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Herman Dooyeweerd: Christian Philosopher of State and Civil Society (Book Review)

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Chaplin, Jonathan. *Herman Dooyeweerd: Christian Philosopher of State and Civil Society*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011. 452 pages including bibliography. ISBN-13: 978-0-26802305-8. Reviewed by Keith C. Sewell, Professor of History, Dordt College.

Herman Dooyeweerd (1894-1977), Christian philosopher and legal thinker from the Netherlands, has not always been well-served by his English-language translators or North American publishers. At the same time, it must be said that the originality of much of his thinking was not always matched by a readily accessible style of writing, and this disparity helps to explain why his thought has sometimes been presented inadequately or even inaccurately by commentators and critics. Thankfully, the tide is changing. The works of Dooyeweerd are now appearing in English at a reasonable price through the Dooyeweerd Center at Redeemer University College, Ancaster, Ontario, and the Reformational Publishing Project based in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The appearance of this important book by Jonathan Chaplin is a further positive development. It will provide those new to Dooyeweerd studies with an introduction that is both accessible and competent. Chaplin has taught at the Institute for Christian Studies, Toronto, and has been the Director of the Kirby Laing Institute for Christian Ethics, Cambridge, England, since 2006.

A clear strength of this book is that it does not assume any detailed prior understanding of Dooyeweerd's systematic philosophy. Rather, as the subtitle indicates, the author focuses on the state and civil society. This is not only Chaplin's primary area of concern but also one of the best ways to introduce non-philosophers to Dooyeweerd's thinking generally and to demonstrate its relevance and constructive fruitfulness to what is often called "the real world." For Chaplin, the context is our contemporary situation in which the functioning of (purportedly) autonomous markets militates against the workings of governments and civil society generally—increasingly in situations marked by financial and socio-economic turbulence (6-7). This situation calls for a deepening of our understanding of civil society—a nuanced grasp of the diverse and inter-acting social entities functioning in complex western societies, along with a principled understanding of our Christian calling in such settings. It is here that Dooyeweerd excels. Chaplin is clear that his approach "displays impressive . . . salience today" (13). More specifically, Chaplin's purpose is to demonstrate just how relevant Dooyeweerd's work is for understanding the scope of civil society, the relationship between it and the state, and its utility in the formulation of social critique (18).

Chaplin lays the groundwork in his second and third chapters by placing Dooyeweerd in his Dutch milieu and then in chapter four by addressing Dooyeweerd's understanding of both religion and philosophy. Chaplin has the gift of clear written expression, and one can only regret that such a fine overview and exposition, beautifully contextualized, was not available to English-only readers forty

or fifty years ago. At the same time, it should be emphasized that Chaplin is not an unquestioning Dooyeweerd disciple. He criticizes questions and refines the content and balance of Dooyeweerd's formulations and respects the observations of others, such as Henk Geertsema, Sander Griffioen, and Nick Wolterstorff (78, 92-93, 98-101).

The fifth chapter considers the charge that Dooyeweerd's proposal—that societal institutions exhibit an "invariant structural principle"—"baptizes the [existing] institutions of the modern west," thereby tilting everything in the direction of conservatism (71). The discussion focuses on what Dooyeweerd meant by "cultural disclosure"—how human culturally-wrought innovation actualizes hitherto unrealized structural potentialities. Chaplin has some qualified sympathy for those who have found Dooyeweerd to be Eurocentric according to his examples, even though that was not his intention (84-85).

The sixth chapter addresses the weightier question of whether Dooyeweerd's dynamic understanding of "cultural disclosure" nevertheless produced, in his theory, a view of social structures as basically static, in that they are bound to invariable structural principles without which they would not retain their necessary character (86), hence the charge of "essentialism" (71-72). Here Chaplin concludes that this criticism is not wholly valid, especially when Dooyeweerd's formulations are read in their full nuances (107-109).

In chapter seven Chaplin considers the medley of social structures, their diversity, and the enriching complexity of their inter-relationships and how, in that context, Dooyeweerd takes us way beyond the basic formulations of Abraham Kuyper (139-151). Chaplin emphasizes that Dooyeweerd surpasses the false mirror-image alternatives of individualism and universalism (151-155). Only in the wake of this discussion does Chaplin adequately prepare the ground for his systematic discussion of the state, offered in the eighth chapter.

He there sheds light on the traditional contrasting of "might" and "right"—power and justice. Both are indispensable, and neither should be set over against the other (165-176). Chaplin is less than happy with Dooyeweerd's view that the state is founded in the human exercise of power (185).

Certainly, however its basis is understood, the state, as the ninth chapter emphasizes, is called not only to be just but to provide public social justice as only it can (201). From these insights the discussion moves to a consideration of matters such as popular elections, the role of political parties and the play of public opinion (213-15).

Chaplin's concluding tenth and eleventh chapters address the application of Dooyeweerd's thinking to more

contemporary situations. He discusses how the provision and maintenance of public justice in complex societies require of the state that it foster and uphold the development and functioning of non-state social structures, recognizing that persons have callings and responsibilities that extend beyond those of citizenship. Here Chaplin gives extended attention to elucidating what only lies implicit or is insufficiently developed in Dooyeweerd's writings. He repeatedly shows that where difficulties seem to arise, these may often be resolved within the framework of Dooyeweerd's thinking (107, 178, 216).

The picture that emerges is one of an active state that facilitates much but that is not all-encompassing (226-35). The discussion is impressively wide-ranging, touching the U. S. Constitution on church and state (251-2) and the issues raised by the behavior of corporate capitalism (255-6). The eleventh chapter proceeds to discuss how all of this relates to civil society generally. It construes civil society as "that realm of social interactions embracing the dense networks of interlinkages [better, "interdependencies"] characteristic of a modern society" (283, cf. 285). These latter chapters are infor-

mative and richly suggestive for those seeking to confront the complexities of our times from a Christian-principled standpoint. The importance of the state's protective (290) and adjudicative (298) responsibilities is considered, even as Chaplin remains concerned about Dooyeweerd's reserve when it comes to a transformative function of the state (301). His was essentially a reformist outlook (303), arguably attributable to the strong "anti-revolutionary" orientation of the Kuyperian legacy.

In his "Epilogue" Chaplin argues that, as we move into a post-secular era, there has loomed up in western jurisdictions a need for coherent reflection on public justice and civil society issues that current political elites, and the interests and priorities that they represent, are unable and/or unwilling to provide. This inability or unwillingness explains Chaplin's preference for a more transformative approach. This book is not a *quick* read, but it is an immensely rewarding and instructive *careful* read. It is unquestionably *the* work in English on Dooyeweerd's thought in relation to public justice and civil society and is strongly recommended.

Van Drunen, David. *Living in God's Two Kingdoms: A Biblical Vision for Christianity and Culture*. Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2010. 208 pages. ISBN 978-1-4335-1404-3. Reviewed by Carl E. Zylstra, President, Dordt College.

For the past few years a mini-tempest has been brewing over the question of whether David Van Drunen, a legal and theological scholar currently teaching at Westminster Theological Seminary in California, may have finally landed the coup de grace that would put the neo-Kuyperian reformational project to rest once and for all. In fact, in an earlier volume expounding on his theory of the two kingdoms, Van Drunen himself asks critics to await this final volume on biblical ethics before judging the impact of his argument.

The positive aspect of this awaited volume is that it is now obvious that Van Drunen believes it is either his way or Kuyper's way—explicitly referring to the latter as "not biblical" (13). Unfortunately, there isn't likely to be much in this volume that will actually convince many neo-Kuyperians to give up their quest. Rather, they are likely just to get mad.

For instance, in his first book Van Drunen dismisses as self-evident silliness the attempt of a Christian college to infuse its student activities with biblical norms and the attempt of Christian professional agriculturalists to develop biblical norms for the care of their animals and for carrying out business practices (*Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010], 4-5). This new volume shows that his criticism was not just an attempt to pick on a particular college (Dordt College) or a particular group of professionals (Dutch goat breeders). Rather, Van Drunen really does intend to dismiss as totally misguided the entire enterprise of Christian day school education, which at least one key wing of the Reformed tradition

has always considered essential to living out their faith. Moreover, Van Drunen's explicit rejection of the necessity of biblical norms for vocation and civic engagement makes clear his view that the last couple of centuries of (at least some traditions in) the Reformed homiletical exhortation to serve Christ's kingdom in both daily occupations and civic duty has amounted to little more than whistling in the wind.

The problem with Van Drunen's effort is that he seems to think he is telling the Reformed community something they didn't already know. But the Reformed community has been well aware of this difference of perspective among themselves for a century at least. For instance, Dordt College itself is located in a region of the country that has, for almost 100 years, experienced a very keen division over exactly these arenas of Christian education and biblically normed civic engagement. Indeed, in the Northwest Iowa area, still today one wing of the Reformed community views Christian schooling as so essential to living out their faith in Jesus Christ that parents are willing to hold down two jobs, conduct bake sales, and do without family vacations or homes at the lake in order to make this separate system of Christian day school education possible. Meanwhile, the other wing of the Reformed tradition continues to view such a commitment as optional quirkiness at best and un-American separatism at worst. Van Drunen doesn't seem to view such schools as unpatriotic, but he does make clear that he believes cultural engagement takes place better in a round of golf at a fine country club (25-26) than it does in the local Christian school gym.