands his rightful place in the higher professions; he demands the franchise across the board and self-government in his own areas ... Cultural segregation on the same territory is without doubt doomed to fail because equality of civilizational level will eventually cease to respect racial differences. Above all, miscegenation between white and non-white is taking place on a large scale – mainly outside of marriage (PV337, letter to Mekkes, 06/03/1947).

Strauss now declares his own position to be territorial segregation that would finally lead to white and non-white living in separate areas; that is, presumably, the total spatial separation of whites and blacks (PV337, letter to Mekkes, 06/03/1947).

Strauss was apparently eager to distinguish himself from mainstream nationalist thinking and pours scorn on the NP's adherence to "liberal" parliamentary democracy and its lack of a "Scriptural" vision. The "Scriptural vision", that is, the Calvinist view of political authority as held by John Calvin (following St Augustine) rejected the liberal democratic tenet that state authority vested in the *demos*. According to Calvin, governmental authority vested in God, and the "people" merely possessed the limited right to "choose" the government. We will note the significance of this point for Strauss's views on the political rights of black people in a moment. For now, it is sufficient to note that Strauss was committed to addressing the "native question" from a neo-Calvinist perspective.

The letter shows that by this time Strauss had already linked the "native question" to Dooyeweerd's philosophy of cultural development. The reference to the "civilization of primitive nations" that will not remain "undisclosed" indefinitely, refers to Dooyeweerd's notion of the "opening proces" [*ontsluitingsproses*]. These remarks already contain the kernel of the argument that Strauss would subsequently espouse to justify apartheid; they also

bring to the fore the main difficulty that Strauss would encounter in consistently drawing on the philosophy of the cosmomic idea to justify his position.

The problem arises when, as seen above, Strauss is forced to admit that black people will inevitably become “civilized” in Dooyeweerd’s sense of the word, and that this process would level racial differences. This is why Strauss advocates for a more complete version of territorial separation. It would seem from these remarks that Strauss held an unarticulated view of racial difference that is *not* founded on progressive stages of civilizational development. “Cultural segregation” on the same territory will fail, because as the “natives” progressively become more civilized, that is, as they embark on the process of “cultural disclosure”, the racial differences on which segregation is based will cease to be important and thus undermine the basis of segregation. Strauss then appeals to racial differences that exist beyond the realm of cultural development. Territorial segregation is required to maintain respect for this unarticulated concept of racial difference, which is diluted, but not eliminated by parity of cultural development. Pervasive miscegenation is presented as a further risk to maintaining racial difference, and thus provides an additional rationale for total territorial segregation. Clearly, in Strauss’s mind, the notion of “cultural disclosure” allows for a “civilizing process” that raises difficulties for his ideal of a segregated society.

The introduction of the dreaded bogeyman of miscegenation in this context suggests that a biological conception of race was not precluded from Strauss’s rationale, but such a conception is never explicitly mentioned. Strauss’s subsequent publications on the topic do not adequately elucidate the concept of difference that is implied in the remarks to Mekkes – instead, as we will see, this unarticulated concept haunts his efforts to justify his defence of apartheid in strictly Dooyeweerdian terms.

## 2. Strauss: religious direction, civilization and political status

Strauss's first published attempt at an articulation between the philosophy of the cosmogenic idea and the *native* question occurred in a paper titled, '*Die beskawings- en politieke status van die naturel in Suid-Afrika*',<sup>163</sup> delivered at the Calvinist congress in Bloemfontein in 1950. Strauss's argument in support of racial discrimination as articulated at various occasions over the next two decades never fundamentally deviated from central premises set out in this 1950 paper; subsequent articles and lectures, however, emphasise different aspects or elaborate particular points. I will therefore offer a detailed reading of the 1950 paper, and then proceed to expand on and enrich the picture with reference to subsequent writings, both published and archival.

Before we turn to a detailed investigation of Strauss's published arguments, it is first necessary to introduce a further element of the philosophy of the cosmogenic idea, that is, Dooyeweerd's elaborate conception of social structures such as church, family and state in its relation to his notion of "cultural disclosure" and religious orientation.

### 2.1 Social structure, cultural disclosure and religious orientation

As we saw in Chapter 5, Dooyeweerd's philosophy of cultural development describes a dynamic, temporal unfolding of the creation order as mediated by human action. For example, a "primitive" legal culture of retribution may be enriched or opened up by moral considerations arising from the ethical aspect, and thus the juridical demand for retribution may become enriched and "opened up" by the moral notion of mercy.

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<sup>163</sup>In English: 'The civilizational and political status of the native in South Africa'. Strauss's pamphlet was reviewed in *Philosophia Reformata* the year after its publication (1951). The reviewer, who is not identified, acknowledges the Strauss's use of the philosophy of the cosmogenic idea and moreover describes it as a good example of the practical application of this philosophy to a concrete historical example.

Social structures, such as the state, family or church, are similarly the products of “formative control”, that is, they are also positivisations that are conditioned upon invariant structural principles given at the ontic level. The invariant structural principles function at the law-side of the creation order, that is, they govern or condition the positivisation of social structures located at the factual side. The state, family or church, for example, is each conditioned upon an invariant structural principle, that is, in Dooyeweerd’s conception, the state displays an invariant typical structure. Dooyeweerd analyses different social structures in depth and also stresses the complex ways in which they are both “sovereign” in their own sphere and inseparably interwoven. The indebtedness of this conception to the modern concept of history, which transforms “higher aims” into the aims of *political action*, was highlighted in Chapter 5.

Despite the invariant structural principles that condition different social structures, Dooyeweerd’s conception allows for considerable variability in their positivisation. On the subject-side, as opposed to the law-side, the invariant structural principles give rise to a wide variety of actually existing social structures. Simply put, in actual fact we will encounter many widely differing examples of existing states, churches and all other manner of organizations, but each will be in some sense an expression of an invariant structural principle (Chaplin 2011: 91-94).

Dooyeweerd’s attempt to account for this variability on the factual side is based on the theory of the modal aspects as well as the notion of religious ground motives, or as Griffin puts it, on “structural” factors that are attributed to the process of cultural disclosure as well as the “directional” factor that is provided by religious orientation. As for the structural factor, Griffin distinguishes three different sub-categories of differentiation: first, variability will occur on the basis of the stage of cultural development: a “primitive” tribe will not yet exhibit a differentiation between family, state and church. For example,

the “primitive” communities the Dutch settlers encountered in Southern Africa could not yet be said to have formed a state, because their form of social organization did not yet disclose the “structural principle of the state”. Secondly, variability in social organization between two cultures at a similar stage of development may arise due to factors such as the state of technology: the early Boer Republics could be considered genuine states by virtue of their having established a public juridical order; this despite the fact that they lacked the more advanced bureaucratic apparatus of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Dutch state or even that of the Cape Colony. Finally, there are local cultural differences lacking any universal significance, for example, lingual norms are differently positivised in the occurrence of different languages (Griffin 1986).<sup>164</sup>

The “directional” factor of religious orientation further complicates the picture. As explained in Chapter 5, for Dooyeweerd the religious ground motive that is dominant in a particular culture directs it to positivise norms in either a normative or anti-normative, that is, idolatrous way. In other words, cultures under the guidance of an apostate ground motive, for example, the humanist motive, will positivise norms in antinormative ways, or as Chapman puts it, “[s]ocial structures will vary according to the character of the religious ground motives dominant in their culture, since ground motives will distort people’s grasp of structural principles” (Chapman 2011: 93).

Taken together, the “structural” and “directional” factors will entail, for example, that it would be possible to conceive of a particular, local culture that is at a comparatively lower level of “cultural disclosure”, and yet is directed by the Christian ground motive. This culture may then be distinguished from another as being relatively speaking more

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<sup>164</sup> As Chapman (2011: 93) notes, these considerations make it a complicated task to distinguish between invariant typical structure and variable positive form. It is, however, beyond the scope of this thesis to explore this difficulty in detail here.

“primitive”, although normatively directed. By the same token, one could conceive of a culture that is relatively speaking more developed, although exhibiting distortions arising from its religious orientation, for example, a modern Western state might show an over reliance on market mechanisms due to the influence of the humanist tendency to privilege a single aspect of created reality.

We can now begin to see how Dooyeweerd’s conception may have been received in contemporary discourses relating to imperialism, the “native question” and Afrikaner nationalism in early 20<sup>th</sup> century South Africa. From a Dooyeweerdian perspective, one would have to attempt to account for cultural differences, that is, varying positivisations of invariant typical structures, in terms of the “structural” factors arising from the process of cultural disclosure as well as the “directional” factors arising from religious orientation. In other words, from the perspective of Dooyeweerd’s social philosophy, traditional African social structures would have to be described as variants conditioned by either structural factors and/or distortions brought on by the directional factor of religious orientation. As we will see in a moment, this is precisely Strauss’s starting point in his attempt to justify the limited political rights of black people and the demand for territorial segregation.

## **2.2 ‘The civilizational and political status of the native in South Africa’**

As noted above Strauss’s first published attempt at an articulation between the philosophy of the cosmonomic idea and the *native* question occurred in a paper titled, ‘The civilizational and political status of the native in South Africa’, delivered at the Calvinist congress in Bloemfontein in 1950.

There is no doubt that Strauss based his argument on a reading of the philosophy of the cosmomic idea. He tells Dooyeweerd as much in a letter dating from June 1951, also admitting that he did not expect Dooyeweerd to agree with him on all points. Strauss makes known to Dooyeweerd his hope to have the paper distributed, for “propaganda purposes”, within the National Party with the help of a friend who happened to serve as propaganda secretary of the National Party (PV337, letter to Dooyeweerd, 18/06/1951). Whether anything came of these ambitions could unfortunately not be established.

Strauss’s argument is essentially anthropological in that it first involves a determination of the native’s [*naturel*] state of civilization [*beskavings-status*], and then assigns the *native* a political status accordingly. Strauss invokes the discourse of trusteeship in so far as he describes the Europeans’ authority over the *native* in terms of the “superior” civilization’s duty to act as the custodian of the “inferior” civilization (see Allsobrook & Boisen 2016). In Strauss’s (and later Venter’s) case the anthropological description of the native’s state of “civilization” derives from the philosophy of the cosmomic idea, and the authority exercised by the “superior” civilization is conceived in specifically Calvinist terms. As we will see, Strauss’s appropriation of the discourse of trusteeship is also evidence of a certain shift, identified by Allsobrook & Boisen (2016), in terms of which “covering law universalism” became reconciled with cultural relativism. “Covering law universalism” entails privileging a “way of life because it is believed to be uniquely right” (Allsobrook & Boisen 2016); trusteeship, informed by the latter principle, thus entails supplanting an “inferior”, “primitive” way of life with a “superior”, “developed” way of life. Covering law universalism thus rejects cultural relativism, since it holds culture to a universal principle. As Allsobrook and Boisen show, however, in South Africa this universalist ethos was displaced by a pluralist ethos, and trusteeship came to articulate a principle of segregation (Allsobrook & Boisen 2016: 3).

Writing in 1950, shortly after the coming into power of the National Party, Strauss begins his paper by acknowledging both local and international attention to the “Boer’s” policy regarding the “native question”. His opening remarks closely echo the main themes occurring in the 1947 letter to Mekkes. In Strauss’s view, the local and international response is characterized by confusion and in this respect, he concedes “the Afrikaner’s” obligation to explain his [*siz*] position to the world; his paper is presented as “modest contribution” to this duty.

In introducing “the Afrikaner’s position”, the Dooyeweerdian provenance of Strauss’s approach is immediately apparent. The problem is first of all the lack of a “Scriptural consideration” of the *native* [*nature*] as a “primitive or nature-man” [*natuurmens*].<sup>165</sup> With this view, as we shall soon see more clearly, Strauss is appealing to Dooyeweerd’s notion of cultural development as determined by the progressive “opening up” of cultural possibilities in terms of the anticipatory structure of the modal aspects. Only in light of a “Scriptural” consideration will it be possible, according to Strauss, to judge the “native’s” level of civilization and assign him the appropriate political status.

Secondly, Strauss continues, the question must be considered in terms of the “Christian religion”. Here he is invoking the notion of religious ground motives. Dooyeweerd’s argument, which attributes diverging epistemological and cultural expressions to the Christian and apostate ground motives respectively, is by now familiar to the reader. The political enemies of Afrikaner nationalism – individualism, liberalism, revolutionary democracy and communism – are idolatrous “religious” positions and will thus

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<sup>165</sup> Strauss may have adopted this word from the work of Groen van Prinsterer (see p. 154-155), who uses a similar Dutch word [*natuurmensch*] in the context of an argument rejecting the notion of natural law and arguing for the “traditional” basis of all religion: “Alle Godsdienst is traditioneel. Het denkbeeld van God zou bij het ruwen natuurmensch, gelijk de valsche wijsbegeerte dien voorstelt, nooit opgekomen zijn” (quoted in Schlebusch 2023).

unavoidably accord the *native* a radically different (anti-normative) civilizational and political status from the Christian religion.

A third and related problem for Strauss is the lack of a proper scripturally founded understanding of the “authority-relation” entailed by trusteeship. If trusteeship means the subjection of the *native* to the authority of a “white” [*blanke*] custodian, the question is where this authority derives from, and whether faith and apostasy can give the same answer. Here, Strauss will invoke John Calvin’s infamous realist understanding of political authority – as Walzer summarises Calvin’s position: “God was the cause of all political facts – and especially of such incredible facts as order and subjection” (Walzer 1965: 36).

Finally, Strauss argues, the political status of the *native* can never be separated from our “political confession of faith” [*politieke geloofsbelydenis*]: “Every conception of the state is rooted in a determined life- and worldview, a religion – true or false – and assigns to man a particular political status accordingly” (Strauss 1950: 3).

Having established these fundamental points of departure, Strauss further develops the argument under four headings: ‘The civilizational condition of the native’, ‘The civilizational status of the native’, ‘The origin and meaning of trusteeship’, and ‘The political status of the native’. I discuss each in turn.

### **2.3 ‘The civilizational condition of the native’**

In his analysis of the *native*’s social condition, Strauss takes for granted the then anthropological discourse of ‘primitive culture’. The *native* is a manifestation of primitive culture, and primitive culture is essentially a manifestation of degeneration. The fundamental question in relation to primitivity is therefore, “what causes man to degenerate?” (Strauss 1950: 4). The answer, we immediately learn, is apostasy from God:

Every community that turns away from God, deforms. For this, history provides all the examples and it is this wicked course that was also treaded by the native-ancestors. This is why they became a nature-people [*natuurvolk*], equal to nature [*natuur-gehyk*], whilst the image bearer of God was surely called upon to subject and master nature in His honour (Strauss 1950: 4).

An anthropological description of the *native* as *natuurmens* follows; the by now familiar Dooyeweerdian notion that a religious motive determines the possibilities of cultural expression, is central. The heart of the *natuurmens* has been taken hold of by an apostate “nature religion”, and therefore his “entire spiritual makeup”, his “full human personality” is surrendered to “degeneration”; because the *natuurmens* is caught in the grip of a *nature-religion*, because he has made nature the object of his worship and fear, he is incapable of subjecting and mastering nature. Being unable to bring nature under his control, the *natuurmens* remains a stranger to civilizational development (Strauss 1950: 4). Strauss expounds on this condition of depravity: beholden to a *nature-religion*, the *nature-worshipper* is culturally deficient in every way. In religion he knows only primitive idols drawn from nature; in morality he is prone to polygamy, cannibalism and murder; in law he knows only retribution; his art is malformed and devoid of proper proportion; his economy is precarious; his social relations are crude and rough, his language characterized by a small vocabulary; his knowledge devoid of understanding and insight – the totality of his culture no more than a “light bundle”, fit for a “beast of burden” [*ligte pakdier-bondeltjie*] (Strauss 1950: 4) Due to this deficiency in spiritual and intellectual abilities, the “nature-child” is forced to rely on physical strength and violence, and is unable to rein in his desire and emotions; his society is characterized by a lack of independent institutions such as “marriage, family and state”: the tribal chief is religious chief, marital chief and family chief. Finally, the *native*’s economy is a primitive socialism (Strauss 1950: 5). In light of this,

Strauss concludes that this “fallen man’s” civilizational state is no more than a caricature. Nevertheless, as we would expect, this condition can in principle be overcome: by returning to God, the *native* can embark on a process of cultural disclosure; the *bantu* is “without doubt” still created in the image of God, but “radically wrenched from his life-root [*lebensworte*]” (Strauss 1950: 5).

Dooyeweerd’s conceptual framework clearly speaks from these remarks – the native’s culture is not only “primitive” in terms of the structural factors that determine culture, that is, the process of disclosure, it is also deformed in terms of religious direction. It is worth noting how the “empirical-transcendental” character of Dooyeweerd’s thought functions in Strauss’s argument; its positivist and eschatological dimensions reinforce each other in the figure of an endless loop: on the eschatological side, the *nature-religion* of the *native* determines his destiny as cultural degeneracy; on the empirical side, the anthropological description of *native* culture points to its religious deformation.

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to critically investigate Dooyeweerd’s anthropological description of primitivity, which may have been inaccurate even within the intellectual climate of the 1950s. Paul Radin, for example, had already questioned 19<sup>th</sup> century anthropology’s concept of primitivity in his 1927 book, *Primitive Man as Philosopher*, arguing that “primitive” cultures are no less intellectually sophisticated than their “civilized” counterparts (Radin 1927). McIntire (1985: 104) also criticises Dooyeweerd on this point, referring to the anthropological studies of E.E. Evans-Pritchard from the late 1940s and early 1950s as showing that so-called “primitive” societies are sociologically far more complex than Dooyeweerd allowed.

It is clear that Strauss's description did not apply to *black* people in general; the letter to Mekkes proves that by 1947 Strauss was well aware of the fact that black people as such could no longer be described as “primitive” in the sense Dooyeweerd intended. I have already drawn attention to the context of increased political resistance against segregation and white supremacy, which by the 1950s had long been voiced by black lawyers in the language of modern constitutionalism (Ngcukaitobi 2018). Strauss was apparently keenly aware of this, for he soon forestalls any potential objections to his reliance on the notion of “primitivity” by introducing a distinction between the tribal and “detrribalized” *native* [*ontstamde nature*].<sup>166</sup>

The depraved figure of the *natuurmens* described up to now, we learn, is only applicable to the tribally rooted native; it still remained to consider the “detrribalized native”. The latter, Strauss contends, echoing the sociologist Geoffrey Cronjé (1948), presents us with a “hallucination” [*drogbeeld*]; this figure may appear “civilized”, but this is not the case: “he has merely been wrenched from his *bantu* soil by the pull of white civilization, especially our technology and modern machine-culture” (Strauss 1950: 5). For this figure there is no hope at all: the tribally rooted *native* at least retains the possibility of “unlocking” his cultural potential as rooted in his “Bantu identity”, whereas the “detrribalized native” has relinquished this proper starting point for his civilizational development: “his personality is literally ruined and so broken down that he can no longer serve as representative of the Bantu culture” (Strauss 1950: 6). This figure is characterized by the “confusion” that reigns in his heart; he has no solid ground for his belief and thus becomes the victim of the “rotting processes in white civilization” (Strauss 1950: 6). Strauss concludes: “the tribal

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<sup>166</sup> This distinction was readily plucked from existing discourse surrounding the “native question”. Geoffrey Cronjé, for example, discusses the condition of the “detrribalized native” in his *Voogdyskap en apartheid* (1948). See also Coetzee 1991: 15.

native displays a poverty of civilization [*bekawingsarmoede*], the detribalized native on the other hand is bankrupt, a complete wreck” (Strauss 1950: 6).

Judging by these remarks, Strauss seems to think of ethnic difference in essentialist, if not in explicitly “ontic” terms. Echoing his remarks in the letter to Mekkes, where he refers to “racial differences”, he now he appeals to “*bantu* identity” as being the normative starting point for a unique developmental course. The process of normative cultural disclosure on the basis of the Christian religion is available to the *bantu*, but above and beyond a Christian grounding, it must also issue from the “*bantu* identity”. The “Westernised”, “detribalized” *bantu* on the other hand is emphatically *not* civilized; he has boarded the wrong developmental bus, so to speak; he is fundamentally deceptive, he is not what he appears to be (Strauss 1950: 5-6).

The distinction between the “tribal” and “detribalized” native was a common trope within segregationist and apartheid discourse. The idea that black people were the bearers of a unique ethnic identity was to become a key feature of what Dubow (2014) calls the “prescriptive multiculturalism” of “grand apartheid”. The “detribalized” *native* presented a practical and theoretical problem for this project, because this figure questioned the apartheid ideologues’ essentialised notion of ethnic identity.

The distinction between the “tribal” and “detribalized” *native* found implicit support in Dooyeweerd’s theory of cultural development, precisely as a *function* of development. As a given tribal culture undergoes a process of “cultural disclosure” it will in a sense become “detribalized”; it will lose those characteristics which identify it as “tribal”. In Dooyeweerd’s argument therefore, “detribalization” can be viewed as a condition for further societal integration – in the South African context of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, one

may well have argued from a Dooyeweerdian point of view that “detrribalization” was a necessary process for the constitution of an integrated and societally differentiated modern state. In Strauss’s argument, however, normative cultural development must take place within the constraints of a prior “*bantu* identity” and “detrribalization” comes to denote a distorted form of development. The notion of “development” itself is thus transformed from a potentially universalising concept into a pluralising concept. This conceptual modification closely resembles the shift in the discourse on trusteeship identified by Allsobrook and Boisen (2016) referred to earlier: a “covering law universalism” is displaced by a notion of cultural relativism.

The contempt that Strauss reserves for the “detrribalized” *native* is severe, and one cannot help but wonder what motivates it. The text provides no answers, but at this point we may well recall Norval’s analysis of the “dislocation of identity” as it applied to Afrikaners, and my attempt to read Strauss’s intellectual history through this lens. I argued that the philosophy of the cosmonomic idea provided Strauss with the intellectual resources to overcome his own sense of crisis, which he experienced as a clash between tradition and modernity. The “detrribalized” *native* in a sense recalls the Afrikaners’ dislocation of identity, a crisis which in 1950 was arguably not yet a thing of the past. As Roos (2024: 9) points out, apartheid was at most half a generation away from the depredations of poor whiteism. Roos further notes that the “interlocking traumas affected not only the white poor but also the middle-class custodians of Afrikaner nationalism, who feared both a dilution of the Afrikaner *volk* [people] and a blurring of lines between Black and white” (Roos 2024: 9). Strauss’s notable contempt for the “detrribalized” native may thus perhaps be ascribed to the possibly destabilising presence of this figure in the Afrikaner nationalist psyche: the distressing possibility that Afrikaner culture is similarly lacking in a transcendental source, that it too, is a “hallucination”, severed from the spiritual cradle of Western Europe, at

most donning the veneer of “civilization”. In other words, the “detrribalized” *native* becomes a disturbing reminder of the contingency of Afrikaner culture, putting in doubt its metaphysical foundations and its future normative disclosure. Viewed from this perspective, Strauss (and Venter’s) fixation on civilization and civilizational status may thus also be understood as a veiled cautionary tale, pedagogically deployed at the precise moment at which the Afrikaners must take control of the state.

#### 2.4 ‘The civilizational status of the native’

Having described the *native* in terms of “primitive” culture, Strauss concludes that compared to “white civilization”, the *native* enjoys an “exceedingly inferior civilizational status”. The tribally rooted native, locked in a “primitive” state, is powerless in his relation to the white man, whereas the “detrribalized” *native* “borrows” what little resources he has from Western civilization. In this respect, Strauss resentfully acknowledges the power the *natives* acquire by virtue of their substantial presence in the labour market. This “power”, however, does not legitimately raise the civilizational prospects of the “detrribalized” *native*, no, it merely renders him a “civilizational crutch [*beskawingskeruk*] underneath the alien, white body” (Strauss 1950: 6). Strauss summarises: “[A]s primitive man, the *native* has no civilizational status, but he has potential. As *detrribalized* and *westernized* man, he even lacks potential” (Strauss 1950: 6). [my emphasis] This leads to the following conclusion:

[T]he civilizational condition and status of the native [thus] naturally places him under the trusteeship of the white man [*blanke*]. In the civilizational sense the white man is the superior, the native the inferior; the white man the adult [*mondige*], the native the minor; the white man thus the guardian, the native the ward [*beskermling*] (Strauss 1950: 6).

Having established the civilizational status of the *native* in relation to the white man, Strauss sets out to clarify the “Christian” understanding of trusteeship.

## **2.5 The “Christian” understanding of trusteeship**

Even though Dooyeweerd’s concept of cultural development offers a normatively grounded explanation for the differences between “primitive” and developed civilizations that could potentially inform a discourse on trusteeship, Strauss does not draw on Dooyeweerd as his primary point of reference in his discussion of trusteeship. Strauss’s understanding of trusteeship as presented here is much more directly informed by the Christian doctrine of obedience to secular authority as filtered through Calvinism.

The doctrine of obedience can be traced back to St. Paul and St. Augustine and briefly entails that “temporal government is providentially ordained by God to deal with a fallen humanity” (Meiksins-Wood 2012: 69). In Calvin’s theology this doctrine is interpreted to the effect that civil governments are considered the representatives of God: “When those who bear the office of magistrate are called gods, let no one suppose that there is little weight in that appellation. It is thereby intimated that they have a commission from God, that they are invested with divine authority and, in fact represent the person of God” (Calvin quoted in Meiksins-Wood 2012: 78–79). As Meiksins-Wood notes, this means that Christians owe obedience to civil authorities, and not out of fear, but because this obedience is “rendered to God himself, inasmuch as their power is from God” (Calvin quoted in Meiksins-Wood 2012: 79).

Strauss begins his discussion of trusteeship by noting that God endows man with official authority [*ampsgesag*] when he commands Adam to subject and master the earth. This task and the authority it implies derive only from God. When Adam disobeys God, he forsakes

this responsibility and delivers the human race to the bondage of sin. After the Fall, no legitimate authority vests in man. “As sinners, white and black, civilized and uncivilized are equal before God in condition and status – equally cursed. Man is deserving of nothing, also not by virtue of civilization and culture!” (Strauss 1950: 7). However, the sacrifice of Christ restores man’s God-given authority; by confessing our faith, believers are freed from the bondage of sin and regain their responsibility. In this God-given authority also vests the legitimate authority of man over his fellow man. All earthly power (authority)<sup>167</sup> wielded by men over other men derives from Christ. This includes the power of sinful, or ungodly governments – the difference is only that the faithful wield this power to the glory of God, whereas the unfaithful use this power against God. “Christ is therefore the Boundary between free (and true) authority and bondage to sin”. An explanation of “free authority” follows in Strauss’s text: “Christian authority liberates, safeguards against the precipices of evil, directs those subjected in Jesus Christ towards God” (Strauss 1950: 8). For this reason, it is “good for a child to be born from believing parents, good for the subject to have a believing government, good for the learner that his teacher is believing and good for the labourer to have a believing employer” (Strauss 1950: 8). In contrast to this, the power of the unbelieving can only lead to bondage; they reject the responsibility of the divine “office”, and lead no one to God; this authority bears no relation to freedom.

Thus, in typical Calvinist fashion, Strauss describes the scope of legitimate earthly authority: all authority is decreed by God, and believers have the divine duty to wield this authority to the honour of God. Although not explicitly stated, the implication throughout is that we can clearly distinguish between the believing and the unbelieving, those who wield authority legitimately, and those who forsake this divine duty.

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<sup>167</sup> Strauss uses power [*mag*] and authority [*gesag*] interchangeably, but in this context it would make sense to reserve “authority” for the transcendent source that gives legitimacy to the enactment of (earthly) power; divine authority legitimates earthly power as enacted by its proper representatives.

Having interpreted trusteeship in terms of the Calvinist interpretation of secular authority, Strauss is now ready to apply this understanding to the “civilizational relationship between white and black in South Africa”. Trusteeship, he claims, is nothing more than the legitimate authority that man discharges as divine office bearer, akin to the authority of the “believing parent over the child” (Strauss 1950: 8). Trusteeship is taken up by the Christian *volk* as a divine duty, and trusteeship exists solely on this Christian basis. In other words, Strauss interprets trusteeship as merely another instance of Calvin’s notion of an “office”, occupied by a legitimate “magistrate” who discharges a divinely instituted authority.

The Calvinist concept of authority and Strauss’s appeal to the developmental discourse of “civilized” and “primitive” cultures are not, however, necessarily reconcilable. Strauss makes a point of stating that trusteeship does *not* depend on the superiority of white civilization – authority is not gained by human accomplishment; it exists only by the grace of God. This qualification comes across as disingenuous, because from the foregoing argument it is clear that the power differential mirrors the purported civilizational differential. The argument for divinely bestowed authority appears as a belated justification for a situation that is initially presented as the outcome of a historical process. The comparison of the relationship between “civilized” and “uncivilized” to the relationship of authority between “parent and child” would also seem to suggest a hierarchy founded in the natural order of things. As Hannah Arendt has argued, beginning with Plato and Aristotle, the Western tradition of political thought has often turned to “natural” relationships of authority in attempting to address the precarity of the political realm (Arendt 1958). As Walzer (1965: 33) notes, however, Calvin distinguished himself from his contemporaries’ use of paternity as a metaphor for political authority, and may have been closer to the inverse view, namely that fatherhood was an “office” invested with divine authority in the sense described above. This indeed seems to be Strauss’s intent too: the

parent-child relationship does not serve as metaphor for political authority, it is but another instance of an “office” invested with authority by God.

There is thus a tension in Strauss’s account: the pejorative distinction between “civilized” and “uncivilized” cannot but present its own internal justification for the white man’s authority, but the Calvinist conception of authority does not require justifying political authority in this manner. The question is therefore, why does Strauss concern himself with the civilized/uncivilized distinction if his Calvinist conception of authority would simply have allowed him to adopt Calvin’s political realism and affirm that the white people’s factually existing political authority over black people is God’s will?

The tension appears as a vicious circle, or as what Jacques Derrida has described in a different context as a moment of “undecidability”: on the one hand trusteeship is explained as being based on the inferior civilizational status of the *native*; on the other this inferior status is explained as a function of a relationship of authority instituted by God. Herein lies the undecidability: we cannot decide whether the white man is superior because he has been granted authority, or whether he has been granted authority because he is superior. The circular reasoning becomes even more glaring a few lines further when Strauss writes:

About our white self-preservation we may not be primarily concerned, but indeed about the preservation of the condition of our office, namely, Reformed Christianity in South Africa, because outside of Christ – as civilized heathens – we fall out of office and relinquish our status as guardian (Strauss 1950: 8).

In other words, the whites are compelled to discharge their divine authority over blacks in order to maintain Reformed Christianity, so that their authority may remain legitimate. In

this justification of the authority that underlies trusteeship, we find the familiar interpretive violence that underlies acts of foundation: that which is *founded*, that which is the outcome of a contingent political and historical process (trusteeship) is presented as natural and necessary, and God is called upon to smooth over the tension between the necessary and the contingent.

The vacillation between the discourse of development (the distinction between civilized and uncivilized) and the Calvinist notion of divine office allows for a certain flexibility in Strauss's conception of the custodian's task. In elaborating the implications of this notion of trusteeship, Strauss notes that trusteeship has its limits: first, as guardians, we may never enslave our wards; secondly, "we may ... not assimilate him, neither physically nor spiritual-culturally, *because he is simply not us*" [my emphasis], and finally, "[w]hen he reaches Christian civilizational adulthood ... we must leave him in the service of the Lord", that is, trusteeship then comes to an end (Strauss 1950: 9).

The concept of the "uncivilized" *native* thus implies the potential end of trusteeship, that is, when the *native* reaches "Christian civilizational adulthood". Once again, we encounter this wavering or tension between two different orders of justification. The notion that trusteeship will end when the *native* reaches an adequate state of "civilization" suggests that the relationship of authority is justified by or at least related to "civilizational" level, thus contradicting the Calvinist argument which attributes the custodian's authority solely to the notion of divine "office". On the one hand, this ambiguity allows Strauss to say that trusteeship is not absolute, that the *native* is capable of rising to a level of civilization where trusteeship would no longer be necessary. On the other hand, his Calvinist realism allows him to affirm the essential legitimacy of trusteeship wherever it in fact exists, because such authority could only have been divinely ordained. In other words, as long as trusteeship

exists, it exists legitimately (by virtue of God's will). At the same time however, he is able to dangle the carrot of the *native's* eventual emancipation – but strictly on the white man's terms.

In a certain sense we can recognise in this ambiguous or undecidable discourse the mirror image of the circular structure that Conradie (1960) and Zuidervaart (2004) identify in Dooyeweerd's transcendental critique, and which I, referring to Derrida's work on the problem of foundation described as an interpretative violence (see Chapter 5, page 206). As we saw before, the theory of modal aspects is both the product of and an element in the proof of the religious basis of all thought; or in Foucault's terms, the critique is characterized by the undecidability between a positivist and an eschatological discourse, between the empirical and the transcendental. On the one hand Strauss presents what aspires to be a more or less empirical account of *native* civilization as "primitive"; at the same time, however, "primitiveness" is defined as the result of an apostate religious orientation. In an inversion of the transcendental critique, *native* culture is also the product and the proof of the religious basis of culture.

Strauss summarises his argument thus far as follows:

In brief, Christian trusteeship is the performance of circumscribed duty of office in responsibility to God. Therefore, although equal and equally condemned before Him, the Christian white [*christen-blanke*] is nevertheless invested with power over the native and in *this* sense we are mutually unequal. Therefore, the native must obey us, provided we ... act in obedience to God. Then he must even suffer our castigation in the name of the Lord LORD [*sí*], because it brings liberation from the bondage of sin (Strauss 1950: 9).

He adds, however, that it would be short-sighted to view trusteeship simply in *political* terms. Trusteeship involves the “entire life of the *native*, his spiritual make-up and all his life forms”. White, Christian civilization is tasked with the “liberation” of the *bantu*, that is, in Dooyeweerd’s terms, to lead him in the process of cultural disclosure, to “liberate” him from his “primitive state”. This means, first and foremost, to rid him of “natural religion” so that he may fix his heart on God. Thus – and here arrives the all-important qualification – “Bantu-nature [becomes] Bantu-culture”, thus the Christian guardian leads “Bantu-heathendom ... to “Bantu-Christendom!” (Strauss 1950: 10). Strauss concludes: “Against the background of the Christian understanding of trusteeship the civilizational status of the *native* is thus that of civilizational ward [*beskawingsbeskermling*], a minor on the way to Christian, cultural adulthood with the maintenance of his Bantu-identity” (Strauss 1950: 10). Despite Strauss’s nominal commitment to “sphere sovereignty” he crudely confuses the political and theological here, which results in nothing less than a theocratic defence of the modern state’s disciplinary power.

Here we see how the notions of “*Bantu* identity” and trusteeship are brought within the purview of Dooyeweerd’s notion of cultural disclosure, or rather, how Dooyeweerd’s concept is adapted to accommodate the notion of “*Bantu*-identity”. The *bantu* is subject to the process of cultural disclosure, provided that white Christendom leads the way to “*Bantu*-Christendom”. The cultural distinction still precedes any religious communality. The implication remains that the *bantu*, however Christian he may be, is destined to follow his own, unique developmental course, and it is even the divine duty of white Christendom to ensure that he stays on this path. Strauss further points out that trusteeship can never succeed under the guidance of the “unbelieving”; unbelieving guardians inevitably strip the ward of his “own nature” [*eieaard*]; only Christian trusteeship is capable of facilitating the unfolding of the *bantu*’s unique cultural identity.

In Dooyeweerd's terms the reality of "civilizational difference" is accounted for in terms of the distinction between "nature-religion" and Christian religion, and could in principle be overcome. The philosophical or theological basis for "Bantu-identity" is, however, never theorised and instead functions as an *a priori* condition for normative cultural development.

We can now consider the political implications Strauss draws from the foregoing.

## 2.6 "The political status of the native"

Having described the civilizational condition and status of the *native* and explicated the Christian (Calvinist) understanding of trusteeship, Strauss, as he interprets it, then considers the specifically political dimension of the "native problem". At this point the immediate context of the late 1940s and 1950s becomes apparent, because, as Strauss explains, the *native* has changed:

Our *natives* no longer accept – like their ancestors – the trusteeship of the white man. They can no longer abide by the ward-status [*beskermelingstatus*] that their civilizational condition accords them. ... Previously, there was subjection to the white man, trust and reverence, respect for the office [*amp*] ... Today it is different ... The native deems himself an oppressed, especially because he lacks political equality. He no longer honours the guardian, but hates an oppressor (Strauss 1950: 13).

Strauss's remarks clearly reference the state of heightened resistance to segregation and inequality dating from the mid-1940s. As Strauss puts it, "yesterday's heathen has suddenly become a modern revolutionary" who "deems himself the equal of the white man" and makes use of "modern struggle methods, namely, unions and strikes" (Strauss 1950: 14).

This reveals, for Strauss, the deepest roots of the “native problem”: “it is a problem of authority, born from apostasy from God, revolt against Christ, defiance of the civilizational custodian [*beskawingsvoog*], rejection of Christian trusteeship-authority [*voogdyskap-gesag*]!”

We have noted Strauss’s adherence to the Calvinist doctrine of secular authority, namely, the notion that secular authorities derive their authority from God and serve as his representatives. For Strauss, the “native problem” fundamentally results from the rejection of authority understood in this sense, which in turn must be traced back to “the unbelief and revolution” that originated in Europe.

The phrase “unbelief and revolution” refers to Groen van Prinsterer’s work from 1847,<sup>168</sup> and Strauss is herewith evoking the neo-Calvinist interpretation of the French Revolution as a revolt against God. In the political sphere, the revolt against God manifests as political revolution; having rejected God, man proclaims himself the highest source of authority, and thus revolutionary democracy is borne: the godly origin of political authority is rejected and instead located in the will of the people. By rejecting the authority of God, the notion of the “sovereignty of the people” [*volkssoevereiniteit*] is borne. Democracy and political equality is thus for Strauss rooted in apostasy. The democratic “dogma of equality” does not distinguish between “civilized and uncivilized, Christian or heathen”, and rejects all forms of authority as illegitimate, only acknowledging the sovereign status of each individual, and thus even the *native* came to be considered sovereign by mere virtue of being human (Strauss 1950: 12).

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<sup>168</sup> Strauss is here referencing his *Ongeloof en Revolutie* (1847).

In Strauss's interpretation, this pernicious doctrine also found its way into South Africa, first, by way of the Cape Patriots<sup>169</sup> and subsequently by way of the "revolutionary democratic" policy of the British, as exemplified by the institution of the coloured vote in the Cape Colony in 1853 (Strauss 1950: 13).<sup>170</sup> Strauss presents the Great Trek as an attempt by Christian *Boers* to escape the nefarious doctrine of equality, but concedes that it spread even amongst them; inevitably, the *native* would also fall under its spell, imagining himself to be the equal if not the superior of his guardian (Strauss 1950: 13). White political power thus becomes for the "defiant native" [*verset-naturel*] the ultimate symbol of his bondage, and therefore equality and universal suffrage is the "watchword of the black revolution" (Strauss 1950: 14).

This then, is the essence of the "native problem": under the influence of a pernicious and apostate dogma of equality, the *native* has rejected the rightful authority of the white man. According to Strauss this defiance has left the white man [*blanke*] no choice but to take extreme action:

At this stage we are compelled to say something about the infamous "apartheid". Without this defiance by the native, the word "apartheid" would not have come to the fore so harshly. When he was still contented with this guardian, the native was naturally apart, in his place and no threat. But when he began to strive for equality, he vacated his status, became a problem and thus the white man had to meet him with the reprimand of "apartheid" and therewith explain to him his condition and status (Strauss 1950: 14).

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<sup>169</sup> The Cape Patriots was a late 18<sup>th</sup> century movement in the Cape Colony that agitated for greater political freedom at the Cape following the American and French Revolutions.

<sup>170</sup> Strauss does not mention the "right to resistance" by lesser magistrates as formulated by Calvin and subsequently developed by Calvinist thinkers such as Beza, Knox and Buchanan into a secular theory of resistance against illegitimate government (see Kingdon 1991: 193–218; Meiksins-Wood 2012: 57–84; Witte 2008).

For Strauss, the demand for equality in the form of the vote is completely out of the question; he argues that the limited civil freedoms that the *native* possesses have already torn him from the security of his tribal traditions, leaving him vulnerable (because of his primitive state) to the dangers of Western freedoms: humanistic education, excesses of private property, modern dance, liquor and cinema. According to Strauss, these freedoms are already leading the *native* to ruin and therefore, entrusting him with the powers of the modern state would be absurd. For Strauss, the suggestion that *natives* could aspire to political equality could only be the product of a profane political confession of faith: the leaders of *native opinion* in South Africa are “revolutionary spirits that renounce Christ ... Therefore they theoretically assign to the native a civilizational and political status that is foreign to the demands of God’s word and also in open conflict [*in openlike stryd*] with reality” (Strauss 1950: 15).

It is worth noting once again in the above formulation the by now familiar conflation of the descriptive and normative dimensions that occur throughout the argument. Once more, it is impossible to decide whether “reality” or “God’s Word” is the final instance of authority. Strauss will no doubt argue that there is no tension to speak of, since reality is conditioned upon God’s law; however, the problem is that by conflating reality as it presently exists with “God’s Word”, Strauss leaves no room for the possibility that “reality” might be in need of reformation. In other words, in one and the same stroke, “God’s Word” is used to legitimise current political “reality” and the possibilities of “God’s Word” is restricted to “reality” as it is presently given.

In terms of the Calvinist view of political authority, Strauss argues, the denial of voting rights does not amount to oppression. If a government acts as a servant of God and governs in a Christian manner, no subject can be oppressed simply for lacking the vote.

Furthermore, as long as a government respects the Calvinist principle according to which governmental power is limited and prohibited from dominating all spheres of life, i.e., is not totalitarian, such a government cannot be considered oppressive. The limited civil freedoms and political representation that black people possessed at the time (for example, native representation in various legislative bodies) are accordingly judged by Strauss to fall entirely within the scope of legitimate, non-oppressive government as contemplated by Calvinist doctrine (Strauss 1950: 16). The inferior civilizational status of the *native*, however, makes him entirely unfit for the responsibility that comes with the right to vote. As Strauss puts it:

Christian political philosophy [*staatsleer*] puts much higher demands on political participation ... than the political theories of unbelief. The latter conceptions of the state, especially that of revolutionary democracy, is all too ready to grant everyone the same political status on the grounds of the dogma of equality (Strauss 1950: 16).

In distinction to the political theories grounded in unbelief, Christian political thought dictates that only certain citizens can be entrusted with the sacred duty to elect a government. “A full-fledged political status is thus principally only bestowed on those who are taken up in Christ [*hulle wat in Christus begrepe is*]” (Strauss 1950: 17). Here Strauss is forced to admit that the Christened *native* must in principle also have a legitimate claim to equal political participation; but at the same moment he then reintroduces the discourse on primitivity: “political participation also presupposes adulthood [*mondigwording*] in the sense of Christian civilizational responsibility, and in this respect our natives are seriously lacking. Measured by this standard, even the Christened native is but a mere child” (Strauss 1950: 17).

In this last section we saw how in joining the potentially conflicting discourses of “cultural development” and the Calvinist understanding of authority a framework is erected that effectively, if not explicitly, precludes any possibility of the *native*’s political emancipation. The Christened *native*, who accepts God, and by implication the God-given authority of his white guardian, is not the white man’s civilizational equal; the *native* who proclaims his political equality, on the other hand, can only be the perverse figure of the “detrribalized” native, and is denounced as a civilizational delinquent acting in defiance of God. Strauss concludes with a plea: “let us ... pray that the Lord may make us into a loyal servant. Furthermore, that He will effect a change in the native’s heart and show him that the Christian guardian is no oppressor” (Strauss 1950: 19).

## 2.7 Refinements

Strauss repeated this argument in broadly similar terms in several publications throughout the 1950s, only slightly shifting his emphasis from one article to the next. From Strauss’s perspective the most troublesome aspect of the “native problem” was arguably what status to assign to the Christened *native*. As we saw above, Strauss admits that in theory the Christened *native* is entitled to political participation as contemplated by the Christian concept of political authority; we also saw, however, that in practice Strauss views even the Christened *native* as incapable of being entrusted with this responsibility; Strauss offers no substantial argument for this position, however.

In subsequent articles, Strauss attempted to elaborate his thinking on this point. In 1952 he set out to refine his argument regarding civilization, culture and the political rights of black people. In a contribution to *Die Gereformeerde Vaandel* he draws a sharp distinction between the *outward* trappings of culture and the *subjective-inner* condition of civilization. The context is yet again the troublesome figure of the educated and “cultured” black

person that lays claim to equal political rights. Strauss argues that the *inner* condition of “civilization” is not something that can be acquired by means of education. The *civilization* of the white man is the spiritual inheritance of “thousands of centuries”, “it is the result of a hidden spiritual maturity [*geesteswasdom*]”; culture is but only a superficial symbol of that which “stirs in the spiritual depths” (Strauss 1952: 137). The *native* can acquire the white man’s culture, but does not therewith gain access to the white man’s spiritual inheritance. “Cultural adaptation makes of the native no civilized person in the Western sense and therefore he lives – judged in terms of civilization – on a different level from that of the white man [*blanket*]” (Strauss 1952: 137). In contrast to this, the white man who is heir to the “hidden spiritual maturity” of Western civilization is considered civilized even though he shows no outwards signs of culture. Yet even the Christened black has not yet “received” the requisite “civilization” to qualify him for political rights, because he is as yet “merely placed at the beginning of a centuries long Christian civilizational course” (Strauss 1952: 139). Only those who are historically rooted in the Christian civilizational inheritance can be entrusted with the responsibility of fully-fledged political rights. Here Strauss notably proceeds also to consider the political position of the coloured population of South Africa. He admits that this group indeed shows a certain superficial similarity with the civilizational inheritance of the white population, but concludes that they still have not reached the requisite civilizational level to qualify for equal political rights (Strauss 1952: 139).

In an article published in *Die Gereformeerde Vaandel* in 1957, Strauss adds yet a further element to his argument. He points out that only the children of the Covenant can participate in Christian civilization. The history of Christian civilization is therefore never to be considered in isolation from the history of the Covenant: “Christian civilization is the civilization of the covenantees [*bondelinge*], and as the children of the Covenant partook

of the blessings of the Covenant through the centuries, generation after generation, so their civilization shared in the same blessings” (Strauss 1957: 11). From this, Strauss deduces that the blessings of the Covenant are “accumulative”, because “[s]urely it makes a radical difference whether the representative of a civilization was born from the loins of Covenant-keepers or Covenant-breakers and heathens. Thus, the faithful ancestors form a *regenerating* Covenant-line [*Verbondslinie*] wherein Covenant-power *accumulates*” (Strauss 1957: 11). Strauss therefore concludes that the children of the Covenant are able to draw on the resources of accruing civilizational power [*aanwassende beskawingskrag*]. The implication is yet again that the newly Christened *native* does not have access to this accrued civilizational power, and therefore his mere Christening would not summarily qualify him for the rights and privileges of Christian civilization.

The preceding arguments all attempt to deal with the problem of the Christened *native*, who in strictly Christian terms must be viewed as the white man’s equal. Strauss is at pains, however, to expound a difference on the basis of which he can establish the *native*’s political inequality. The argument turns on the notion of process, even though this word is not explicitly used. Strauss uses the biologically derived concept of “maturity” and the economic notion of “accrual” to describe a gradual, incompressible process through which the untransferable civilizational capital of the white Christian is accumulated.

The question that haunted the 1950 paper (and the transcendental critique) thus resurfaces: is “civilization” the product of Christian historical development or is this version of “Christianity” invented to legitimise a contingent historical process and its politics? I return to this question from another angle in the final section of this chapter. In the next section I first present E.A. Venter’s neo-Calvinist inspired defence of apartheid, also elaborated in the 1950s.

### 3. E.A. Venter: the crisis of Western civilization

E.A. Venter had already made known his position on apartheid by the time of his appointment at UOFS in 1952. He had elaborated a scriptural defence in a 1950 contribution to *Die Gereformeerde Vaandel* in which he argued that the Dutch Reformed Church, in establishing the scriptural foundation of the National Party's race policy, had merely systematized a belief that "still intuitively lived in the minds of our pious forefathers and that was also unequivocally recognized by foreign theologians" (Venter 1950: 5).<sup>171</sup>

Venter's main argument, developed with reference to Genesis, is that God had willed the differences between races and peoples, and that therefore apartheid was not only sanctioned by Scripture, but that any attempt at equalization in fact amounted to a violation of a God-given ordinance (Venter 1950: 7). In the course of the argument Venter also argues for a close correspondence between apartheid policy and the politics of the Anti-Revolutionary Party in the Netherlands (with reference to the latter's position on Dutch colonial policy in Indonesia) (Venter 1950: 11–12); finally, he appeals to Calvin's interpretation of the "Biblical doctrine regarding the natural inequality of people". On this view "inequality" is simply a consequence of the demonstrable diversity of the creation order (see Venter 1950: 12).

In his inaugural lecture, titled "The Crises of Western Civilization", delivered in 1954 at UOFS, Venter's argument recalls the themes of his 1950 publication, but this time it is cast within a particular reading of the history of Western philosophy. He now introduces Dooyeweerd's notion of the religious ground motives and instead of a straightforward appeal to God-willed pluriformity, he introduces the notion of normative civilizational

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<sup>171</sup> Strauss had read Venter's article and approved of his exposition (PV337, letter to F.J.M. Potgieter, 20 March 1950).

development and structures his argument around a critique of the nefarious influence of humanism.

As noted in Chapter 5, Dooyeweerd's critique of humanism finds common ground with a number of widely differing critical genealogies of modern European thought. Showing notable similarities with thinkers as diverse as Heidegger, Gadamer, Arendt and members of the Frankfurt School, Dooyeweerd locates the destructive modern drive to subject nature to human control within the humanist tradition itself and shows how this drive leads to the totalitarian oppression of humanity. Nevertheless, as I already pointed out above, the foundational premises of Dooyeweerd's analysis and therefore his proposed response to the problem differ radically from those of his European contemporaries.

Venter essentially appropriates Dooyeweerd's critique of humanism, and like the post-war philosophers in Europe, he invokes the discourse of crisis. He begins by establishing it as a given that Western civilization is confronting a crisis. The question as to the nature, causes and resolution to this crisis are, according to Venter, *philosophical* questions, because philosophy as the "science of totality" is tasked to "reflect on the foundations of thought, science and civilization" (Venter 1970a: 91). For Venter, however, it is obvious that contemporary philosophy is unable to confront this crisis of civilization: "In the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophy became a discipline that exhausted itself in a senseless pottering ... Humanist philosophy in all its multitudinous forms knows no remedy for the malaise of Western civilization" (Venter 1970a: 91).

In light of the tired and impotent state of contemporary humanism, Venter aligns himself with the "new Reformational philosophy which has radically and integrally broken with humanist philosophy" (Venter 1970a: 91). Like Strauss, Venter accepts the results of

Dooyeweerd's transcendental critique without argument: "Theoretical thought is never autonomous, and just as little does there exist a neutral experience of reality. This *simple* discovery ... paves the way to the insight that there exists an intimate and indissoluble relation between philosophy and forms of civilization" [my emphasis] (Venter 1970a: 92). Different philosophies and forms of civilization are determined by the religious ground motives from which they arise, and therefore, argues Venter, the root causes of the contemporary crisis of Western civilization must be sought in the religious forces that ground its dominant philosophical and civilizational expressions.

Venter follows Dooyeweerd in identifying four religious ground motives as having determined the development of Western culture: the Greek, the Christian, the Thomist and the humanist ground motives. The Christian ground motive is credited with establishing a radically new form of civilization at the beginning of our year count, whereas the Thomist ground motive is described as the attempted synthesis between the Greek and Christian motives (Venter 1970a: 92).

Venter attributes the characteristic features of Western civilization to the influence of the Christian ground motive, which on this view reasserted itself during the Protestant Reformation. North America, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom are held up as examples of the superior civilizing force of the Christian ground motive, compared to the South American and the Balkan states (Venter 1970a: 92).<sup>172</sup> In adopting Dooyeweerd's religious a priori, Venter subsumes all historical events under the overarching influence of religious forces and disregards any material factors such as colonialism, slavery or

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<sup>172</sup> According to Venter's interpretive scheme, Catholic South America falls under the influence of the Thomist ground motive. He lumps together the former with the Balkan states, seemingly not recognising a distinction between the Christian Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church at the level of the ground motives, notwithstanding the fact that Catholicism is the dominant religion in what is today known as Croatia, and was at the time part of the Yugoslavian Federation.

imperialism in his assessment of the Northern European countries that he singles out for their civilizational achievements. Indeed, any argument that would attempt to historicise the purported economic and cultural supremacy of these states or explain it in terms of political economy would be precluded precisely on the basis of its presumed “humanist” premises. On this view, only a philosophy deriving from the Christian ground motive is able to recognise the overriding influence of religious forces; any explanation that disregards the role of the ground motives will unavoidably distort the picture.

In any event, Venter contends without recourse to any historical explanation that the Christian ground motive was soon displaced by a new religious ground motive, namely humanism.<sup>173</sup> This new religious force was also the impetus behind the humanist philosophy and science that rose to dominance from the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards. Based on these insights, Venter claims, it stands to reason that by investigating the foundational concepts of humanist philosophy, we will also be able to determine the essential nature of the crisis of Western civilization (Venter 1970a: 92).

Venter traces the origins of the contemporary crisis to the Renaissance, where he locates the emergence of the notion of autonomous human reason, that is, the notion that reason is a law unto itself, sovereign and free of any transcendent authority. In this way, the foundations of the medieval order were destroyed, and Europe engulfed by secularism. It was under these conditions, argues Venter, that a figure like Descartes could make his appearance. Venter brands Descartes the father of humanist philosophy and claims that three centuries of humanist thought have not been able to supersede Descartes’s intervention.

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<sup>173</sup> Brad S. Gregory (2015) provides an account of how humanism was in fact the unintended consequence of the Protestant Reformation.

Descartes's decisive step, according to Venter, was to reduce all of reality to identical elementary particles that interacted on the basis of unchanging natural laws. In doing so, according to Venter, Descartes gave birth to a mechanistic and materialist cosmology, which in turn would ground what Dooyeweerd described as the humanist ground motive, that is, the dialectic between nature and freedom. Venter rephrases Dooyeweerd's argument as follows:

Man, independent of any higher power and independent of any belief in authority, would realise the dignity and freedom of his personality by means of natural scientific command of the cosmic totality. Freedom by command over nature (or also the personality ideal and the science ideal) thus became the religious ground motive that would decisively lead Western philosophy, science and civilization in the coming centuries (Venter 1970a: 94).

Venter thus credits Descartes with providing the philosophical foundations for "freedom by command over nature". As Venter argues, however, the material dimension of reality, what Descartes termed *res extensa*, could not fully account for the phenomenon of consciousness, that is, perception, the will, feeling and so forth, leading to Descartes' notorious dualism: apart from *res extensa* (the mathematically determined world extending in space), he also had to postulate the existence of *res cogitans*, that is, a "world existing of thinking spirits" (Venter 1970a: 96).

Following Dooyeweerd, Venter identifies the hallmark of the humanist ground motive as its inability to overcome the dualism that springs from Descartes' thought. Sovereign, self-sufficient reason, unable to find a point of reference outside of the cosmos, is always forced to assign primacy to one or the other pole of the dialectic between nature and freedom. Following Dooyeweerd, Venter draws a line from Hobbes, passing through Rousseau,

Comte, Mach and finally the neo-positivists to show how the dualism inaugurated by Descartes is at each turn suspended by reducing all of reality to the characteristics that define *res extensa*, that is, as a collection of individual entities acting upon one another in terms of the laws of causation. As Venter summarises his brief reading of Hobbes: "... the concept of causality as derived from the natural sciences must be made valid for all fields of investigation" (Venter 1970a: 97).

As a consequence, the "reality of all supra-individual relations of authority (family, church and state)" is denied, in so far as the only thing that really exists is the individuals that constitute these relations. These individuals are rapidly reduced to a mere collection of particles in motion, subject to the laws of causality, and thus "human individuality, his freedom and the dignity of his person disappears in the mechanical causality of a mathematical natural lawfulness" (Venter 1970a: 97). In other words, the deterministic ideal of science eventually completely displaces the personality ideal. Those philosophers that try to reclaim the personality ideal (freedom), namely Hume, Kant, Hegel, Dilthey and Bergson simply succeed in reducing the cosmos to any number of other one-sided explanations, for example, evolutionistic biology, psychology or sociology, all of which, according to Venter, succumbs to the same naturalistic premises of a mechanistic physics.

No doubt constrained by the parameters of a public lecture, Venter's argument was condensed, truncated and therefore perhaps lacking in detail and nuance. He makes a number of logical and historical leaps that beg extended and careful analysis; the rudiments of the argument is of course taken over from Dooyeweerd, who indeed engages this history of ideas in a much more nuanced way. Nevertheless, the reductive nature of Venter's argument is to a large degree predetermined and enabled by the structure of Dooyeweerd's transcendental philosophy. As Venter glibly notes, once we accept the results of

Dooyeweerd's transcendental critique, namely, that philosophy and civilizational forms are determined by religious ground motives, our task becomes easy: humanist philosophy, governed by the humanist ground motive, always reveals the same unresolvable dialectical tension between nature and freedom. The relation between religion and philosophy as postulated by Dooyeweerd's transcendental critique determines *a priori* that philosophy which proceeds from the humanist ground motive will always encounter the same pitfalls. No amount of subtle historical or philosophical analysis will be able to prove otherwise. Conversely put, any philosophy that encounters an unresolvable tension between nature and freedom is under the sway of the humanist ground motive, which in the final instance issues from the human heart, where the philosopher is either turned towards or against Christ.

We already noted the circularity of Dooyeweerd's argument in Chapter 5: the transcendental critique provides Dooyeweerd with the very premises which he requires to ground the critique. He presents his philosophy as the product of the Christian ground motive, that is, the philosophy of the cosmonomic idea is the necessary outcome of itself. This circularity is even more pronounced in Venter, who accepts the results of the critique at face value. As Nash notes, Venter simply "claims that religion determines human thought; and proves it by defining that which defines thought as religion" (Nash 2009: 115).

However, if we put aside for the moment Venter's reliance on the transcendental critique and the critical questions this raises, his critique of Descartes undeniably finds common ground with several other critical genealogies of modern philosophy. Several major figures in the history of 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophy have critiqued the deterministic and instrumental character of modern thought along similar lines and attempted to trace its political

consequences. For example, around the same time that Venter delivered his inaugural address, Hannah Arendt sought to understand how the Western tradition of thought was able to give birth to the totalitarian repression of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union; the instrumental thinking of modern philosophy and the desire to explain social and political phenomena in terms of unchanging natural laws also featured prominently in her argument (Arendt 1968 [1948]). It is therefore remarkable to see where Venter's critique of modern philosophy leads him when he now starts to draw out its consequences for his immediate political context.

Having established that civilization is determined by a religious force and that the humanist ground motive has gained dominance over the development of Western civilization, Venter identifies what he considers to be the central features of hegemonic humanism. Before we continue, it is worth briefly recalling Venter's characterisation of the humanist ground motive:

This belief ... is that the freedom and dignity of the human personality will be assured when all of reality has been subjected to the authority of the physical sciences. This religious ground motive ... further demands the proclamation of the sovereignty of reason, and consequently the denial of all external bonds of authority. ... We further saw that this thought must necessarily be cosmocentric, and that reality in all its aspects must be converted to *one* cosmological ground denominator; only thus will reality be explained, grasped and controlled as a closed chain of cause and effect (Venter 1970a: 98).

This ground motive, according to Venter, irrevocably leads to the disintegration and decline of Western science and civilization. The major reason for this, according to Venter, is that it by necessity demands the eradication of *difference*, specifically, the differences that

are given by the creation order (Venter 1970a: 98). Humanism, in its drive to find a single cosmological denominator has set in motion a whole-sale levelling process, which “subtly but relentlessly” tears down Western civilization. As a consequence of this levelling process, Western civilization can no longer appreciate the “natural differences between civilizations, races and people” (Venter 1970a: 99).

Venter’s line of argument here recalls his position in an earlier article when he argues that any attempt at equalisation would amount to a violation of God’s ordinances (see Venter 1950). This view carries the curious implication that man is compelled to realise what is already affirmed as creational law. It amounts to the non-sensical demand that the differences between races should not be eradicated, because God has ordained that there are different races – we are thus compelled to make reality align with the way reality is.

Venter continues: when all human relations and actions are reduced to their most simple elements, institutions like family, state and church lose their reality and cannot be maintained. This process robs Western civilization of its very foundations and paves the way for the totalitarian state, which recognises no limit to its authority. In Western Europe, the vestiges of its Christian past retards the inevitable decline, but the West’s colonial possessions (Venter mentions India and Ghana), reared on the fruits of imported humanist thought, know no such impediment and are therefore set on a one-way path to Communist dictatorship. Communism, Venter tells us, is the inevitable result of humanism. The revolutionary mantra of the French Revolution, “freedom, equality and fraternity” robs man of his identity and reduces him to the status of animal. Thus, Cartesian science gives birth to modern mass society, where man is reduced to a “robot-labourer without individuality, without personality, without racial pride and without national feeling” (Venter 1970a: 99). The future development of Western civilization will thus be characterized by “the continued eradication of diversity in religious convictions and

between civilizations and races; the increased overthrow of all non-state relations; and the accelerated depersonalisation of mankind” (Venter 1970a: 100). This, according to Venter, is the inevitable outcome of the humanist desire to subject and control. Venter is quick to emphasise however, that it is not the *desire* to subject and control as such that is put into question, only the “naturalistic postulates” that underlie this desire in its humanist manifestation (Venter 1970a: 100). This is consistent with Kuyper’s understanding of the cultural command, as seen in Chapter 5, according to which God commands humankind to subjugate and rule over the earth. In Kuyper’s understanding, however, God’s creation order provides the normative framework in terms of which humanity must carry out this command. In other words, the humanist subjugates by distorting the God-given order of things, whereas the Calvinist must subjugate by observing and maintaining this order. This is once again a clear example of the reactionary modernism that characterizes the neo-Calvinist argument: the modern desire to control is not wrong as such; the problem is humanism, which perverts this desire and spawns a decadent modernity. Under the guidance of the Christian ground motive an alternative, normative modernity may be realised. Venter then outlines the consequences for South Africa as follows:

Seen against the backdrop of these overwhelming cosmic forces, our own struggle for separate development in South Africa takes on a truly heroic character. It becomes a struggle, in the name of historical Christian Western civilization, against the engulfing of unique identity in the uniformity of a drab multitude (Venter 1970a: 100).

In other words, Venter is implying that the policy of separate development, underpinned by the notion of apartheid, constitutes a form of resistance against the levelling process that is set into motion by the humanist ground motive: separate development takes into

protection the God-ordained differences between religion, races and civilizations, thus correcting the path of Western civilization.

We can see how the circular logic of Dooyeweerd's transcendental critique serves Venter's argument. Humanist philosophy levels the God-given differences between civilizations, races and nations and therefore undermines Western civilization; separate development maintains these God-given differences and is therefore a product of the Christian religious motive and the ally of Christian civilization. Conversely: the apartheid state is an exponent of the Christian religious ground motive; its conception of difference aligns with the normative order of reality. In the same way that Dooyeweerd's transcendental critique retro-actively grounds the philosophy of the cosmomic idea, it here serves to found the "normativity" of separate development.

The purported link between religion, philosophy and civilization thus also relieves Venter of the obligation to consider what the struggle for separate development and the notion of racial difference have in common with the modern subjugation of human life he rightly critiques. Venter's conviction that he has rejected humanism in favour of the Christian ground motive, makes it a simple matter to diagnose the crisis of civilization and to convince himself of the philosophical and cultural rectitude of his position. The task of the Christian philosopher speaks clearly from this: to combat humanism in all its forms, which means resisting the process that would level the God-ordained differences between institutions, races and civilizations, and by extension, to support the heroic efforts of the apartheid government. The link Venter establishes between Christian civilization and the safeguarding of the "natural" differences between races does not directly derive from Dooyeweerd. Nevertheless, as we have seen, Venter's argument undeniably feeds on the logic of Dooyeweerd's argument.

In conclusion, I shall now consider both Strauss's and Venter's fixation on the notion of "civilization". I argue that their concept of "civilization" derives from, via Dooyeweerd, a distinctly modern concept of history, namely history as process, and as such takes on the typical characteristics of "ideological thinking" as described by Hannah Arendt.

#### **4. In the interests of "Christian civilization"**

The most striking aspect of the sustained defence by Strauss and Venter of the limitation of political rights for black people in general and the policy of apartheid in particular, is their fixation on a particular understanding of "civilization", namely as an "inner", religiously determined condition that radically differentiates between different groups of people, allowing us to categorise some as depraved and inferior, and others as "civilized", and accordingly to adjudicate their claims to political rights. Strauss's argument in this regard was discussed at the beginning of this chapter; Venter's inaugural lecture at UOFS argues along the same lines. An unfinished manuscript found in Venter's desk after his death in 1968 included a chapter with the title, '*Op Weg na 'n Beskawingsfilosofie*' ['On the way to a philosophy of civilization']. Here Venter writes:

As soon as the all-controlling significance of the religious root is overlooked, we descend into all manner of confusion. In humanist circles civilization is primarily identified with a certain culture or way of life. A black person who has cultivated a civilized way of life and who has progressed quite far intellectually is then considered to be a civilized human being. ... We should reject this train of thought. Culture is fundamentally different from civilization. ... a person may very well acquire the culture of another *volk*, but you can never acquire its civilization. Civilizations cannot be substituted. As long as the Bantu is still ruled in the deepest level of his heart by a natural religion (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 civilization (Venter 1970b: 55-6).

The argument is more or less exactly the same as the one advanced by Strauss in 1952: an educated or economically successful black person may appear to be civilized, but the true test lies at the “deepest level of his heart”, where a natural religion may still prevail and thus prevent his entry into Christian civilization. In spite of the apparent theoretical possibility of the black person acquiring Christian civilization, practically this seems all but impossible: the outward signs of such a transformation cannot be trusted; the religious locus of civilization would serve to make it so arcane as to be permanently inaccessible.

In a 1965 article for *Philosophia Reformata*, Strauss takes his thoughts on “civilizational interests” a step further when he argues that the state, despite the principle of “sphere sovereignty” sometimes has a duty to engage in activities that do not strictly speaking fall within the purview of the state. Here, he warns that “sphere sovereignty” is at risk of being “absolutized” when the state limits itself to its juridical “leading function”, that is, to secure an integrated public legal order. Strauss appeals to our “religious calling” to everywhere, in all spheres of life, “do what our hands find to do”, always in accordance with the God-given norms provided for each form of life (Strauss 1965: 200). This means that the state also, as determined by its Godly office, is called upon to engage in non-state work.

For Strauss, this insight held far-reaching possibilities, for it means that no government could idly watch while the interests of its people are threatened: “No, even initiating foresightedness is here demanded, because no government may rest merely on the laurels of its state [*staatlike*] accomplishments, when non-state [*nie-staatlike*] need requires its attention” (Strauss 1965: 201). There are limits to this work of course, limits that are determined by the God-given norms of the different societal institutions. For example, the state should not initiate marriages or create businesses – this would violate the structural principles of these societal forms. But the state can subsidise schools, churches and

businesses, because this would not inherently violate the “sphere sovereignty” of such institutions. The critical element for Strauss, however, is that when engaging non-state activities, the state should always do so with a view to promote the interests of *civilization*. This means, in the context of humanity’s “religious calling” to promote normative civilizational development, to act in the interests of Christian civilization as it unfolded in the West under the guidance of the Christian ground motive. Strauss writes:

In defence of non-state governmental tasks we thus face the following question: Does it promote the positivisation of civilizational and developmental norms by the people [*staatsvolke*] in the non-state sectors of his social life? Does it bring increased civilizational maturity [*beskavingsmondigheid*], self-sufficiency and responsibility? (Strauss 1965: 202).

Right after this, Strauss reasserts the indissoluble link between civilization and state form, and repeats in a truncated and less explicit form the argument from his 1950 article, according to which an undeveloped civilization does not qualify for political rights. The point is couched in the by now familiar undecidability between the prescriptive and the descriptive registers:

Each civilization condition demands its own unique state form. Sunken into civilization immaturity – due to false religious guidance – a people have no claim for example upon the rule of law with private and public citizen’s rights, because a civilizationally immature citizenry are also politically not of age.

A people who *is* politically not of age *ought* not to have political rights. The collapse of the *is* and the *ought* is accomplished by the religious ground motive, which determines both the *empirical* description of the politically immature and their *normative* destiny. Strauss in all likelihood left out any references to “natives” with a view to the Dutch audience of his

article, but in the context of his earlier publications, the specific political implications of his article are clear.

The remarkable point in Strauss's argument, however, is the notion that the state should take up its religious calling with "foresightedness" and with a view to safeguarding civilization. Here we see the dangers Arendt warned about in her discussion of the "modern concept" of history, which turned the "higher aims" of history into the aims of political action. Strauss is namely suggesting that state power should be used to promote the positivisation of God's norms, that is, the formative power of the state should be brought to bear on the future unfolding of civilization.

If Strauss neglects to mention the specific implications of this argument for South Africa at the time, his son D.F.M. Strauss had no trouble in pointing them out in a contribution to his father's *Festschrift* that was published in 1975. Referring to criteria of "civilizational interests" D.F.M. Strauss writes:

This criterion leads us to the foundational contribution that Strauss made to the elaboration of a Christian philosophy of civilization, with the important perspectives it held for a situation in which human communities on differing levels of civilization and with societies which are not opened and differentiated to the same degree, have to bound together in one state relation. In such a situation the criterion of general civilizational interests provides an indispensable perspective on the *temporary* [emphasis original] suspension of certain rights of the citizenry in a transitional situation. As such it might be in the interests of civilization that the personal right to freely entering into marriage be temporarily suspended in a state where more and less civilized citizens have to live together (Strauss 1975: 22).

D.F.M. Strauss is here apparently appealing to the notion of “civilizational interest” to justify the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act of 1949, which prohibited marriages between “white” and “non-white” persons. He admits that it is typically not the task of the state to suspend civil rights, but when weighed against “civilizational interest”, he argues that it might be justified. Here we see a clear instance of the state conceived as an actor in service of a “higher end” – a typical instance of the substitution of “historical consciousness” for political consciousness that Arendt associates with the modern concept of history. For Arendt, this substitution was at the heart of what she called “ideology” in the *Origins of Totalitarianism* (1948). This begs the question as to the stance of Strauss and Venter towards the humanist ground motive of nature and freedom.

### **5. Nature, freedom and fabrication: the road to ideology**

As noted, Arendt was keenly interested in the philosophical developments that underlay the totalitarian regimes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For Arendt, however, the deepest reason behind these developments was not a “religious ground motive”, but a transformation in our understanding of the meaning of history. As shown in Chapter 5, Arendt, like Dooyeweerd, recognises the far-reaching effects of the scientific revolution of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries; in effect, she also recognises the abyss between nature and freedom that appeared so glaringly in the philosophy of Kant. In her analysis, however, this abyss does not set in motion a “religious dialectic” between the science ideal and the personality ideal: it engenders the modern concept of history as *process*, which attempts to bridge the divide between nature and freedom with an appeal to human action conceived as *fabrication*. Dating from the invention of the telescope, and its dramatic devaluation of the senses, the increasingly abstract and experimental nature of modern science led to the conviction that we can only know what we have made ourselves. Thus, human action could appear as the common factor between the laws of nature and the “laws” of history. Human action

understood as *fabrication* – the manipulation of raw material according to a free design – could constitute the node between the laws of nature and the “laws” of history. It is this nodal point that gives birth to the literal notion of ‘*making* history’ (Arendt 2006: 57-61).

In Chapter 5, I argued that Dooyeweerd’s notion of “cultural development” or the “opening process” also linked him to the modern concept of history. We are now in a position to show that this concept of history, as it figures in Dooyeweerd, ultimately also derived from his attempt to overcome the dialectic between nature and freedom.

We need to return now for a moment to Dooyeweerd’s distinction between modal *laws* and modal *norms*, since it is this distinction that most strikingly represents the divide between nature and freedom in Dooyeweerd’s thinking.

We will recall that Dooyeweerd posits a distinction between law-side and subject-side to express the relationship between constancy and change, structure and event: the law-side provides the constant structure in terms of which alone change can manifest on the time-side (duration). This relationship describes the basic structure of the creation order and encompasses both “natural” phenomena, like the growth of trees, and “historical” phenomena like the development of the state.

This account seems unproblematic in the case of the pre-logical modal aspects, where modal law is “realised in the facts”. From the logical aspect onwards, the situation is more complicated: here, the “law” is not realised in the facts, because in the logical and post-logical aspects we are concerned with the conditions of possibility of human action. The logical, historical, social, lingual, juridical, economic, aesthetic and religious aspects of existence reveal themselves as modes or conditions of human action. The problem for

Dooyeweerd is how to conceive of these modes as *normative*, but not deterministic, that is, how to conceive of these constant conditions in their *indissoluble relation* with change (duration, time-side) without eradicating human freedom. Clearly, if historical laws were to be conceived as “realised in the facts”, there could be no question of human freedom, only a deterministic unfolding of history.

Dooyeweerd solves this problem by introducing the notion of modal “norms”. Norms are analogous to the “laws” contained in the pre-logical aspects, but instead of being “realised in the facts”, they must be “positivised” by human subjects. Humans can discover the universal ontic norms of the logical mode of being, for example, and *positivise* these norms by acting *logically*. The same goes for the historical norms of differentiation, integration and individuation – these norms can also be positivised normatively or anti-normatively. It is these norms that provide Strauss with the criterion of “civilizational interest”. We must act in such a way as to promote differentiation, integration and individuation (Strauss 1975).

It will now be noted, however, that in the case of modal *norms*, the relation between the law-side and the time-side is mediated by *human action*; these norms must be “positivised” by human action – the human subject is thus located on the boundary between the law-side and the subject-side. This means that the relationship between constancy and change, between law-side and time-side, undergoes a modification: it is now only through human intervention, through human acts of “positivisation” that the “law-side” can be revealed. This effectively means that the law-side becomes *subject* to the time-side. The “indissoluble relation” between law-side and time-side thus manifests in the shape of the human subject.

This brings us back to the original problem in an infinite regress: either this human subject is subject to deterministic laws, or human *freedom* is the expression of the relation between law-side and time-side. If law-side and time-side are to be indissoluble, human freedom is either the expression of this indissolubility, meaning that there is no norm external to human freedom, or humans are subject to modal law in a deterministic fashion. In other words, humans are either autonomous or subject to deterministic laws of nature. It would thus appear that Dooyeweerd also arrives at the abyss between nature and freedom.

Dooyeweerd too found the solution to this problem in the backward glance of the historian, to which culture revealed itself as a developmental process mediated by human action conceived as “formative control”:

If the meaning-nucleus of the cultural modality is only to be found in control or mastery we must establish that this nuclear moment, as such, implies a vocation and task which can only be accomplished in a successive cultural development of mankind in its temporal social existence (Dooyeweerd 1984b: 196).

Thus Dooyeweerd found in *fabrication* – “mastery” – the link between the “laws” of nature and the “norms” of human action. The normative meaning of history reveals itself in the process of disclosure that is set in motion by human acts of “formative control”. Put differently, cultural development as the outcome of “formative control” revealed that history, like nature, involves a transcendental relation between the universal structures of existence and their meaningful temporal unfolding.

When H.J. Strauss and E.A. Venter appeal to the safeguarding of “Christian civilization” to justify separate development, the purported “Christian” nature of this project only

barely hides their debt to the very same modernist, instrumental reason which they reject so vehemently. Moreover, their firm conviction in the radically religious determination of all philosophy, and their unshakeable conviction in the “Christian” nature of their own position prevents them from recognizing the instrumental rationality of their own position.

In summary, Strauss and Venter, in varying ways take from Dooyeweerd the notion of an earthly task, to be performed in the manner of “formative control” and directed by a religious ground motive. In its most extreme manifestation, these three elements, taken together, give rise to the notion of a profound, hidden civilizational inheritance that determines who does and who does not qualify for political rights, and a nebulous distinction between *outward* signs of “culture” and the *inner* condition of civilization. At this point, their conception starts to resemble what Arendt referred to as “ideology”.

For Arendt, ideologies are the outcome of the “process-thinking” that entered philosophy together with the modern concept of history; they are characterized by their ability to explain “everything and every occurrence by deducing it from a single premise” (Arendt 1976: 468). In spite of Dooyeweerd’s attempt to provide a non-reductionist account of reality, in which a single concept such as history or biology could not purport to provide a total explanation of reality, his notion of the “cosmomic idea” and the concomitant concept of a ground motive that informs and directs culture is arguably used by Strauss and Venter precisely as such a single premise, from which they attempt to explain “everything and every occurrence”.

The typically ideological character of Strauss’s and Venter’s appropriation of the philosophy of the cosmomic idea is perhaps nowhere more striking than in their application of it to the so-called “native problem”. At each step their argument is

characterized by ideological thinking in the Arendtian sense as a form of logical deduction that is divorced from experience. This aspect is most patent in their tortuous efforts to distinguish between the merely “cultured” *native* and the “civilized” white man.

Arendt writes: “[I]deological thinking becomes emancipated from the reality that we perceive with our five senses, and insists on a “truer” reality concealed behind all perceptible things, dominating them from this place of concealment” (Arendt 1976: 470–471). This ideological dimension to Strauss’s thought was already visible from his reflections on his “humanist” colleagues as revealed in his correspondence and also in his understanding of Christian science as “calling and struggle”. Social and political reality are in each case explained by the truer, concealed reality of religious orientation. The philosophy of the cosmomic idea itself becomes the key to identifying these concealed forces – it provides what Arendt calls the “sixth sense” that is necessary to become aware of this “truer” reality. The justification of segregation, apartheid and limited political rights for black people requires but a small further step within a framework which purports to provide such a radical and total explanation.

## Conclusion

The idea for this study arose from a desire to better understand what it means to be an academic philosopher at a South African university at a particular time and place, with specific reference to this country's fraught history of colonialism and apartheid. In view of this question I attempted to write an intellectual and institutional history of the department of philosophy and the department of political philosophy for the period 1942–1969 at what is presently known as the University of the Free State. I chose this period, because it presented the opportunity to study the relation between academic philosophy and politics during a fateful time in the history of South African politics, namely, the consolidation of Afrikaner nationalism and the institutionalization of apartheid. The objective was to investigate how the relationship between academic philosophy and politics manifested at this particular institution.

In setting out to write this history I was mindful of three moments in the history of “Western philosophy”. The first point of reference was the pedagogically influential account of Socrates's trial and execution for his alleged corruption of the Athenian youth. This story reached me as an undergraduate student in the form of an almost unquestioned discourse on the philosopher's vocation as *critique*: a critical questioning of political power, of culture, of the self. In Hannah Arendt's interpretation, Socrates's death precipitates a divide between philosophy and politics: henceforth, philosophy is characterized by the attempt to bring to heel the unpredictability of political life, of finding yardsticks in the realm of thought by which to measure and discipline human action.

A second point of reference was the 18<sup>th</sup> century institutionalization of philosophy as an academic discipline in the modern university, an institution which was tasked with

grounding a national culture for the modern nation state. Under these conditions, the notion of *critique* took on a new, ambiguous meaning: in Kantian philosophy, the notion of critique retained to some degree its earlier, Socratic meaning, but it increasingly also took on a new meaning, namely, critique as laying down the Law, critique as establishing the proper boundaries of thought, critique as discipline. As Bauman (1992) argues, from this point onwards, philosophy as critique becomes intertwined with the “designing intentions of the modern state”.

Thirdly, I was guided by Andrew Nash’s attempt to cast light on the vocation of the philosopher in the colonial context. If philosophy as a “critical” vocation had become ambiguous when it was adapted to the needs of the modern nation state, it arguably underwent a further modification when it was imported to the colonies to serve the needs of Empire. Here, academic philosophy in the form of British Idealism, was able to reflect the march of Colonial reason, providing a real historical task for Oxford-trained philosophers like Alfred Hoernlé.

I have argued that academic philosophy at the University of the Free State between 1942 and 1968 should be understood in the context of a radicalizing Afrikaner nationalist movement seeking to counter the cultural and philosophical claims of British Imperialism. The earliest academic philosopher at the then GUC, Thomas Forsyth can be broadly situated within the contours of British Idealism, and during Forsyth’s tenure (1911–1933), the GUC itself was a typical colonial institution: a predominantly English Faculty engaged in transferring a largely imported tradition to a small, largely Afrikaans community.

From the mid-1930s, a new cohort of young, Afrikaans intellectuals returned from studies in Europe, eager to contribute intellectually to the Afrikaner nationalist movement, and

aided by efforts from the *Broederbond*, took up positions at these fledgling higher education institutions. This occurred during a period in which Afrikaner nationalism was radicalizing in response to a range of social and political factors, and adopting a more exclusivist language of the *volkseie*. Following the scholarship of O’Meara (1985) and Marx (2008) on Afrikaner nationalism, I traced these developments to the Free State, and the department of political philosophy at the GUC. Here, a key figure among the northern Afrikaner intelligentsia, Nico Diederichs, took up the chair in philosophy at the precise moment that the nationalist movement (with the help of the *Broederbond*) was redefining itself as “modern”, yet distinct from the liberalism and cosmopolitanism it associated with British Imperialism.

I then attempted to show that this articulation between Afrikaner nationalism and philosophy represented by Diederichs was continued in the department by one of his students, namely, H.J. Strauss. Through a reading of Strauss’s letters, written during the course of his studies in Germany and the Netherlands, I argued that Strauss was representative of the articulation of a “dislocation of identity” experienced by Afrikaners in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century as they confronted the effects of modernization. In Strauss’s letters, this process comes to the fore in particular as a conflict between an ill-defined, but passionately experienced religious tradition, and the demands to serve the *volk* by means of “science”. These letters strikingly reveal Strauss’s longing for a philosophical orientation that can reconcile his longing for a sense of order and stability in an alienating world with the “Boer” tradition as he understood it.

I argue that he found the longed-for orientation in the neo-Calvinist philosophy of the Dutch legal theorist, Herman Dooyeweerd. Dooyeweerd’s philosophy was Kantian in the sense that it also promised liberation and order: a particular kind of liberation, namely, a

liberation from *secular* philosophy, and claimed to offer in its place a philosophical understanding of reality as God-given order that could ground scientific and moral enquiry. In the spirit of Kant, Dooyeweerd's philosophy begins as an attempt to critique a dogmatic faith in reason. In the process he develops a *religious* critique of reason. In as far as this gesture could suggest that there is always an irreducible moment in any philosophical system that the system cannot account for, a moment that troubles a given foundation, a given politics – the philosophy of the cosmonomic idea holds critical potential. However, in so far as Dooyeweerd fills that moment with a particular content – a particular understanding of the Christian religion – he arguably betrays this critical moment and reconstitutes a philosophy that is certain of its own foundations. Academic philosophy at the UFS between 1942 and 1968 reflects this moment of critique and reconstitution in the context of a nationalist movement that rejects “modernism”, “liberalism” and other “alien rulers” and yet seeks to gain control of the modern state.

Drawing on this foundational thinking, Dooyeweerd's philosophy of history offered the possibility of self-reflexively locating the Afrikaner people within a developmental course that relativized British Imperial power. In light of Dooyeweerd's philosophy of history, “the Afrikaner” could be identified as a more authentic representative of Christian civilization; the enemies of Afrikaner nationalism – liberalism, Imperialism, communism – could all be considered as so many instances of a dogmatic, apostate “religious ground motive”.

Dooyeweerd's understanding of cultural development as a normative process was eventually used by H.J. Strauss and E.A. Venter to develop an argument in support of apartheid. During the 1950s, shortly after the National Party government started to implement the policy of apartheid, Strauss and Venter argued that apartheid was necessary

to safeguard “Western civilization”. They used Dooyeweerd’s notions of religious ground motives and cultural development to argue that black people lacked civilization in a fundamental way, and that they therefore did not qualify for the same political rights as white people. Extending these rights to black people, they argued, would be against the norms of historical development as set out by Dooyeweerd in his philosophy of history. I have argued here that Dooyeweerd’s philosophy provided the Bloemfontein neo-Calvinists with a variant of the philosophies of history that arose during the 19<sup>th</sup> century – exemplified by Hegel – that identified history as a process and understood human action as a form of fabrication through which history could be “made”. Drawing on the philosophy of the cosmonomic idea, H.J. Strauss and E.A. Venter understood their vocation as contributing to the unfolding of “Christian civilization” by uncovering the norms of “Christian cultural development”; in a problematic appropriation of this framework they were able to conceive of apartheid and its associated discriminatory laws as giving expression to divinely ordained norms of development.

The reliance on a notion of history as a process driven by “religious ground motives” arguably makes Dooyeweerd’s philosophy vulnerable to what Hannah Arendt describes as “ideological thinking” – where the logic of a single premise becomes “productive”. In the hands of the Bloemfontein neo-Calvinists, the philosophy of the cosmonomic idea was made productive in service of the apartheid state.

This study has not attempted to determine the influence of academic philosophy as taught during this period on the broader society. This might be a further avenue to explore. There are indications that from the mid-1970s onwards, the reach of Christian philosophy in the university was extended through the practice of members of other faculties completing postgraduate degrees in philosophy (from a neo-Calvinist perspective) and propagating

this philosophy in their original faculties. In this regard, the list of theses provided in Appendix A offers a helpful point of departure. P.G. Schoeman, for example was later a member of the faculty of education and A.W.G. Raath was a member of the faculty of law. It might also be worth exploring how, if at all, interpretations of the philosophy of the cosmomic idea started to change as apartheid increasingly became discredited from the 1980s onwards. Finally, moving outside of the context of the university, it would be worth investigating H.J. Strauss's role on P.W. Botha's president's council, called to life during the 1980s to investigate possible constitutional amendments in response to increasing external and internal pressure on the apartheid state.

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### Personal correspondence

Personal e-mail correspondence with D.F.M. Strauss

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<sup>174</sup> The Strauss collection has not been organised into separate categories. I have referenced correspondence by including the name of the correspondent and the date of letter.

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## Appendix A

### List of M.A. and Doctoral theses completed in the department of political philosophy (1949-1977) and the department of philosophy (1953-1991)<sup>175</sup>

Author		Year	Degree	Supervisor
<b>Department of political philosophy</b>				
Rosslee, D.D.	Sabbatsontheilg as kerk: staatsvraagstuk in Suid-Afrika by die lig van die wysgeerte van die wetsidee	1949	M.A.	Strauss, H.J.
Crause, C.A.	Politieke mede-seggenkap in Suid-Afrika	1950	M.A.	Strauss, H.J.
Scheepers, D.J.J.	Die beginsel van soewereiniteit in die kring as waarborg vir burgervryheid in die Christelike staat	1952	M.A.	Strauss, H.J.
Wessels, F.J.H.	Vroustemreg: 'n staatsfilosofiese studie	1953	M.A.	Strauss, H.J.
Zietsman, P.H.	Demokrasie en kommunisme met toespitsing op die bestryding van die kommunisme: 'n staatsfilosofiese studie	1954	M.A.	Strauss, H.J.
Jonck, L.M.	Afrikaner-Republikanisme	1955	M.A.	Strauss, H.J.
Wessels, F.J.H.	Die owerheidstaak	1957	D.Phil	Strauss, H.J.
Rosslee, D.D.	Die verhouding staat en kerk in die westerse staatsfilosofiese denke	1958	D.Phil	Strauss, H.J.
Foune, J.J.	Sosialistiese tendense in die Suid-Afrikaanse partypolitiek sedert 1910	1958	M.A.	Strauss, H.J.
Foune, J.J.	Verhouding staat en kerk by Herman Dooyeweerd	1962	PhD	Strauss, H.J.
Van der Watt, L.	Die reg van verset: 'n staatsfilosofiese studie	1963	M.A.	
Van Wyk, A.J.	Die toekoms van reg- en magstate in Afrika - suid van die Sahara: 'n prinsipiële-teoretiese beoordeling van die faktiese tendense	1964	D.Phil	
Eksteen, C.F.	'n Kritiese ondersoek na die staatsfilosofie van Bernard Bosanquet	1965	M.A.	Strauss, H.J.
Botha, H.W.J.	Die U.S.S.R. as totalitêre staat: 'n kontemporêre studie: 1958-1966.	1969	M.A.	
Grobbelear, W.J.	Die administratiewe problematiek in die uitvoering van die beleid van afsonderlikeontwikkeling, met verwysing na die Bantoe-tuislande	1969	M.A.	Wessels, F.J.H.
Wessels, H.A.	Die anti-kommunistiese wetgewing van die Republiek van Suid-Afrika, getoets aan die grondbeginsels van die regstaat	1970	M.A.	H.J. Strauss
Van der Watt, L.	Die staatsfilosofiese grondslae van die Suid-Afrikaanse staatkunde sedert 1910	1971	D.Phil	Strauss, H.J.
Wessels, H.A.	Die stryd van die Republiek van Suid-Afrika teen "Kommunistiese" imperialisme: 'n staatsfilosofiese studie	1972	D.Phil	Strauss, H.J.
Wessels, H.A.	Die stryd van die Republiek van Suid-Afrika teen "Kommunistiese" imperialisme: 'n staatsfilosofiese studie	1972	D.Phil	H.J. Strauss
Barnard, L.D.	Moderne teoretiese benaderings van internasionale verhoudings	1973	M.A.	Wessels, F.J.H.
Le Roux, G.P.V.	Die staatsfilosofie van Jacques Maritain	1973	M.A.	Strauss, H.J.
Barnard, L.D.	Die magfaktor in internasionale verhoudings	1975	D.Phil	Wessels, F.J.H.
Smith, H.D.	Die Thomistiese subsidiariteitsbeginsel	1975	M.A.	Strauss, H.J.
Ioubert, P.S.	Die staatsfilosofiese grondslae van politieke medeseigenskap in die regstaat	1977	D.Phil	Strauss, H.J.
<b>Department of philosophy</b>				
Colijn, C.C.	Die ontologiese nihilisme in die eksistensie-filosofie van Martin Heidegger	1953	M.A.	Venter, E.A.
Heiberg, P.J.	Die neutraliteitspostulaat in die teoretiese denke by Aristoteles en Thomas Aquinas	1954	M.A.	Venter, E.A.
Kock, F.A.	Betekenis en plek van die hart in die wysgeerte van die wetsidee	1954	M.A.	
Grobbelear, P.W.	Die ontstaan van die westerse wysgeerte: 'n bydrae tot die studie oor die aanvang van die vroeë Griekse wysgerige denke Thales tot Leukippos	1954	M.A.	
Krick, A.I.M.	Die kategoriese imperatief as sedewet	1955	M.A.	Venter, E.A.
Loots, Z.B.	Progressiewe reformasie in die Christelike kerk: 'n histories-filosofiese studie oor die verhouding tussen kerk en wysgeerte	1956	M.A.	Venter, E.A.
Durand, J.J.F.	Wysgerige grondslae van die ius resistendi by Calvin	1956	M.A.	Venter, E.A.
Kock, P. De B.	Teologie as wetenskap en sy verhouding tot die wysgeerte	1958	D.Phil	Strauss, H.J.
Furstenburg, J.P. Du Toit.	Dr. A. Kuyper se wetenskapsleer en kosmologie	1958	M.A.	
Bekker, C.F.	Die doelbegrip in die geskiedfilosofie van A. J. Toynbee	1960	D.Phil	Venter, E.A.
Rossouw, P.	Die vitaliteit van die gesagbegrip van Thomas Aquinas	1960	D.Phil	
Loots, Z.B.	Augustinus as Christendinker	1964	D.Phil	Venter, E.A.
Van Tonder, J.A.	Die antropologie van die Thomisme	1965	M.A.	
Smit, J.H.	Rooms-Katolisisme en die wysgeerte van die wetsidee: met besondere verwysing na die religieuse grondmotiewe	1966	M.A.	
Van der Merwe, B. De V.	Christelik-reformatoniese geskiedenisbeskouing	1968	M.A.	
Lederle, H.I.	'n Religeuse en wêreldbeskoulike ontleding en waardering van die prosakuns van Etienne Leroux	1969	M.A.	
Botha, W.J.	Die religieuse grondmotief van die Indiese filosofie - 'n wysgerige studie	1969	M.A.	
Strauss, D.F.M.	Die samehang wysgeerte en vakwetenskap	1970	M.A.	Kock, P. De B.
Smit, J.H.	'n Kritiese-wysgerige ondersoek van die dieptesielkunde	1971	D.Phil	
Malan, J.H.	Die wysgerig-antropologiese grondslae van die opvoedkundige teorie by C. K. Oberholzer	1971	D.Phil	Kock, P. De B.
Du Toit, N.	'n Wysgerige ontleding van die struktuur van die Christelike skool, opvoeding en onderwys	1971	M.A.	
Lee, F.N.	Communist eschatology: a Christian-philosophical analysis of the post-capitalistic views of Marx, Engels and Lenin	1972	D.Phil	Kock, P. De B.
Van Niekerk, P.J.	Die struktuur van die wetenskap in wysgerige perspektief	1972	M.A.	
Cloete, P.C.	Grondbeginsels van die normatiewe estetika	1973	D.Phil	Kock, P. De B.
Van der Walt, H.	Godsdiensondering in kerk en skool - 'n wysgerige struktuurontleding	1975	M.A.	
Schoeman, P.G.	Grondslae en implikasies van die Christelike opvoedingsfilosofie	1975	M.A.	Strauss, D.F.M.
Pretorius, W.W.	Kosmologiese aspekte in die denke van J.A. Heyns met besondere verwysing na sy wetenskapsleer en sy beskouing van die teologie as wetenskap	1976	M.A.	
Van Tonder, J.A.	Vryheid en gedetermineerdheid: 'n wysgerige besinning	1979	D.Phil	
Visage, P.J.	Wet en interpretasie: 'n studie van die idee van kosmiese begrensing in die Christelike wysgeerte	1983	D.Phil	
Raath, A.W.G.	Die juridies-wysgerige grondslae van vryheid en gelykheid: die Grieks-Romeinse aanloop	1983	M.A.	Strauss, D.F.M.
Raath, A.W.G.	Menslike vryheid in konteks en perspektief	1986	D.Phil	Strauss, D.F.M.
Foune, H.S.	'n Totaliteitsvisie op biblioteke en biblioteekkunde: 'n wysgerige studie	1985	M.A.	
Schoeman, P.G.	Metavne van 'n agologiese vakfilosofie: verkenning van enkele transendente en transendentale aporiese	1988	D.Phil	Strauss, D.F.M.
Strauss, G.J.	Christian philosophy and the transformation of African culture	1990	M.A.	
Moster, Von W. P.	'n Evaluering van die geloofsonwikkelingsteorie van James W. Fowler	1991	M.A.	

<sup>175</sup> The selected period for the department of political philosophy comprises the length of H.J. Strauss's career at the institution. The period selected for the department of philosophy starts with the appointment of E.A. Venter and ends shortly before D.F.M Strauss (H.J. Strauss's son) left South Africa (1994) to become the first director of the Dooyeweerd Centre in Ontario, Canada. The name of the supervisor is provided where available.