

**AUTHOR:**

Andries Raath

**AFFILIATION:**Research Fellow, Department of  
History, University of the Free State,  
Bloemfontein**CORRESPONDENCE TO:**

Andries Raath

**POSTAL ADDRESS:**Faculty of Law, PO Box 339,  
Bloemfontein, 9300**DATES:**

Published: 22 Aug 2018

**HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:**Raath, A.W.G., 2018. Politocratic  
communitarianism, immanentist  
sociology and sphere sovereignty.  
KOERS — Bulletin for Christian  
Scholarship, 83(1). Available at: [https://  
doi.org/10.19108/KOERS.83.1.2317](https://doi.org/10.19108/KOERS.83.1.2317)**COPYRIGHT:**© 2018. The Author(s).  
Published under the Creative  
Commons Attribution License.

# Politocratic communitarianism, immanentist sociology and sphere sovereignty

## Abstract

*Politocratic communitarianism supports the historic revival of ancient Greek notions of social life in opposition to the nominalist trends in modernistic philosophy of society. The need for a penetrating normative philosophy of society from an integral non-dualistic angle to social life is manifest from Danie Goosen's and Koos Malan's pursuit of the neo-Aristotelian philosophical revival of the Greek polis: their formalistic approach to sociology, the dialectical tension between "normativity" and "factuality", and the juxtaposing of the "general" and the "specific" in their approach to social phenomena. In this article the shortcomings of politocratic communitarianism are traced to its immanentist approach to social theory with all the ensuing dialectical tensions emanating from its social philosophy and its views on the role of the state in society.*

## 1. Introduction

In his *Philosophy. Discipline of the disciplines* (2009), Danie Strauss captures the normative responsibilities of practicing science by pointing out that scientists are called to respond to the normativity of human life either by conforming to or by rejecting the norms guiding human scientific endeavours: this fibre of our shared humanity naturally spans across multiple dimensions of normativity; human beings, in their actions and societal institutions, are guided by norms and constantly give shape to basic principles explaining why human beings functioning in diverse societal relations do not cease to be norm-oriented; normativity demands the acknowledgement of the distinctions of structure and direction, a confusion of which results inevitably in dualistic worldviews - metaphysically explained in terms of the preferences for "holy cows" and "golden calves", correlated with their "black sheep" and "scape goats" (Strauss 2009: 43). Such humanistic preferences are evident in the philosophy of society in general and social philosophical views of the state in particular - issues closely associated with the emerging politocratic communitarianism in contemporary social philosophy.

In several respects Robert Nisbet (1962; 1980; 1982) and Alasdair MacIntyre (1984; 2007; 2008) were the progenitors of the emerging neo-Aristotelian communitarianism and its off-shoots in the work of Michael J. Sandel (1983) and Kelvin Knight (2007). In South African academic circles the views of politocratic communitarianism surfaced fairly recently in the domain of Public Law (Koos Malan) and Philosophy (Danie Goosen): both are supporters of communitarianism reflecting Aristotle's social and political philosophy; they are united in their anti-liberal stance; they apply Aristotle's sociology as an alternative to the so-called modern territorial state and both aim at employing conceptions of substantive community visualising a different way of life. Furthermore, these politocrats claim that the Aristotelian principles of association are superior statements of political theory and that the Aristotelian *polis* represents the superior form of human association among the various forms of political life. South African proponents of neo-Aristotelian community life, therefore, emphasise community as a source of value and interpret the whole of social life from the perspective of the Aristotelian *polis*.<sup>1</sup>

1 For a more extensive discussion of the opposition between "facts" and "values" cf. Strauss 2002: 1-12; 2005: 219ff.

Strauss's statements on the lack of normative orientation in immanentist sociological approaches highlight the need for normative reflections on social life for addressing the dialectical tensions reflected by contemporary philosophical approaches to social issues generally and the efforts of communitarianism's historicist revival of ancient Greek notions of social life in particular. The need for a penetrating normative philosophy of society from an integral non-dualistic approach to social life and a consideration of the political and state philosophical implications thereof are manifest in Danie Goosen's and Koos Malan's pursuit of the neo-Aristotelian revival of the Greek *polis*. At the heart of Goosen's and Malan's politocratic communitarianism are a number of dialectical tensions emanating from the ground motive of form and matter at the heart of the Aristotelian philosophy of society (Goosen 2007; Malan 2011). In this contribution the politocratic communitarian philosophy of society is analysed from a normative orientation to social life, and the implications for man's social existence in the world and the role of the principle of sovereignty in own sphere in the context of social philosophy are considered. Furthermore, the discourse on the foundational issues undergirding politocracy raises a number of core issues of interest for purposes of this article: is community a normative issue or can a mere "factual-empirical" approach to the historicist evolution of society provide solutions to issues in this field of science? Can a formalistic methodology by focusing on certain types of relationships (e.g. those emanating from close ties of political community in the Aristotelian *polis*) provide the basis for addressing societal issues?

## 2. Foundational issues in the discourse on politocratic communitarian

### 2.1 The "Formal" school's approach to the philosophy of society

The multitude of different approaches to social philosophy and the legacy of August Comte's (1798-1857) social positivism inspired the sociologist and jurist Georges Gurvitch (1894-1965), in his book *Twentieth century sociology* (1945), to observe that sociology is now more mature than it was in the nineteenth century. He added however that it is uncertain as to its field of investigation, and he mentions its "fumbling immaturity" and "chaos" (Gurvitch 1945: 6, 11). The formalistic-positivistic school of sociology was the upshot of this influential a-normative approach to sociological phenomena. This formalistic methodology in the social sciences gained momentum mainly through the work of Alfred Vierkandt (1867-1953) and Georg Simmel (1858-1918). They taught that sociology is not merely interested in relating facts but rather in describing types of relationships in terms of power. Therefore, sociology is rather concerned with the ultimate forms of the psychical bonds linking human beings. Georg Simmel gave impetus to the formalistic school of sociology by drawing a sharp line between the forms of social relationships and their matter. Forms such as "competition," "division of labour," etc., appear in various contexts, e.g. economic and religious. The task of sociology is to disengage these formal relationships and to study them in isolation from their content (Kooistra, 1963: 28). This approach was questioned amongst others by the English sociologist Morris Ginsberg (1889-1970) by laying more stress upon the modes in which these supposed forms appear (Ginsberg 1950).<sup>2</sup> It is, for example, not justified to speak of "subordination" purely in the abstract without regard for the nature of the social structures involved. Therefore, the meaning of subordination differs in the family, church and state.

The recently revived Aristotelian interest in South African sociology and political philosophy has to a considerable extent followed the formalistic sociological theory. Koos Malan for example justifies Aristotle's state absolutism by rejecting appeals to conform to the normative structures of man's social life. Malan regarded appeals to normative sociology to represent abstract and esoteric schemes and being out of tune with contemporary political and constitutional theory (Malan 2016: 1253). Rather than submitting to the normative

2 Also cf. Weinstein and Weinstein, 1972: 40-53; Ziegenfuss, 1956: 128ff.

context of limited state competencies, Malan voices his preferences for the form of the Greek *polis* and the appeal of the solidarity reflected by the political life of the Greek city-state (Malan 2011).

## 2.2 The dichotomy of “normativity” and “factuality”

Malan’s negative appraisal of normative discourse on man’s social existence and political life should be considered against the background of the legacy of so-called factuality of human existence and appeals that sociology, in the strict sense of the term, traces out various factual, non-normative correlations, for example the correlation between church membership and marital stability or, for that matter, the suicide rate. This implies that sociology is purely descriptive of the facts which are themselves totally unrelated, and that normative considerations do not belong to the domain of social philosophy.

The emphasis of factuality and so-called expertise in natural facts at the expense of a normative approach to social philosophy is essentially positivistic in outlook. It loses from view that even the most factual presentation assumes either consciously or unconsciously a framework of interpretation - for politocrats the framework is a naturalistic one. All human values are said to have arisen out of a natural matrix, which, at the bottom of it, are nothing but facts. The irrational historicistic pursuit of this positivistic stance in jurisprudence surfaces for example in William Graham Sumner’s (1840-1910) influential theory of the origin of law: human conduct is first regulated by “folkways”, which arise unconsciously and anonymously; they change from mere habits and become imperative as “mores”; finally, institutions and laws are produced out of mores (Sumner 1906).<sup>3</sup>

Politocratic communitarianism reflects a similar juxtaposing of factuality and normativity. As a consequence so-called historical “factuality” wreaks havoc in the social philosophy of politocratic communitarians by disallowing all structural distinctions of a normative nature between social entities. Goosen for example underscores Aristotle’s commitment to the evolutionistic unfolding of society in terms of which the “private family” historically precedes the complete community in the form of the Greek *polis*. The *polis* is the social manifestation of the “community of communities”, it is the apex of the historical development of public participation in community affairs with the aim to accomplish the common good (Goosen 2015: 34). The *polis* is ontologically the most important community; it is the “complete community” (Goosen 2015: 52). The communities preceding the *polis* are ontologically speaking not “completed communities”; at most they point towards “the complete community”. The *polis* is the complete community because it reflects the “nature of things” (Goosen 2015: 52) and because it cultivates and transfers virtues (Goosen 2015: 102). Relying on the views of Francis Slade, Goosen supports the view that social philosophy hinges on two different versions of community: on the one hand the politics of sovereignty (or the state); on the other, the politics of the common good (or the *polis*) (Goosen 2015: 289).<sup>4</sup>

## 2.3 The juxtaposing of the “general” and the “specific”

The issues pertaining to social formalism, normativity and factuality, are closely related to the third issue, namely whether sociology is an all embracing science or whether it is merely one science among others (cf. Strauss 2005: 59-113). August Comte (1797-1858) believed that sociology is a total science. According to Comte sociology deals with the human being and the whole of social life, offering a truly universal perspective on man’s status and role in the world. Comte surmises that the understanding of social life enables mankind to reconstruct society along rational lines. However, Comte could not avoid the

3 In her work *Sociological research* (1963), Matilda Riley exposed the fallacy at the heart of the positivistic orientation to science: every sociological approach reflects a theoretical “model” to interpret such facts.

4 Also cf. Dooyeweerd’s critique of Aristotelian legal and state philosophy in his *Time, law and history* (2017), 124ff.

problem of the relationship of sociology to other disciplines: if a study of social life opens up an all-embracing discipline, the other scientific areas must be subordinated to it and distinguished from each other according to some material criterion. Therefore, either sociology is an encompassing scientific field of human endeavour, or it must have some mark to distinguish it from the others. If not, what would the basis be for their relatedness?

In similar fashion politocratic communitarianism regards social philosophy as the scientific field embracing the whole of human life. The philosophical ground idea undergirding the whole of social life, is that of community. Community informs all other disciplines of science: from history to politics, through to ethics and education. The ground idea of politocratic communitarianism is an historical phenomenon emanating from the pre-modern period. Goosen, for example, observes that according to modernism, community does not belong to the nature of man but it is an artificial construction made technical (Goosen 2007: 25). In the Aristotelian tradition life in community with others was experienced as a natural given - to "appear to others" and to participate in matters of community meant to act in accordance with the nature (*kata phusis*) of things. Communities are encapsulated in an hierarchical order of communities: the family superseding the town and finally evolving into the *polis* as the "community of communities" (Goosen 2007: 52). According to ancient Greek society, those living in community, lived according to nature.

To politocrats the other side of the coin is that Hobbes' hyper-individualism means living unnaturally (Goosen 2007: 98). Social philosophy is basically a science of nature: the Greeks relied upon timeless norms taken from nature; the discovery of the norms of nature marks the moment of birth of philosophy; in the historical unfolding of philosophy these norms are called laws of nature; from the norms set by the laws of nature, it can be rationally deduced what we ought to do to accomplish the good (Goosen 2007: 103). Goosen proceeds with the following reasoning: reality is grounded in a particular rationality and order; in and through reason reality itself constantly reaches beyond itself to larger forms of community. The essence of the traditional idea of community is the coherence of totality: origin, nature and purpose (Goosen 2007: 174). From the perspective of the scientific study of community, all the sciences are involved in the study of community, and all fields of science form part of sociology - the investigation of community in human social life.

According to the Christian philosopher Herman Dooyeweerd (1894-1977), the issue of the status and role of sociology as either a super-science or only one field of science among others, should be addressed from a deeper perspective of scientific involvement. Dooyeweerd maintains that these issues remain insoluble if the scientist proceeds from the immanence standpoint by taking a point of departure within a supposedly neutral attitude of theoretical thinking. Theoretical thought, he says, originates when one sets the logical function of thought in an anti-thetic relation to a non-logical aspect of reality, whether the social, economic or the biological. For this reason any absolutisation of theoretical thought leads necessarily to the absolutisation of one of the temporal aspects of reality (Dooyeweerd, 1969 I: 5). If the scientist takes his starting point within theoretical thought itself, he is led into inescapable embarrassments as he tries to define his field of investigation. In order to carry on a theoretical inquiry into social phenomena, one must have a concept of the social aspect of reality. Without such a concept, one cannot recognize social facts, much less subject them to a systematic inquiry. But in this attempt to define his field of inquiry the immanentist thinker encounters profound difficulties. He/she can define his/her field of investigation only by delimiting it from other possible fields of investigation. Such a delimitation, in turn, can be accomplished only on the authority of an idea of continuity between the various aspects which must be distinguished from one another. If one has chosen a starting point within theoretical thought itself, the necessary relationship of this thought to a particular aspect of reality forces him/her to find a common denominator, his/her principle of continuity, within one of the aspects of reality itself. In addition he/she has in an a priori fashion eliminated the possibility of honouring the sovereignty within their own sphere of these various aspects (Dooyeweerd 1948: 38). He/she has eliminated the

possibility of discovering the continuity of the various sides of reality in the transcendental horizon of cosmic time, which streams through the modal aspects and which holds them in unbreakable connection without destroying their uniqueness. For the immanentist thinker there is only the possibility of seeking the unity of the various aspects within one of the aspects itself. This can take place, however, only at the expense of a fundamental distortion of reality. It is the source of innumerable difficulties which effectively bar the way to finding a satisfactory solution to the theoretical questions which arise within the various special sciences. Neither does it help to stop trying to discover the origin. It merely assists to classify logically the various aspects according to genus and species. Such classification always assumes that the various sides have a common logical denominator and also a common logical divisor, and in terms of this common denominator and this common divisor the uniqueness of the aspects of reality is again annihilated. On the background of a common denominator, various sides of reality (e.g. the social and economic) are distinguished according to specific characteristics. But to limit certain general unspecified characteristics to a particular side of reality is to forbid them the other sides. That is, in fact, impossible. Every side of reality, Dooyeweerd says, not only has its sovereignty within its own sphere. Each aspect of reality reflects from its own standpoint every other aspect of reality. This is observed when one tries to understand the meaning of the analogical concepts, e.g., social space, legal causation, logical extension, etc. (cf. Strauss 2013: 185-204).<sup>5</sup>

Even a cursory examination of some of the categories illustrates the need to relate sociology to other disciplines. Sociology as well as other sciences uses such concepts as "law", "causation", "space", "movement" and "life". Do these categories have their meaning within the social realm? Or do they have their place elsewhere, and are they employed by the sociologist only as metaphors? Or is neither alternative true? One category used extensively in social science is "social space".<sup>6</sup> Borrowing a term from biology, sociologists call the special branch of sociology which deals with social space "ecology". Ecology, then, deals with the spatial distributions and configurations of social groups and with the problems associated with such spatial configurations. As soon as ecology is defined, however, a number of questions arise: is social space the same as geometrical space, or even the same as the space which is dealt with by ecology in the realm of biology? A common sociological distinction suggests that they are not. Sociologists, for example, distinguish between community and communality. A community is defined as a group which is confined within a common geographical boundary. A communality, on the contrary, is defined as a group whose members are separated geographically but who are bound together by mutual interests or other ties. This distinction involves two different ways of viewing nearness and farness, i.e., two different kinds of space.<sup>7</sup> Spatial relationships such as "nearness" and "farness" have different meanings for the sociologist and for the geometer or geographer. One may be near to someone in a geographical sense and yet be distant socially. Social distance might be manifested, for instance, in terms of difference of social standing, e.g., that between a file clerk and a judge.

From this brief discussion it is clear that the scientist is inevitably drawn into a study of the relationship between sociology and other sciences if he wishes to be clear about the concepts which are used within the sphere of sociology itself. Even a glance at some of the special sociologies will also suggest this conclusion. Among them one hears of the sociology of knowledge, the sociology of law, the sociology of religion, etc. Furthermore, it is concluded that in order to carry on a discussion of the phenomena of social life, it is

5 Cf. Dooyeweerd's sharp and penetrating study of the analogical concepts in his work, *De analogische grondbegrippen der vakwetenschappen en hun betrekking tot de structuur van den menselijken ervaringshorizon*, Noord-Hollandsche Uitgevers Maatschappij, Amsterdam, 1954.

6 For discussions of the various categories of social space, cf. Gosztonyi (1976).

7 A distinction between various kinds of space is found in Martin Heidegger's distinction between geographical space and the "spatializing" activity of human existence (*Dasein*).

necessary to develop a concept of the social aspect of reality, in contrast to other aspects of reality. Without such a clear concept one cannot come to grips with what he/she is doing when he/she surveys facts from a social point of view or employs what are called social categories.

## 2.4 The individual and the community

### 2.4.1 The dialectics of the individual versus the community

The history of social thought testifies to the steady conflict between those views which would make the group prior to the individual and those views which would make the individual prior to the group. In the ancient world the former view, which is called "universalistic", was represented by metaphysical realism. The latter view, which is called "individualistic", was represented by the nominalist schools. In modern times the individualistic views have been largely psychological. Social groups have been thought to consist of congeries of individuals in their psychical interaction. Universalistic views on the other hand, have been associated largely with the irrationalist, historically oriented universalism which arose after Immanuel Kant and reached its zenith in the philosophy of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831). This historically oriented universalism seeks for some self-sufficient group in which man can discover the ultimate source of meaning for human life. The individual is thought to be embraced in an all-inclusive social group in terms of which he has his meaning (Goosen 2015: 24, 25).<sup>8</sup>

### 2.4.2 Universalism

In an attempt to overcome the scepticism of the Sophists, who denied the reality of the community, Aristotle developed his famous idea of man as a *zoon politikon* (cf. Brandt 1974: 191-196; Mulgan 1974: 438-445). The individual is not essentially isolated nor in conflict with the group; he/she is internally related to it, since it is only in the group that he/she can realize his/her inner nature. By himself the individual is incomplete and by nature each person strives towards his own self-realization. Since he cannot attain completion in isolation, he/she is led naturally to attach himself to a group (Mulgan 1977: 26-27). He/she is, by virtue of birth, part of the family. His/her inner drive towards self-realization causes him/her to attach himself/herself freely to the community and finally to the state (Aristotle 1921: III, 6, iii [1278b20-21]).

The societal groups are arranged in an ascending scale, from the lowest and least inclusive, the family, to the highest and most inclusive, the city-state. Here, in this self-sufficient group, the individual finds his *telos* (Aristotle 1921: I, 2, viii [1252a24-b34]). The whole of social reality is arranged in a hierarchy, the most inclusive communities having a priority over the less inclusive, which are subordinated to the former as means to an end. The end point was found in the political unity, the polis, in which the individual discovered the community of the good life (Aristotle 1921: I, 2, viii [1252a24-b34]).

In the high Middle Ages, Thomas Aquinas (1226-1274) carried forward the realistic tradition, synthesizing elements of the Christian faith with Aristotelian philosophy. According to his essence, man cannot be independent of the community in which he first comes to realization. Striving according to his nature for temporal happiness, man attaches himself to the community and then to the state, which gives him means for his prosperity which he cannot gain of himself. Like his philosophical mentor, Aristotle, Thomas believed that all communities are arranged in hierarchical order. (Aquinas 1965: 197). For him also the state was the highest, with the qualification that it was the highest within the realm of nature. To the Aristotelian scheme, however, he added the institution of the church, as the mystical body of Christ. Man's *telos* is not discovered in the highest community within the realm of nature, the state, but in the institution which pertains to the realm of grace, the church

8 For a more extensive critique of nominalism cf. Strauss 2009: 370-379.

(Aquinas 1920: qu.90, art. 2, ad.3).

Like Aristotle, Thomas regarded these groups to be related to each other as matter and form. A lower group is subordinated to a higher group as means to an end (Aquinas 1920: qu. 58, art. 5). The individual is relatively autonomous; nevertheless, he is subject to the church in all matters which pertain to the eternal well-being of the soul. The state is indeed autonomous in the realm of nature; but it is not able of itself to lead the individual to eternal blessedness. In this respect it is subject to the church. The sufficiency or insufficiency of each group is predetermined, being rooted in the metaphysical nature of reality. The more inclusive communities have the primacy over the less inclusive communities (Aquinas 1920: qu. 58, art. 5).

### 2.4.3 Individualism

The ancient world was not altogether given over to universalism. Epicureanism, for instance, was individualistic.<sup>9</sup> The late Middle Ages witnessed the breakdown of the great realistic philosophies and the resurgence of nominalism. According to nominalism, universals do not have reality; they are only general concepts which stand for a collection of individuals (Leff 1977: 239). Nominalism, aided by the rise of empirical scientific inquiry and the unparalleled economic expansion which provided a means of expression for the energetic individual, prepared the way for modern individualism (Leff 1977: 2-14).

The philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) represents extreme individualism. In the state of nature, he said, before the rise of conventional laws which could act as a restraint, individuals are driven by their own inclinations (Hobbes 1978: 189). Each one seeks his own self-aggrandizement, striving to gain control of means to guarantee both his own security and that of his possessions (Hobbes 1978: 189). In the state of nature one has the right to strive for his own preservation, and no means can be denied him in his struggle. The natural state of mankind is the warfare of all against all (*bellum omnium contra omnes*) (Hobbes 1978: 185ff.).

By way of calculating reason, however, the individual can come to understand that it is not advantageous for him to remain in the state of nature (Hobbes 1978: 189). In a state of total warfare it is always possible for man to encounter a challenge which he is unable to withstand. Reason dictates that he give up some of his rights in order that he might retain something for himself. Therefore, it is more advantageous for him to maintain a relative balance of power than to commit everything in a life or death struggle (Hobbes 1978: 190).

Reason prescribes that one should seek to maintain peace as long as possible. Only if peace is not possible should he revert to the state of nature and employ whatever means he can for his survival. To establish the very possibility of peace the individual must be ready to surrender certain rights which are his by nature and to delegate them to an agency which will govern the warring individuals and keep them in harmony (Hobbes 1978: 191). To this end the state is created by way of mutual contract between opposing individuals. Only in this fashion can a community be established in which one can be protected from the predatory instincts of the other (Hobbes 1978: 193ff.). There comes into being, therefore, a state Leviathan, by whose grace the individual lives and against which he can revolt only at the risk of his own life. Hobbes' sociological and political views juxtapose the individual and the universal in an uncompromising fashion.

9 Cf. e.g. the legal positivism of Protagoras of Abdura (485/411 B.C.) in Du Plessis 1979: 57-61.

#### 2.4.4 *The universalist-individualist dilemma*

A theory is not individualistic because it claims to give the individual a greater place or to allow him to come to greater expression. To the contrary, the Universalist makes the claim that it is in the universal community that the individual first comes to himself. Whether a theory is individualistic or universalistic depends upon whether the individual or the community is taken as the axis (Strauss 2009: 60).

Hobbes' theory of society is individualistic because the individual in the state of nature is thought to possess the full right of self-aggrandizement. According to the law of nature he may employ any and all means for his survival. The only limit to his self-aggrandizement is the individual's calculation that he will not be able to succeed. Prudence dictates that his selfish interests can be maintained only if there is a relative balance of power within the framework of the state. There is, therefore, no inherent limitation to his self-interest (Hobbes 1978: 188).

In the individualistic theories the individual is faced with a dilemma. He can never realize himself within the confines of organized society. At the same time, he can never realize himself outside of its bounds. This dilemma comes to clear expression in the social thoughts of Thomas Hobbes. The individual cannot realize himself within society because he must hand over his essential unlimited prerogatives to the state Leviathan (Hobbes 1978: 191). By definition his self-realization is possible only if he is altogether untrammelled. He could come to self-realization only if all of the instruments of power were in his own hands. Apart from contact with other persons, however, he could not realize himself, for there would be no one to dominate. Within individualistic theories, therefore, there is necessarily a conflict between the individual and the individual and the individual in the community.

In the ancient universalistic systems, on the contrary, limits are set for the individual by the metaphysical structure of reality. His rights are predetermined. Only can he come to himself within the limits which are set by reality itself. The universalistic theories tend to swallow up the individual in the group. In modern views, one group, most likely the state, is given preference above other groups.

Twentieth century theories at solving the individualist-universalist dilemma surfaced in the phenomenological school - efforts of purely theoretical nature as represented in the sociology of Theodore Litt (1880-1962) (Litt 1919: 21-22). The attempted solution proceeds on the assumption that the dilemma of the individual and the community arises from a false view of both. The individual is regarded as if he were a thing, artificially separated from the community. Because of this artificial separation it is necessary to decide whether it is the individual or the community which has the primacy. Thus arises the constant warfare between individualism and universalism. The sociologist Matilda Riley (1911-2004) reflects influences from this type of thought. She distinguishes, for example, between causal analysis, which in her definition involve the reduction of social phenomena to nature, and the analysis of the social system, in which all factors are in (functional) interaction but are not related causally (Riley 1963: 12-13). She warns against the fallacy of reification (Riley 1963: 14), which presumably would isolate one factor (as a separate thing) as the (causal) explanation of the rest. In terms of the principle of sphere universality, however, it is questionable whether causal explanation could be set off from a whole system of meaning in this fashion.

The separation of the individual and the community, it is said, arises because of a necessity of thought (Litt 1919: 138ff.). Thought is bound to the ego-world relationship. By its very nature it spatializes, breaking the organic connection between the individual and the community and then seeking to bring them together again in a synthetic unity (Dooyeweerd 1969 III: 249ff.). This is the origin, e.g., of psychologist theory, where the individual is viewed as a fundamentally independent entity with psychical needs which can be satisfied to a

greater or lesser extent in group life. According to Litt, however, the individual and the group are originally not separate but are organically related. The individual is not an entity, a thing, which can be thought of apart from its relationships in the world, both with things and with persons (Litt 1919: 21, 22).<sup>10</sup> Ego and world are really only two perspectives of a simultaneous event. Fundamentally the individual has his being only in his interaction with other individuals. It is impossible to separate the individual from the community, for the individual has his being only within a closed circle of meaning in which others are also involved in a dialectical unity (Dooyeweerd 1931: 48ff.; 1969 III: 248-260). According to this theory, the individual and the community do not have the identity of a thing; nor are they separate, having only external relationships with each other. They are reciprocal perspectives of an original and organic unity, the dialectical unity of the individual experiencing centre and the totality of meaning in which the individual symbolizes his life in relation to other individuals.

Since all rational experience takes place within the subject-object relationship, which of itself involves spatialisation, the relationship between the two poles of these experiencing foci cannot be expressed in rational terms. The experience of the original, dialectical unity is irrational. It is the experience of the I-Thou relationship. The I-Thou relationship is fundamental. All other relationships, which are analysable by reason, are derived. Within the latter everything is seen teleologically. The other person is conceived as being external, as a thing for use. Thinking about someone or experiencing him in any other fashion that sets him apart from us reifies him. The original, organic bond with him is destroyed. The most fundamental criticism that this phenomenological sociology can make of social life is that there has been a process of reification and that men fail to encounter each other in an I-Thou relationship (Litt 1919: 109-110). In this respect phenomenological sociology suffers from at least two major defects: First, the original level of experiences it seeks to disclose is not really the original integral level which we encounter in our naive experience. Second, the theory involves a dimensional view of reality, distinguishing sharply between spatializing thought and experience and a supposedly original level of I-Thou relationship.

Social philosophical approaches - whether the philosophy undergirding the Aristotelian *polis*, Martin Buber's (born 1878) I-Thou thinking, Martin Heidegger's (1889-1976) description of the ego-world relationship (*In-der-Welt-sein*) or Theodor Litt's phenomenological contextual approach - take their starting point in a supposedly neutral and unprejudiced trust in human thought itself, and is forced to interpret the relationship of the individual to the group and of the group to other groups in the general scheme of whole and part (Dooyeweerd 1969 III: 255). Either the individual is thought to be part of the group or the group is thought to be composed of a congeries of distinct individuals. On the immanence standpoint sociology has been driven between the horns of the individualist-universalist dilemma.

From a normative point of view the truth lies on neither side. One cannot reduce the individual to the group nor the group to the sum of individuals which comprise it. In the first place, the individuality of a person is much deeper than any human community. The full individuality of a person cannot be exhausted within the confines of any terrestrial reality. The individual cannot discover his destiny, his *telos*, in any supposedly all-embracing group. In the second place, careful observation acquaints us with the fact that groups retain their identity even in spite of changes within their membership (Dooyeweerd 1962: 108ff.). Groups have a relatively constant structure which is more than a reflection of the subjective will or activity of any one or even all of their members. In order to take account of both these insights a sociological standpoint is needed that breaks radically with the immanence standpoint.

---

10 The individual is lost in the spiritual totality, "die alles mit allem nicht durch äusserliche zusammenfügung, sondern durch ein an Spannungen reiches Ineinandergreifen ..."

### 3. Sphere sovereignty

#### 3.1 Sphere-sovereignty and concept formation

The Christian philosopher Herman Dooyeweerd calls for a break with immanence thinking in sociology all together (Dooyeweerd 1962: 70ff.). Immanence thinking, he says, must employ the scheme of whole and part because it tries to use as a universal method of interpretation what has only limited validity. It is forced to construe everything within the scheme of genus and species. Indeed, Dooyeweerd says, this method of concept-formation is valid for the classification of phenomena within a particular science, let us say, in biological classification; but it cannot be used to express the relationships between the various spheres of life like the family, the state, and the church. If one tries to distinguish the state from the family, for instance, by way of genus and species, he is found to fall into a whole-parts scheme. He must then seek the most inclusive social group of which all other groups are members, or he must seek some basis for relating what are altogether unrelated individual groupings. The alternative is to seek a truly transcendental standpoint that avoids the pitfalls of immanence social philosophy (Dooyeweerd 1950: 51). Such a transcendental point of departure must not only be truly concerned about the individual in social life, but must also be truly cosmological in approach (Dooyeweerd 1939: 193-232). This insight served as the motivational spark for the Dutch statesman-philosopher and theologian Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) on the path to formulate the first implicit theory Christian social theorizing, namely the idea of sphere-sovereignty (Taylor 1966: 42-61).

Kuyper followed in the wake of the thought of the German Lutheran thinker Julius Stahl (1802-1861) and the Dutch historian-philosopher Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer (1801-1876) (Taylor 1966: 28ff.; Fogarty 1957: 10). Both were influenced by the revival movement which emanated from Switzerland in the nineteenth-century. The idea of sphere sovereignty is directly linked to the idea of the sovereignty of God over all aspects of life (Van Riessen 1952: 68-86). This religious point of departure serves as the fundamental basis for postulating a fundamentally Christian social philosophy: Firstly, within the framework of the covenant of grace, this means the sovereignty of Jesus Christ. Correlate with the idea of the absolute sovereignty of God is the religious command given to man that he serves God with his whole heart in every realm of life (Runner 1961: 69ff.). Secondly, the theory of sphere-sovereignty includes the insight that there is a sovereignty also of various spheres or orbits of life, a derived sovereignty which has been assigned to them by the sovereign God (Runner 1961: 70-71). The bounds of each sphere have been set by God himself, so that each sphere has its own legitimation and competency within its own bounds. Thirdly, each sphere has its legitimation directly from God and no sphere of life can derive its legitimation from any other sphere. Each has its own derived sovereignty, a competency within its own orbit which is given to it by its Lord (Runner 1961: 70). Fourthly, no sphere may transgress the bounds of competency of another sphere. Thus the state should not seek to regulate the internal affairs of the family. Neither should the church seek to regulate the affairs of the state (Taylor 1966: 56). Similarly the church is not organized along the lines of a political party. Fifthly, the principle of sphere-sovereignty presupposes a certain conception of religion. It rhymes with the idea that religion is the service of God with all one's heart in every sphere of life. This implies that all levels and spheres of life are holy, not only in the sense that they are part of the creation which the direction of man, who in turn is responsible covenantally to his sovereign God. No sphere of life therefore is per se profane, and no sphere of life need become holy by way of dedication or consecration (Taylor 1966: 60).

In essence the idea of sphere-sovereignty emanates from the perspective that man has the covenant responsibility of fulfilling the will of God in all spheres of life; man must carry out the responsibilities which have been given to him. It is the responsibility of the Christian to track down the principles which pertain to the various spheres of life. By performing the duties of his office, he must bring every aspect of life into subjection to the rule of Christ. No sphere of life is excepted. Everywhere there should be the realization of the fact that

all things are of God, through God, and unto God (Kuyper 1974: 87ff.; Dooyeweerd 1939: 193-232).

### 3.2 Sphere-sovereignty, structures of individuality and the state

In the third volume of his *A new critique of theoretical thought*, Herman Dooyeweerd states that the principle of sphere-sovereignty demands that there be a distinct theory of individuality structures (Dooyeweerd 1969 III: 53ff.). Dooyeweerd draws a distinction between the casual social relationships which men sustain to one another, where there is a differentiation according to levels of personal ability, etc., and the social experience within the relatively permanent and stable connections such as the family, the state, and the church, where there is an inherent structure of authority (Dooyeweerd 1969 III: 78ff.). The latter have individuality structures, in which there is a typical relationship of authority and subordination (Dooyeweerd 1969 III: 177ff.). Furthermore, the individuality structure of a group must be understood in terms of its "founding" function and its "pilot" or "leading" function respectively (Dooyeweerd 1969 III: 56, 177ff., 404ff.). Only by taking both of them into consideration can a proper definition of an individuality structure be obtained (Taylor 1966: 412).

The state also has its own structure of individuality and its own peculiar sphere of competency. Unlike the family, it is historically founded, being the result of the free forming activity of man. The leading function of the state is juridical in nature (Dooyeweerd 1969 III: 346-376). The state has the power of the sword over a particular geographical area by reason of a duly constituted authority. The sovereignty of the state cannot be derived from that of any other group. Therefore, the state is not subject to the church, not even in matters which are supposed to pertain to the eternal blessedness of the soul. True enough, in a society which is as yet undifferentiated there is no clear distinction between the cultic, the state, and the family - for example the merging of functions of diverse social structures in ancient Israel. It is only in the course of historical differentiation that these have been separated. The idea is widely held in Christian circles that the state is an institution which has arisen because of sin. Certainly the element of coercion which characterizes the activity of the state is a consequence of sin. In the course of historical differentiation, however, some kind of central authority resembling that of the state would most likely have arisen, even if there had been no sin.

Because of its sovereignty within its own sphere, the state has a direct responsibility to God, it must, in its own fashion, seek to carry out the divine will and it has a divine responsibility to administer justice within its bounds in a typically "stately" fashion (Dooyeweerd 1969 III: 401). It must put down injustice and prevent civil disorder. The foundation of the authority of the state cannot be sought, for example, in the will of the people, in the *volunte generale*. Failure to strive for justice, even when justice has become unpopular, will lead to strife and disorder, precisely the things which the state should seek to overcome (Dooyeweerd 1969 III: 414).

The authority of the state is not ultimate and unlimited. It is not a state Leviathan. It has its own sphere of competency, whose bounds it may not transgress (Dooyeweerd 1969 III: 402). Indeed, the state has often sought to transgress its own limits. Such attempts, however, always lead to disruption. There are, in addition, some areas that the state cannot control, try as it will. It cannot control the inner faith of its citizens. A totalitarian state may seek to establish a system of thought control; it may strive to accomplish its purpose by appealing to the faith of its people by way of clever propaganda. To go beyond, to use control in the sense of "brainwashing", would undermine the state itself. A limit to the power of the state has been manifested when it has tried to uproot the family. Needless to say, it has always failed in this attempt (Dooyeweerd 1969 III: 446).<sup>11</sup> Any proper definition

11 Also cf. Dooyeweerd 1924-1925: 7-25, 62-79, 104-118, 161-173, 189-200, 228-244, 309-324, 433-460, 489-504, 528-542, 58-598, 617-634; 1926: 244-265, 425-445.

of the state should firstly establish its limitations. If the state is regarded to be one particular kind of organization of man's psychical impulses, there is no clear delimitation possible of its bounds and of its responsibilities. The Christian sociologist must seek to establish its specific individuality.

#### 4. Conclusions

The debate on politicocratic communitarianism highlights a number of important considerations in dealing with the theoretical context of social normativity: Firstly, power itself is understood within the context of the cosmonomic order of reality. Its limitation is not simply that of its own force or range. If meaninglessness and chaos are to be avoided, the proper limits of power must be observed. Furthermore, any view which would unleash sheer power is forced nevertheless to consider questions of right and legitimation as reflected by Aristotle's and Thomas Hobbes' views on political society respectively. In order to form his concepts Hobbes posits a state of nature in which man has the right of self-aggrandizement, even though it need not be supposed that he thought that his state of nature ever was an historical reality. In similar immanentist fashion Politocratic communitarianism identify no specific structural principles and limitations to the *polis*

Secondly, no meaningful view of reality is free from disastrous antinomy, if the theory of sphere-sovereignty is not accepted as a presupposition. According to the philosophy of the cosmonomic idea, the *nuclei* of meaning of the various modes of reality cannot be defined. Their presupposition is what makes all definition possible. Without the proper delimitation of their bounds one falls into antinomy in the formation of concepts. Likewise, in the discussion of the spheres of society one cannot obtain clarity in one's distinctions and definitions unless one distinguishes various spheres, which indeed are interlaced with one another but which have their own sovereignty in their own orbits. Presupposing them is the only avenue to clarity and precision with regard to questions which fall within their scope.

Thirdly, do the historical manifestations of tribes, clans, or sub-divisions of these on which politicocratic communitarianism is based, not shatter the principle of sovereignty in own sphere? No, as Dooyeweerd correctly points out, that when it is established that a matrimonial community, a state, or church have a constant inner nature, determined by their internal structural principles it does not mean that *all* of these societal structures of individuality have been realized in every phase of the development of mankind. It only means that the inner *nature* of these types of societal relationships cannot be dependent on variable historical conditions of human society.<sup>12</sup> Although human culture must pass through a primitive stage, it may not linger there - a foundational principle not accounted for by the historicism dominating politicocratic communitarian social and political philosophy.

---

12 Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, Vol. III, p. 170.

## 5. Bibliography

- Aquinas. 1920. *The Summa Theologica*, translation by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province, Burns, Oats & Washmore.
- Aquinas. 1965. *Selected political writings*, translated by J.G. Dawson, Basil Blackwell, Oxford.
- Aristotle. 1921. *Politica*, translation by B. Jowett, Clarendon Press, Oxford.
- Brandt, R. 'Untersuchungen zur politischen Philosophie des Aristoteles', in *Hermes* 102, 191-196.
- Dooyeweerd, H. 1924-1925. 'In den strijd om een Christelijke staatkunde', 1, pp. 7-25, 62-79, 104-118, 161-173, 189-200, 228-244, 309-324, 433-460, 489-504, 528-542, 580-598, 617-634.
- Dooyeweerd, H. 1926. 'In den strijd om een Christelijk staatkunde', 2, pp. 244-265, 425-445.
- Dooyeweerd, H. 1931. *De crisis der humanistische staatsleer in het licht eener Calvinistische kosmologie en kennistheorie*, W. ten Have, Amsterdam.
- Dooyeweerd, H. 1939. 'Kuyper's wetenschapsleer', in *Philosophia Reformata* 4, 193-232. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1163/22116117-90000686>
- Dooyeweerd, H. 1954. *De analogische grondbegrippen der vakwetenschappen en hun betrekking tot de structuur van den menselijken ervaringshorizon*, Noord-Hollandsche Uitgevers Maatschappij.
- Dooyeweerd, H. 1962. *Verkenningen in de Wijsbegeerte, de sociologie en de rechtsgeschiedenis*, Buiten & Schopperheijn, Amsterdam.
- Dooyeweerd, H. 1969. *A new critique of theoretical thought, vol.s I-III*, translated by D.H. Freeman, The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, Philadelphia.
- Dooyeweerd, H. 1948. *Transcendental problems of philosophic thought*, WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1163/22116117-90000773>
- Dooyeweerd, H. 2017. *Time, law and history*, Paideia Press, Grand Rapids, MI.
- Du Plessis, L.M. 1979. *Westerse regdenke tot en met die Middeleeue*, Pro-Rege Pers Bpk., Potchefstroom.
- Fogarty, M. 1957. *Christian democracy in Western Europe, 1820-1953*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London.
- Ginsberg, M. 1950. *Sociology*, Oxford University Press, London.
- Goosen, D. 2007. *Die nihilisme*, Praag, Dainfern.
- Goosen, D. 2015. *Oor gemeenskap en plek*, FAK, Pretoria.
- Gosztonyi, A. 1976. *Der Raum: Geschichte seiner Probleme in Philosophie und Wissenschaften, vol.s 1 & 2*, Alber, Freiburg.
- Gurvitch, G. 1945. *Twentieth century sociology*, Philosophical Library, New York.
- Hobbes, T. 1978. *Leviathan*, Penguin Books Ltd., Harmondsworth, Middlesex.
- Knight, K. 2007. *Aristotelian philosophy. Ethics and politics from Aristotle to MacIntyre*, Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Kooistra, R. 1963. *A Christian approach to sociology. Facts and values*, Guardian Publishing Co., Hamilton.
- Kuyper, A. 1874. *Het Calvinisme, oorsprong en waarborg onzer constitutioneele vrijheden, een Nederlandsche gedachte*, 2nd ed., B. v.d. Land, Amsterdam.
- Leff, G. 1977. *William of Ockham*, Manchester University Press, Manchester.
- Litt, T. 1919. *Individuum und Gemeinschaft. Grundfragen der sozialen Theorie*, Teubner, Leipzig/Berlin.
- MacIntyre, A. 1984 [1981]. *After virtue*, University of Notre Dame Press, Indiana.
- MacIntyre, A. 2007 [2006]. *Ethics and politics. Selected essays, vol. 2*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- MacIntyre, A. 2008 [1988]. *Whose justice? Which rationality?* University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Indiana.
- Malan, K. 2011. *Politokrasie. Die dwanglogika van die territoriale staat*, PULP, Pretoria.
- Malan, K. 2016. 'Anderkant verstaatlikte konstitusionalisme', in *Tydskrif vir Geesteswetenskappe*, 56(4-2), 1252-1265. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.17159/2224-7912/2016/v56n4-2a12>
- Mulgan, R.G. 1974. 'Aristotle's doctrine that man is a political animal', in *Hermes* 102, pp. 438-445.
- Mulgan, R.G. 1977. *Aristotle's political theory*, Clarendon Press, Oxford.

- Nisbet, R. 1962. *Community and power*, Oxford University Press, New York.
- Nisbet, R. 1980. *History of the idea of progress*, Heinemann, London.
- Nisbet, R. 1982. *Prejudices: a philosophical dictionary*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.
- Runner, H.E. 1961. *Christian perspectives*, Guardian Publishing Co., Hamilton.
- Sandal, M.J. 1983 [1982]. *Liberalism and the limits of justice*, Cambridge University Press, London/New York/New Rochelle.
- Strauss, D.F.M. 2002. "The opposition of 'facts' and 'values'", in *Journal for Christian Scholarship*, pp. 1-12.
- Strauss, D.F.M. 2005. *Reintegrating social theory*, Peter Lang, Bern.
- Strauss, D.F.M. 2009. *Philosophy. Discipline of the Disciplines*, Paideia Press, Grand Rapids, MI.
- Strauss, D.F.M. 2013. 'Are distinct societal spheres a threat to human freedom? The fruitfulness of the principle of sphere sovereignty', in *Journal for Christian Scholarship* 1st & 2nd quarters, pp 185-204.
- Sumner, W.G. 1906. *Folkways: a study of the sociological importance of usages, manners, customs, mores and morals*, Ginn & Co., Boston.
- Taylor, E.L.H. 1966, *The Christian philosophy of law, politics and the state*, The Craig Press, Nutley, New Jersey.
- Van Riessen, H. 1952. *The society of the future*, translated by David Hugh Freeman, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids.
- Weinstein, M. & Weinstein, D. 1972. 'Towards a new role for sociologists: Morris Ginsberg on sociology and moral philosophy', in *Sociological focus*, 5(3), 40-53. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00380237.1972.10570822>
- Ziegenfuss, W. 1956. *Handbuch der Sociologie*, Ferdinand Enke Verlag, Stuttgart.