Sphere sovereignty, solidarity and subsidiarity

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Abstract

Reflecting on the nature of human society and the individual's place in it resulted into focusing on the principles of sphere sovereignty and subsidiarity. The dominating patterns of thinking in the legacy of the West are individualism versus universalism, sometimes also known as the opposition between atomism and holism. After reflecting on some elements of solidarity it is shown that the traditional Roman Catholic account of society adhered to a universalistic perspective. It was the Calvinistic legal scholar, Johannes Althusius who first articulated an alternative understanding designated as sphere sovereignty. The principle of subsidiarity operates with the idea of the relative autonomy of the various "subordinate parts" of society, understood as parts of the encompassing nature of the state (while the latter is still superseded by the church as supra-natural institute of grace). Dooyeweerd criticised the problematic employment of the whole-parts relation in traditional Roman Catholic views of human society. A more nuanced understanding of the nature of individualism and universalism is developed. It is argued that the only hope to transcend the problems entailed in atomistic and holistic views is to expand the scope of application of the principle of sphere sovereignty also to the dimension of modal aspects. After all, the struggle for obtaining a basic denominator for the cosmic diversity

is played out within this domain of theorizing. Theoretical ismic orientations are articulated within this context. Once the proper meaning of discreteness and continuity (entailing the whole-parts relation) is understood,their analogical appearance within the social aspect enables a more nuanced characterization of the extremes of individualism and universalism, supported by a systematic classification of ways of human societal interaction. Attention is also paid to the distinction between typical and a-typical societal responsibilities as well as the problem of solidarity and more recent developments towards a recognition of the importance of human rights.

Opsomming
Soewereiniteit-in-eie-kring, solidariteit en subsidiariteit

Die fokus op die beginsels van soewereiniteit-in-eie-kring en subsidiariteit het binne die konteks van besinning oor die menslike samelewing en die plek van die enkeling daarin na vore getree. Die denkpatrone wat die erfenis van die Weste gedomineer het, kan onderskei word in twee teëgestelde sienings: individualisme versus universalisme, soms ook bekend as die opposisie van atomisme and holisme. Nadat aandag geskenk is aan die aard van solidariteit word aangetoon dat die tradisionele Rooms-Katolieke weergawe vasgehou het aan 'n universalistiese perspektief. Daarteenoor was die Calvinistiese regsgeleerde, Johannes Althusius, die eerste denker wat 'n alternatiewe siening ontwikkel het wat uiteindelik as soewereiniteit-in-eie-kring aangedui is. Die beginsel van subsidiariteit hanteer daarenteen die gedagte van die relatiewe outonomie van die verskillende "ondergeskikte dele" van die samelewing, opgevat as dele van die omvattende aard van die staat (waar laasgenoemde nog opgeneem word in die kerk as hoëre bo-natuurlike genade-instituut). Dooyeweerd het as sistematiese kritikus die problematiese toepassing van die geheel-dele relasie in die tradisionele Rooms-Katolieke sienings van die menslike samelewing bevraagteken. 'n Meer genuanseerde verstaan van die aard van die individualisme en die universalisme is ontwikkel, terwyl aangetoon is dat die verwagting om die probleem wat in atomistiese en holistiese opvattinge opgesluit is op te los, in die uitbreiding van die beginsel van soewereiniteit-in-eie-kring tot die dimensie van modale aspekte gegee is. Die stryd om 'n grondnoemer vir die

*kosmiese verskeidenheid te vind speel tewens binne hierdie do-
mein van teoretisering af. Teoretiese ismes word gewoonlik binne
hierdie konteks geformuleer. Sodra die sin van diskreetheid en
kontinuïteit (wat die geheel-dele relasie bevat) – ook as analogieë
binne die sosiale aspek – verstaan is, is 'n meer genuanseerde
karakterisering van individualisme en universalisme moontlik. Dit
word ondersteun deur 'n sistematiese klassifikasie van die wyses
van menslike sosiale interaksie. Aandag is ook aan die onder-
skeiding tussen tipiese en a-tipiese samelewingsverantwoorde-
likhede gegee, sowel as aan die probleem van solidariteit tussen
mense en meer resente ontwikkelings in die rigting van die
belangrikheid van menseregte.*

1. Orientation

With the concern for individual freedom, operative throughout the
history of social philosophy, an equally important plea for societal
freedom is found. Over-emphasizing individual freedom threatens
supra-individual societal ties, whereas individual freedom is
threatened by over-emphasizing a particular societal sphere. These
opposing extremes are sometimes designated as individualistic and
universalistic approaches, or alternatively as atomism and holism.
This article investigates how the shortcomings present in atomistic
and holistic theories of society could be avoided by an alternative
approach.

While ancient Greece and the Medieval era mainly explored a
universalistic view, modern philosophy,since its inception during the
Renaissance, by and large opted for an individualistic perspective,
anticipated by the views of the nominalist thinker Marsilius of
Padua. The after-effect of this atomistic view is clearly seen in the
social contract theories up to the 18th century, while recently it once
more revived in the theory of justice developed by John Rawls.

Only at the beginning of the 17th century do we, for the first time, see
someone capable of transcending this traditional dilemma.
Johannes Althusius arrived at a sound application of the whole-
parts relation while acknowledging the proper laws of every societal
sphere (see Althusius, 1603 and Carney, 1965). The intermediate
position of Friedrich Julius Stahl reflects elements of the
Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition which still influenced problematic
elements in the thought of later thinkers. Yet the principle of sphere

sovereignty took shape via the thought of Groen van Prinsterer, Abraham Kuyper (see Kuyper, 1880) and Herman Dooyeweerd (see Dooyeweerd, 1997). An analysis of these developments are found in Strauss 2013 where it is shown that the principle of sphere sovereignty provides a constructive alternative to atomistic and holistic theories. What is not discussed in Strauss 2013, is the relationship between sphere sovereignty and the two elements present in Roman Catholic social philosophy, namely *solidarity* and *subsidiarity*.

2. Solidarity

Pope John Paul II played a key role in the actions of the Polish trade union known as *Solidarity*. Weigel and Royal mention that the concern was "to defend the existential interests of workers in all sectors in which their rights are concerned" (Weigel & Royal, 1991:159).

In his Encyclical, *Laborem Exercens*, Pope John Paul II adresses the interests of the workers as positioned within the context of an emerging *solidarity*, first and foremost, between "industrial workers":

> The call to solidarity and common action addressed to the workers – especially to those engaged in narrowly specialized, monotonous and depersonalized work in industrial plants, when the machine tends to dominate man – was important and eloquent from the point of view of social ethics. It was the reaction *against the degradation of man as the subject of work,* and against the unheard – of accompanying exploitation in the field of wages, working conditions and social security for the worker. This reaction united the working world in a community marked by great solidarity (*Laborem Exercens*, §8).

In the same paragraph Pope John Paul II explains that it forms part of the Church's fidelity to Christ so that she can truly be the "Church of the poor". The scope of its purview indeed highlights what is currently also in South Africa at stake with its labour unrest. Just contemplate the following words of Pope John Paul II:

> And the "poor" appear under various forms; they appear in various places and at various times; in many cases they appear as a *result of the violation of the dignity of human*

> *work:* either because the opportunities for human work are limited as a result of the scourge of unemployment, or because a low value is put on work and the rights that flow from it, especially the right to a just wage and to the personal security of the worker and his or her family.

In §8 the predicament of the poor, particularly during the "period of rapid industrialization" was assessed "*from the point of view of social morality*". Although this emphasis surely has a bearing on the immediate needs of poor workers, the solidarity of workers is not positioned within a broader societal context. The underlying issue is whether or not individuals ought to be identified with only *one capacity*, such as being *workers*. Alternatively, the question is if there is a sphere of personal individual freedom, or if individuals are absorbed in one or another societal collectivity, such as the *people* (as an ethnic community), as the *state* or as the *church*.

The French thinker, Emile Durkheim, found that within Roman Catholic circles suicide less frequently occurred than within Protestant communities, possibly as an effect of the disrupting consequences of the self-centered (individualistic) spirit of capitalism. Durkheimarticulated his own views on solidarity in this regard.

His accounts of *social solidarity* are articulated in terms of his understanding of the *collective conscience* ("conscience collective"). He distinguishes two types of solidarity:

"There are in each of us, ..., two forms of consciousness: one which is common to our group as a whole, which, consequently, is not ourselves, but society living and acting within us; the other, on the other hand, represents that in us which is personal and distinct, that which makes us an individual. Solidarity which comes from resemblance is at maximum when the conscience collective completely envelopes our whole consciousness and coincides in all points with it" (Durkheim, 1972:139).

This fusion of the "individual" and the (societal) "whole" is already found in Rousseau's construal of the social contract. He holds that the contract also transforms the abstract individual into an indivisible part of the *body politic* (a *transpersonal whole*): "Everyone of us collectively subject ourselves and all our power to the final guidance of the volonté générale (general will), and we receive

again every member back as an indivisible part of the whole" (Rousseau, 1975:24).

Likewise, according to Durkheim, once the *conscience collective* exercises its power, "our personality vanishes, by definition, one might say, for we are no longer ourselves, but the collective being" (Durkheim, 1972:139). Durkheim distinguishes between *mechanical solidarity* and *organic solidarity*. This second type results from the division of labor which causes mutual differences between individuals.

> The former is possible only in so far as the individual personality is absorbed into the collective personality; the latter is possible only if each one has a sphere of action which is peculiar to him – that is, if he possesses a personality. It is necessary, then, that the conscience collective leaves open a part of the individual consciousness in order that special functions may be established there, functions which it cannot regulate (Durkheim, 1972:140).

Ultimately Durkheim appreciates society as a *whole* which can only be understood either in terms of a mechanical solidarity or in terms of organic solidarity.

> Society is not seen in the same aspect in the two cases. In the first, what we call 'society' is a more or less closely organized totality of beliefs and sentiments common to all the members of the group: it is the collective type. By contrast, the society to which we are all bound in the second instance, is a system of differentiated and specialized functions which are united in definite relationships. These two societies really make up only one. They are two aspects of one and the same reality, but nonetheless they must he distinguished (Durkheim, 1972:138).

Owing to the persistence with which Durkheim appreciates *society* as a genuine *whole* or totality, it should not be surprising that he eventually gave priority to the *conscience collective*. Parsons clearly saw this:

> Gradually the conscience collective came more and more to overshadow the conception of organic solidarity. The distinction of social types ceased to be between situations where a conscience collective did and did not predominate in action, but became a matter of distinguishing different contents of the conscience collective itself (Parsons, 1949:320).

By looking at Durkheim's starting-point in an original unorganized form of society, which is supposed to be composed out of a multitude of individuals (a 'horde' – Durkheim, 1972:170), one might be tempted to discern an individualistic trait in his thinking. Yet, in fact, his universalistic (holistic) view of the *conscience collective* ultimately dominates his social philosophy, eliminating differentiated societal entities with their own inner nature.

Of course specific roles within societal collectivities may benefit from a feeling of a shared *solidarity*. Such feelings of solidarity are displaying the fact that human interaction always functions within the sensitive-psychical facet of reality. Therefore every person exerting a formative control over other social subjects within a particular social whole should be guided by the normative requirement of bringing about *social solidarity* amongst the members of such a social collectivity. But without a *prior* distinction between different kinds of societal entities, no guarantee could be given for avoiding either an individualistic or a holistic view. Did the Roman Catholic understanding of solidarity succeeded in accomplishing this?

Monsma alleges that the "Catholic principle of solidarity" rejects "both individualism and collectivism". He holds that this "emerges out of the personalism and the social nature of human beings that also underlie subsidiarity". Monsma clearly does not realize that the assumed "social nature" of human beings as well as applying the idea of subsidiarity beyond the boundaries of sphere sovereign societal entities, rests on stretching the whole-parts relation beyond its limits.

The quotation which Monsma provides from the German Jesuit scholar, Oswald von Nell-Breuning, states explicitly that under solidarity "all individuals are involved as members of the social totality in the common social destiny of this totality; similarly the totality (society or community) is inextricably involved in the destiny of the members" (Monsma, 2006:7).

3. Subsidiarity

Van Til points out that, although the principle of subsidiarity has been inchoately present throughout the history of the church, it was Bishop Wilhelm Emmanuel von Ketteler of Mainz who introduced this idea into the Catholic social teachings during the 1850s (Van Til, 2008:614). He mentions Ketteler who relates this principle to the

Middle Ages when the autonomy of spontaneously formed social groups, such as towns, guilds, and religious associations, were not mere creatures of the state, but were real entities anterior to the state. Bishop Ketteler taught 19th-century clerics and laymen that "the state had the duty of furnishing by means of legislation the necessary assistance to the working class in organizing a corporative structure in which the new corporations would enjoy autonomy within their respective spheres (see Van Til, 2008:614).

The remark that "towns, guilds, and religious associations … were real entities anterior to the state" does not acknowledge the difference between differentiated and undifferentiated societies. In particular, it denies the fact that within undifferentiated societies actions are performed which later on, within differentiated societies, became part and parcel of what we today call the state. Medieval guilds displayed an undifferentiated structure which reminds us of the extended family and sib, although no real or fictitious common descent is assumed. According to Troeltsch medieval society does "not know a state as a unified, sovereign will-organization of the whole, where it is irrelevant who exercises this sovereignty" (Troeltsch, 1925:302). Yet the multiple kinds of undifferentiated societies which existed during the Middle Ages, such as found in the *feudal system*, *guilds* and *manors*, contained activities which within a differentiated society are performed by societal entities with their own distinct forms of organization, such as the *state*, the *business enterprise*, *social clubs*, *religious denominations*, and so on. Although the state in its modern form at the time therefore clearly was not yet recognizable as a distinct societal entity, what eventually turned out to be functions of the state were present within those undifferentiated structures. For example, without tribal punishment only relatives could exercise revenge, because the monopoly of power was not yet integrated on a territory enabling the enforcement of a judicial resolution of legal conflicts. Early Germanic law as well as early Greek and Roman Law had to use private execution as a practical form of enforcement for liability. Since undifferentiated societies are easily misunderstood in terms of the whole-parts relation, such societies may appear to support the principle of subsidiarity.

According to Van Til it is likely due to the influence of Ketteler's on Leo XIII that we find the concept of subsidiarity seminally present in

Rerum novarum (1891), where Leo writes "The law must not undertake more, nor go further than is required for the remedy of the evil or the removal of the danger" (no. 29). Leo XIII's *Immortale Dei* (1885) also suggests the principle of subsidiarity. Van Til explains that the core concern of the 1931 encyclical, *Quadragesimo Anno*, is with the kinds of social institutions contributing most effectively to the full development of the human personality. In a world increasingly dominated by large and often state-controlled institutions, the encyclical seeks to carve out the grounds for authentic individual self-determination (Van Til, 2008: page 615, note 15).

In the papal encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* (15 May 1931) we read (§ 79):

> Just as it is gravely wrong to take from individuals what they can accomplish by their own initiative and industry and give it to the community, so also it is an injustice and at the same time a grave evil and disturbance of right order to assign to a greater and higher association what lesser and subordinate organizations can do. For every social activity ought of its very nature to furnish help to the members of the body social, and never destroy and absorb them.

The entire paragraph 80 is dedicated to the nature of subsidiary groups subsumed under the "supreme authority of the State":

> The supreme authority of the State ought, therefore, to let subordinate groups handle matters and concerns of lesser importance, which would otherwise dissipate its efforts greatly. Thereby the State will more freely, powerfully, and effectively do all those things that belong to it alone because it alone can do them: directing, watching, urging, restraining, as occasion requires and necessity demands. Therefore, those in power should be sure that the more perfectly a graduated order is kept among the various associations, in observance of the principle of "subsidiary function", the stronger social authority and effectiveness will be the happier and more prosperous the condition of the State.

These formulations do not provide us with a clear-cut criterion as to what properly belong to the "doings" of the state. At the same time it explicitly speaks of "subordinate groups" and "various associations" observing the principle of *subsidiarity*. When the principle of sphere sovereignty is compared with the principle of

subsidiarity,the crucial issue is not what could best be assigned to "subordinate groups" and "various associations", but whether or not these social entities are genuine *parts* of the state.

4. Provisional comparison

Within a differentiated society it should be possible to arrive at a classification of diverse forms of social interaction present in such a society. The remarkable fact is that both individualism and universalism (atomism and holism) represent theoretical orientations generated to give an answer to the question which basic denominator should be chosen for a proper understanding of a differentiated society and for the uniqueness of the societal entities present within such a society. The history of philosophy and of theoretical reflection on human society indeed opted for many different choices regarding a basic denominator for our understanding of reality. As briefy mentioned earlier, the most dominant views explored the aspects of number and space, thus terminating in trying to explain society either in terms of isolated individuals or individuals in interaction, or in terms of one or another societal whole, promoted to be the all-encompassing totality of society. However, these two options never succeeded in giving a satisfactory account of the distinct inner nature of societal entities. Since traditional concepts of solidarity and subsidiarity did not escape from the shortcomings inherent to these ismic orientations, it will be rewarding to look at the way in which Dooyeweerd's philosophy helps us to understand what the Roman Catholic view of subsidiarity actually entails.

5. Dooyeweerd on subsidiarity

In his work on the *Roots of Western Culture,* Dooyeweerd explains a number of concerns when the principle of sphere sovereignty is compared to the principle of subsidiarity (see Dooyeweerd, 2012:124-127). He mentions the dualistic Greek motive of form and matter with reference to the view of Thomas Aquinas who holds that the state is based on the rational nature of human beings. Continuing the legacy of Greek thought Thomas viewed the state as the all-inclusive total community in the realm of nature, embracing and denaturing all the other spheres of social life as its subservient parts – true to the classical employment of the whole-parts relation.

Two important points should be noted: (i) the state has no juris-diction over the supra-natural domain of grace, and (ii) society should be built in an anti-centralist way from the individual up-wards, via the lower communities to the state as the highest whole within the sphere of nature, which is the portal to the supra-natural sphere of grace. Dooyeweerd then points out that the principle of subsidiarity requires that the state should only be responsible for those elements of the common good for which individuals cannot provide by themselves or with the aid of the *lower communities*. Although this may seem to be equivalent to the principle of sphere sovereignty, there is a decisive difference between the two.

According to the Thomistic view individuals come into this world helpless and in dependence upon the community owing to a social propensity implanted in the rational-moral nature of human beings. The step-by-step development flowing from this propensity proceeds from the lowest community, the family, and ends with the state which is the perfect and highest community within natural society. This entire conception depends upon the Greek concept of nature as directed by the form-matter ground-motive, according to which the essential (human) rational form cannot be attained in isolation. But in addition the official Roman Catholic view maintains that

> the state and the lower societal communities cannot exhaust the reality of the individual as a "natural being". The rational law of nature holds that individuals depend on the community only for those needs which they cannot fill themselves as individual human beings. The same natural law also holds that a lower community like the family or the school depends on the higher communities (ultimately on the state) only for those interests that it itself cannot handle. Basically, this hierarchical structure describes the substance of the principle of subsidiarity (Dooyeweerd, 2013:126).

In his subsequent explanation Dooyeweerd points out that Thomism continued to position both the individual and the lower societal communities as parts within the state as the encompassing natural whole. He also recognizes that essentially this view of society is Greek in nature, lacking the possibility of appreciating the intrinsic character of the various social spheres of life, best accounted for in terms of the principle of sphere sovereignty. By simply subsuming

parts of a different kind to the state their intrinsic sphere sovereignty is denied. The apparent synthesis between the Greek conception and the biblical view is found in the Thomistic view that the church will ensure eternal bliss (ad finem beautitudinis aeternae – Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, II, 91,4 – see Pegis 1945). By contrast, the creation motive opens up a positive appreciation of the intrinsic nature of everything created according to its own nature. Yet Dooyeweerd holds that this insight is absent within Thomistic social theory, because its entire approach proceeds from the idea of the immediate *purpose* served by the cooperation leading to the *natural perfection of human beings*. Any societal institution or entity can pursue multiple purposes, either typically belonging to its intrinsic nature or external to it. For this reason the typical sphere sovereignty of societal spheres cannot be deduced from their diverse purposes. When Thomas Aquinas therefore looks upon the family as a natural community incorporating in addition to the relation of husband and wife, parents and children and also that of master and servants, it is clear that he still argues on the basis of an undifferentiated condition, lacking a clear distinction between the family and labour relationships.[1] Also with regard to the state as the perfect human community Dooyeweerd asks how such a teleological goal orientation can provide us with a definition of the internal nature and structure of the state?

> The concept of "common good" in Thomistic political theory was so vague that it applied also to the "lower" societal structures. For example, the modern Thomist does not hesitate to speak of the "public interest" of an industrial corporation in distinction from the "specific interest" of the persons who work within it. For the Thomist the "common good" in the body politic can only refer to the interest of the "whole" that embraces all the "lower" communities and the individuals as "parts." From this perspective, however, it is impossible to indicate an inner criterion for the "common

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1   At this point Van Til articulates a sound view of Christian family life from the perspective of sphere-sovereignty: "The Reformed answer is that, while faith has a great role in all spheres, the church as institution has little role to play in this and other areas. Believing marriage partners are seen as blessed by the church, but the wedding is a family affair, recognized by the state (Van Til, 2008:636).

good," since a Thomist does not see the state according to its own intrinsic nature and structure. We know how even the most revolting state absolutism seeks to justify itself with appeals to the common good. As we mentioned earlier, Thomism certainly does not desire an absolute state, but it has no defense against state absolutism other than the principle of subsidiarity, a principle derived not from the intrinsic nature of the life-spheres but from the Aristotelian conception of the "social nature" of humankind and of the "natural purposes" of the various societal communities (Dooyeweerd, 2013:127).

Interestingly, the terms in which Marsilius defended his view of the church, namely that it is merely a *collection of believers* (*Defensor Pacis*, II, c. VI, 13 – quoted by Von Hippel, 1955:362), returns in Pope Leo's rejection of a similar view of the state: "Thus, as is evident, a State becomes nothing but a multitude which is its own master and ruler" (Pope Leo XIII, 1885:§ 25). This view permeated modern political thinking with an individualistic inclination, particularly in the form of the doctrine of *popular sovereignty*.

Yet within the Roman Catholic tradition the underlying (undifferentiated) whole-parts relation continued to be applied to human society, also in the name of subsidiarity, as we have noted.

Chaplin gives a sound explanation of Dooyeweerd's view in this regard when he remarks that according to Dooyeweerd the approach of Thomism operates with "a universalistic social philosophy, rooted in a hierarchical scholastic metaphysics, in which lower communities are conceived as standing in a part-whole relationship with the state, thus subverting their internal sphere sovereignty" (Chaplin & Marshall, 2011:137). Yet he does not think Dooyeweerd is correct in his assessment (see Chaplin & Marshall, 2011:137 and 367, note 81).

Van Til evinces a similar proper understanding of the meaning of the principle of sphere sovereignty: "There is also the sphere of the political, in which governments pursue and promote justice. One sphere is not greater or less than the other, but different in nature and goal" (Van Til, 2008:629). On the same page he mentions the conclusion reached by Chaplin: "The appropriate conclusion to draw here is surely that each community performs subsidiary functions towards all the others" (see Chaplin, 1994:92). It seems

as if the idea of inter-dependence and mutual aid eliminated the underlying problem of operating with the whole-parts relation in a way in which differently-natured societal entities are denatured into parts of one encompassing whole.

Chaplin also points out that "Reformed and Catholic social thought" both commences "by repudiating the individualistic social theories characteristic of Enlightenment liberalism, and the universalistic theories developed in reaction, whether Romantic, Hegelian, or Socialist" and then states that the "individual is acknowledged as an essentially social being, created by God to live within a variety of different communities, yet never to be subsumed within them" (Chaplin, 1993:188).

6. Extending the scope of sphere sovereignty

The provision that an individual ought not to "be subsumed" within any community appears to be in conflict with the affirmation that an "individual is acknowledged as an essentially social being". Reformational philosophy indeed consistently emphasizes that an individual functions within all the modal aspects of reality, including the social mode. Yet, it is one thing to say that all humans are functioning in all aspects, including the social facet, but something totally diffrent to claim that an individual *essentially* is a *social being*! The latter statement approximates what Monsma quotes from Kuyper (just after he also had referred to the last quote from Chaplin): "Kuyper holds that human 'life ... is so constituted that the individual can exist only within the group and can come to full expression only in community'" (Monsma, 2006:4).

Since Kuyper did not extend the principle of sphere sovereignty to the domain of modal aspects as well, he here actually reverted to one of the classical formulations of *universalism*. To a lesser extent the same remark applies to what Chaplin said in connection with humans as *essentially social beings*. This shortcoming is responsible for the fact that none of these quoted authors, namely Chaplin, Monsma and Van Til, realized that the most basic perspective on the opposition between atomism (individualism) and holism (universalism) concerns the perennial philosophical problem of unity and diversity, manifest in the quest for a basic denominator of the ontic diversity of aspects – and the whole-parts relation.

6.1 The nature of ismic orientations

The history of philosophy and the special sciences are familiar with multiple negative responses to this problem regarding the modal diversity within reality. It could largely be written in terms of monistic and dualistic (and partially pluralistic) theoretical approaches. What happens is that one or a combination of few aspects of reality is elevated to become the basic denominator in terms of which the entire diversity within reality is explained. For example, early Greek philosophy explored the first four modal aspects of reality by assigning an exclusive explanatory power to terms such as *multiplicity*, *static extension*, *constancy* and *change*. The aspects concerned are the *numerical*, the *spatial*, the *kinematical* and the *physical*. The Pythagoreans have chosen the quantitative mode as basic denominator because they believed that the "essence" of everything could be expressed through the relationships of integers (i.e., by means of *fractions*). When "incommensurability" was discovered (about 450 B.C.), it turned out that there are spatial relationships exceeding the grasp of fractions, which led to the *geometrization* of Greek mathematics and to a long-standing legacy of a space metaphysics. Interwoven in this development we find the concern of Greek philosophy for something *firm* and *steadfast* amidst the *ever-flowing stream* of life, *constancy* amidst *change* (thus exploring the *kinematical* and *physical* aspects as basic denominators). Already Thales articulated another choice with his statement that everything is *alive*.

From this point of view, it is unthinkable that "life" is not the normal, governing rule in the universe. Jonas remarks: "In such a worldview, death is a puzzle which stares humankind in the face, the antithesis of the natural, self-explanatory and understandable, that which is the common life" (Jonas, 1973:20). The heading of this paragraph is: *Pan-vitalism and the problem of death* (Jonas, 1973:19). A pan-mechanistic frame of mind, on the other hand, emphasizes that life is a borderline case in the encompassing homogeneous physical worldview. Quantitatively negligible in the immeasurability of cosmic matter, qualitatively an exception to the rule of material characteristics, epistemologically the unexplained in the explainable physical natural world – this is how life turned into a stumbling block for pan-mechanism: "Conceiving life as a problem here means that its strangeness in the mechanical world, which is reality, is re-

cognized; explaining that it means – on this level of the universal ontology of death – denying it, relegating it to a variant of the possibility of the lifeless" (Jonas, 1973:23). The heading of this reads: *Pan-mechanism and the problem of life* (Jonas, 1973:22ff.).

6.2 Atomism and holism/individualism and universalism[2]

This vitalistic tendency in Greek thought provided the starting-point of an organological tradition which manifested itself throughout Medieval and Modern philosophy, up to the diverse organicistic orientations of the 19th century, encompassing the positivism of Comte, the evolutionism of Darwin, as well as post-Kantian freedom idealism (Schelling, Fichte & Hegel) and subsequenly in the thought of Stahl and Kuyper.

Although a (universalistic) emphasis on the whole-parts relation dominates the organicistic legacy, there are also examples of an atomistic (individualistic) orientation within an organicistic mode of thought. Spencer, for example, loads his organicism – the view that society is an organism – with an *individualistic* assumption: "A more pronounced individualism, instead of a more pronounced nationalism, is its ideal" (Spencer, 1968:22).

Why is it possible for an organicistic approach to be individualistic in one instance and universalistic in another one? This possibility flows from the fact that within the biotic aspect of reality analogies of the numerical and spatial aspects are found. If the quantitative analogy is over-emphasized, an individualistic view is advanced and when the spatial analogy is elevated a universalistic orientation emerges. In the latter case the whole (German: *Ganzheit*) is qualified as being *organic* in nature and the parts are designated as members (German: *Glieder*).

While number is characterized by *discreteness*, the whole-parts relation reveals the uniqueness of the spatial aspect. These terms are derived from the Greek word *holon* and the Latin *totum* and *partes* (whole and its parts). Modern set theory had to use both our

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2 The systematic considerations explained below expands the views of Dooyeweerd expressed in the third Volume of his *New Critique* (see Dooyeweerd, 1997-III:596-599).

arithmetical intuition – the discreteness of a multiplicity of distinct elements, and our spatial intuition – this multiplicity of elements united into a whole (*Ganzheit*).

Badiou incorporated only the contribution of the *numerical* when he remarks: "A set, in Cantor's sense of the word has no essence besides that of being a multiplicity; it is without external determination because there is nothing to restrict its apprehension with respect to something else; and it is without internal determination because what it gathers as multiple is indifferent" (Badiou, 2005:46). Compare this to the authentic definition of Cantor: "Under the term 'set' we understand every collection M of determinate and properly distinct objects m of our intuition or our thinking (which are called the 'elements' of M) into a whole" ["Zusammenfassung … zu einem Ganzen"](Cantor, 1962:282; see also Cantor, 1895-1897).[3]

In his principles of mathematics Bertrand Russell also acknowledges the whole-parts relation as basic and indefinable: "The relation of whole and part is, it would seem, an indefinable and ultimate relation" (Russell, 1956:138). His earlier criticism of Bolzano could just as well be directed at the misunderstanding of Badiou. He accuses Bolzano for not distinguishing the "*many* from the *whole* which they form" (Russell, 1956:70 – my emphasis DFMS).

7. Towards a systematic account of the whole-parts relation

In the light of these considerations it should be clear that a proper understanding of the opposition between individualism and universalism has to proceed from a proper understanding of the core meaning of number and space and from the fact that individualism overextends the meaning of the one and the many, while uni-

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3 Badiou left aside that part of Cantor's definition where he, in addition to a multiplicity of determinate and properly distinct elements, refers to the fact that in a set they are brought together into a whole (*zu einem Ganzen*). The original meaning of the term "whole" (synonymous with a *totality*) resides within the spatial aspect (it has its original *modal seat* within the aspect of space). Cantor's set theory is therefore a *spatially disclosed* (or: *deepened*) arithmetical theory. Gödel once said that *sets* are "quasi spatial". Wang mentions these words and then adds the remark: "I am not sure whether he would say the same thing of numbers" (Wang, 1988:202).

versalism overemphasizes the meaning of the spatial whole-parts relation. From the fact that organicism took on both an individualistic and a universalistic shape, it is also clear that analogies of number and space within cosmic later aspects can also prompt this opposition within aspects such as the cultural-historical, lingual, social and jural aspects.

However, it is only when these (and other) analogies are considered within the context of the *social* aspect that we reach an even more nuanced understanding of these two isms under consideration. The central issue arising when the social aspect is observed concerns the question regarding the *different types* of social interaction which can be discerned within a differentiated society. Investigating this issue is not directed at the typicality of any particular societal entity, but merely at the *ways* in which human social interaction takes place. Such an investigation is not interested in a genetic distinction, such as found in the initial position developed by Tönnies in his (1887) work on *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*. In this work Tönnies defends the view that a period of *Gesellschaft* (community) follows a period of *Gemeinschaft* (society) (Tönnies, 1965:251).[4]

Since the distinctions here intended have been treated more extensively elsewhere (see Strauss, 2006:245-255), only the outcome of this analysis will be briefly explained.

When the coherence between the kinematical and the physical analogies within the modal structure of the social aspect is considered, the focus should be on the dynamic equilibrium of thermodynamically open systems. The feature brings to expression the fact that the enduring persistence of an open system is not cancelled by the exchange of material constituents. Likewise certain societal entities also display this feature, for in spite of the coming and going of individual members the solidarity and continued existence of the social form of life under consideration is not

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4   However, in his *Introduction to Sociology* it turns out that he wants to relativize these oppositions. He remarks that in addition to social relations and social connections he distinguishes a third category, *Samtschaften* (collectives). Social entities are classified as *Samtschaften*, social relationships (*Verhältnisse*), and social 'bodies' or organizations (*Körperschaften*) (Tönnies, 1965:XLV ff.).

challenged. Owing to the foundational relationship between the kinematic and physical aspects, all physical changes presuppose an element of (kinematic) constancy. Phrased differently: change can only be detected on the basis of constancy. For example, Ryan accounts for the fact that in spite of the constant flow (exchange) of individual members of a societal collectivity, the durability and identity of the social form of life concerned are not terminated. He writes:

> There are regularities and constancies in the behavior of groups of people which allow us to talk about groups having a stable structure in spite of fluctuating membership, and about the existence of social role which can be filled by different people at different points in time (Ryan, 1980:174).

Here we may speak of the *solidary unitary character of certain social forms*. A more detailed analysis of this phenomenon will show that such an investigation will have to use other analogical moments as well. Identifying a solidary unitary character is only possible when, within the distinct sphere of an integrated social order, an enduring shape is given to this internal order, even in spite of the presence of possible or actual social conflict.[5]

While holding on to this feature of a *solidary unitary character*, another feature may be highlighted by contemplating the spatial analogy. Within the social aspect this analogy could be specified in two ways: accounting for social relations of next-to-each-other and social relations of super- and subordination. Enduring relationships of super- and subordination provides us with a second classificatory feature pertaining to the different forms of social interaction in a differentiated society.[6]

8. Classifying human social interaction

Three classificatory options emerge from these distinctions. Firstly one can combine both features; secondly one can choose either

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5 Note that this formulation analogies from the following aspects are employed, namely the numerical, spatial, biotical, analytical, and cultural-historical aspects.

6 In passing we note that the full meaning of this feature is also co-constituted by the other analogical moments.

one; and lastly one can ignore both of them. When a societal entity partakes in both characteristics, namely (i) a solidary unitary character, and (ii) a permanent authority structure, then we encounter what is designated in German and Dutch as "Verbande" – in English preferably rendered as *societal collectivities*. This type of social interaction embraces societal collectivities such as the state, church denominations, the nuclear family, a firm, social club, language association, tertiary and academic institutions (universities and colleges). All of these societal entities have a solidary unitary character as well as an enduring authority structure (of super- and subordination). Citizens serving in the office of government are always correlated with those citizens who function as subjects within the state. The state can therefore not be identified with the government, as it is frequently done. Both those citizens who occupy specific governmental offices and those subject to the power vested in these offices are *constantly changing* (while keeping its permanent authority structure) – thus highlighting the solidary unitary character of the state as a societal collectivity. The same applies to churches, clubs, businesses, universities and so on.

Selecting only one of the above-mentioned two characteristic classificatory features points at what is known as *communities* – such as ethnic communities (also known as cultural communities) and the extended family. In the absence of both features we meet relationships between individuals, communities or societal collectivities – all of them belonging to the category of *coordinational relationships*.

Although we often refer to the inhabitants of a city of a town as a "community", all three types of social interaction identified above are interwoven within it, each maintaining its intrinsic sphere sovereignty. Dooyeweerd employed the word *enkapsis* for this kind of interlacement. Since whatever is enkaptically interwoven remains true to its internal sphere sovereignty, it cannot be seen as an instance of subsidiarity.

9. A more refined understanding of individualism and universalism

At this point it is possible to deepen our initial definition of individualism and universalism. We argued that over-estimating the

discreteness of number (or its analogies within cosmic-later aspects) and an over-estimation of space (or its analogies) underlies the distortions found in individualism and universalism. The distinction which we have drawn between coordinational, communal and collective ways of social interaction is co-determined by numerical and spatial analogies, but mediated by the other analogical structural elements following number and space. Of course these distinctions do not imply that any kind of social interaction can exist in isolation. No single person is absorbed by inter-individual coordinational relationships and no one merely lives in communal and collective societal entities. Therefore coordinational relationships are unbreakably correlated with communal and collective societal relationships.

However, as soon as it is attempted to reduce communal and collective relationships to coordinational relationships sociological individualism emerges. By contrast, when communal and collective relationships are reified at the cost of coordinational relationships we meet sociological universalism.

Furthermore, classifying different societal entities as social collectivities is done by abstracting from their sphere sovereign uniqueness while focusing on what they share, namely a solidary unitary character and a durable relation of super- and subordination. Avoiding the distorting temptation of subsuming different sovereign spheres under one of them serving as encompassing whole, with the others as its genuine parts, is made possible by identifying a unique sphere sovereign modal aspect as qualifying function of a specific social form of life.

Therefore, without the supporting role played by the theory of sphere sovereign modal aspects, no sufficient demarcation of sphere sovereign societal entities will be possible. The assertion that the state as a public collectivity (*Verband*) is qualified by the *jural aspect* contains a decisive structural delimitation. Its calling is to bind together (integrate) the multiplicity of legal interests on its territory. Yet recognizing the state as a universal integrator of legal interests does not imply that it turns into a universalistic societal whole embracing the integration of all non-jural interests as well. This explains why the state is not called to integrate faith interests as if it is an all-encompassing community of faith, or that it has to integrate all love relationships as if it is a macro-family, and so on.

10. Sphere sovereignty: the relationship between the state and the other societal spheres

The state does not *grant* existence to any non-state sphere sovereign social entity. It merely has to *acknowledge* that, on equal footing, there are multiple distinct and sphere sovereign societal entities. Each one functions within the jural aspect and therefore has typical legal interests which the state has to integrate in one public legal order. This view is important for the problem of boundary-transgressions. With reference to Kuyper's view Monsma writes: "But as soon as there is any clash among the different spheres of life, where one sphere trespasses on or violates the domain which by divine ordinance belongs to the other, then it is the God-given duty of government to uphold justice before arbitrariness, and to withstand, by the justice of God, the physical superiority of the strong" (Monsma, 2006:5). He mentions that Kuyper once wrote that the "state must … keep each sphere within its proper limits. The sovereignty of the state, therefore, rises high above all the other spheres by enjoining justice and utilizing force justly" and also mentions David Koyzis who has made this same point in regard to Herman Dooyeweerd's thought: "By allowing that the state's task includes protecting the integrity of the various societal spheres and enabling them to fulfill their respective normative tasks, it would certainly appear that Dooyeweerd is conceiving the state as something of an overarching hierarchical institution" (Monsma, 2006:6).

There is a subtle difference between *acknowledging* sphere sovereign social forms of life by integrating their legal interests into one public legal order on the one hand and claiming that the state *enables* them to fulfill their respective normative tasks on the other (see also Chaplin, 1994:183 ff.). Integrating legal interests does not at all elevate the state into "an overarching hierarchical institution". This public legal task does not turn the state into a whole with "the various societal spheres" as its subordinate (hierarchical) parts, for then societal entities that are delimited by a *different* structural principle are brought together. Dante clearly saw through this shortcoming with his remark that true parts are governed by one and the same structural principle.[7] Proper parts of the state are

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7   "Teile stehen aber dann in einem rechten Verhältnis zum Ganzen, wen nein und dasselbe Prinzip sie regiert" (quoted by Zippelius, 1980:67).

provinces and municipalities and in this specified sense a legitimate use of the whole-parts relation is found. The competencies, responsibilities and duties belonging to each level are *state* competencies, responsibilities and duties. Therefore they cannot be confused with the principle of subsidiarity, because they exclude those societal spheres that are distinct from the state, whereas subsidiarity does not differentiate between the "subordinate groups" and proper parts of the state.

When Chaplin therefore remarks that the "appropriate conclusion to draw here is surely that each community performs subsidiary functions towards all the others" (Chaplin, 1994:93), he does not realize that sphere sovereignty and subsidiarity are *mutually exclusive*. When Monsma remarks that "the basic insight of subsidiarity [is] that societal functions can best be carried out by the lowest level while protecting a just social order and the common good is a good and appropriate standard" (Monsma, 2006:12), it is clear that he does not address the real problem, namely that it is not an issue of *levels* but of a proper or an improper application of the whole-parts relation.

11. Typical and a-typical responsibilities – exceeding the principle of sphere sovereignty

What needs to be explained at this point is how the principle of sphere sovereignty leads to a proper delimitation of societal task and responsibilities. It appears as if there may be practical problems in applying the principle of sphere sovereignty in order to differentiate between such responsibilities. Monsma considers the example of schools providing lunches, which raises the question if "schools [should] provide not only lunches but also breakfasts for children in low-income areas"? (Monsma, 2006:12). The argument may be that breakfasts are an "important function of the family and not that of the state." The next question is: "what if children, owing to a lack of money or to neglect, are coming to school hungry?" Is it not then "perhaps time for the state to intervene and provide food? But doing so encourages low-income families who are feeding their children as best they can to do even less for their children. One could argue the state is undercutting already weak family structures" (Monsma, 2006:12).

It appears not to be sufficient merely to make an appeal to the qualifying function of the nuclear family (moral love), the state (the

jural) or the school (the disclosed logical-analytical function). Similar questions could be raised by considering South Africa where it was too expensive for private initiative to build railway lines, given the complex physical topography of the country – so it was done by the state. Another industry, Yskor, was also erected by the state on similar grounds. And even the Church embarked on similar actions in establishing the *Kakamas* farming enterprise. If the state is jurally qualified, how can it undertake tasks that are economically qualified?

These practical problems call out for a broader perspective, one in which the crucial distinction between typical and a-typical tasks is introduced. Contemplating this distinction, however, presupposes the long process of differentiation which took place in the historical development of modern differentiated societies. Within undif-ferentiated societies such as the extended family, sib, clan, tribe, guild or manor, it always successively acts *as if* it is what we recognize within a differentiated society as a business enterprise, as a political entity, or as a cultic community. The differentiated existence of societal entities such as these can only be recognized on the basis of their respective sphere sovereign qualifying modal functions. Yet the *process* through which they came into existence is guided by norms for civilizational development, such as the principles of historical continuity, historical differentiation and histo-rical integration. Tasks of an a-typical nature within any community or societal collectivity therefore should be assessed in terms of the normativity of the principles guiding meaningful cultural unfolding and development in a general civilizational sense.

It is not difficult to see that if there are no poor communities the state (state-school) does not have to provide either lunch or breakfast. A state not undertaking tasks such as these could still be a state, but if a state does not maintain its civil and criminal courts, or the judiciary, it is no longer a state. Likewise, building railway lines and establishing steel companies are not *typical* governmental tasks, they are *a-typical* in nature. In general the yardstick for determining whether or not a specific task is typical or a-typical is given in the condition: imagine a situation in which the task under discussion is not performed and then assess if the societal sphere under con-sideration can still perform those tasks that typically belong to its calling and sphere of competence.

Chaplin is justified in remarking that "the government must act in a manner which respects the sphere-sovereignty of the parties involved" (Chaplin, 2007:142). H.J. Strauss specifies two criteria applicable to instances where a-typical tasks are undertaken (see Strauss, 1965:198-199). First of all the a-typical domain (sphere) should be treated in accordance with its own sphere sovereignty (inner structural principle or type law). A business firm must be managed *as* a business firm and not as an integral part of the state. Likewise, a (public) school or a farming industry managed by a church denomination is not to be transformed into an integral *part* of the state or the church. In the second place, the principles guiding a-typical tasks should be those guiding meaningful societal differentiation and integration in the process of civilizational development. This implies that when a-typical tasks are performed the differentiated responsibilities that are supported should be led up to the point where they can properly function without the support of the sphere which is undertaking these a-typical tasks. On the one hand, this implies that neither the emergence of a-typical tasks nor their termination proceeds apart from a guiding principle. The aim of a-typical tasks should therefore always be to work towards a situation where the relation of dependence will be terminated. Support other spheres in such a way that they can regain their independence – thus fully realizing their own internal sphere-sovereignty within the ongoing process of differentiation and integration of society. Clearly, this second consideration retreats to a general perspective which is focused on the dynamic development of society, subject (amongst others) to the mentioned historical principles of historical continuity, historical differentiation and historical integration.

A brief remark is required regarding the central commandment of love. This commandment embraces in a radical, central and total (RCT) way every branch of human life (which as differentiated, peripheral and partial – DPP) without specifying the typicality of any societal sphere. Solidarity also has a RCT depth dimension, serving as the root of the DPP dimensions of our human existence. Therefore, insofar as solidarity touches the root of human existence it solely makes an appeal to the whole-hearted loving service of God and fellow human beings, and insofar as it comes to expression within diverse societal spheres it manifests itself in accordance

with the type law (typical structural principle) of these spheres. But these (DPP) type laws cannot be deduced from the RCT meaning of solidarity, just as little as the central commandment of love contains a specification of the loving service of God and fellow humans within the various (norming) modal aspects of reality or within the diverse norming entity structures within human society.

From an RCT perspective all of humankind share in this root dimension and from a DPP perspective solidarity can assume multiple shapes and forms – from the solidarity of thought between two kindred spirits up to the solidarity shared by citizens of the same state and members belonging to the same ecclesiastical denomination.

In other words, the so-called "principle of solidarity" receives its meaning *either* from the central religious dimension of creation *or* from the dimension of modal aspects and entitary structures.

12. More recent developments: From totalitarianism to human rights

Whereas the Roman Catholic view on the relationship between state and church during the nineteenth century was largely shaped by its reaction to a number of revolutionary events and subsequently by the totalitarian regimes of the early twentieth century, Vatican II caused a turn-around towards an acknowledgment of human rights. This is especially seen in the "Declaration on Religious Freedom" of the Second Vatican Council: *Dignitatis Humanae*. Traditional Roman Catholic countries struggled with dictatorships, whereas a Protestant country like the USA became a successful democracy. Grasso points out that democracy and religious freedom in America were not rooted in "the naturalism and individualism of Continental liberalism" but rather the outcome of "an overwhelmingly Protestant society" (Grasso, 1991:97). On the next page he even opposes "the American democratic experiment with its unique understanding of religious liberty" with the "'totalitarian democracy' of Continental liberalism".

Grasso believes that John H. Hallowell demonstrated, in his classic *The Decline and Fall of Liberalism as an Ideology* (1943), that the liberal individualist continental legacy was from the outset "a highly unstable doctrine because it juxtaposed two conflicting principles,

namely, the autonomy of the individual will and the idea of a higher moral law." One of the factors that acted to erode the "belief in an objective moral order" is "the internal dynamic of liberalism's own rationalism and nominalism" (Grasso, 1991:105). Grasso then mentions Stanley C. Brubaker's assessment, namely that this "new type of liberalism" had as its defining characteristics "radical individualism and profound scepticism". It is "dogmatic doubt that we can ever know what is good for man . . . or that there is even such a thing as the good". The concluding remark by Grasso is significant: "This individualism and subjectivism finds institutional expression in a 'neutral' state" (Grasso, 1991:105).

Grasso makes an appeal to "moral norms that transcend" transcending the "subjective interests and desires" of people (Grasso, 1991:108). Expanding this point he states:

> Contemporary liberalism subverts the foundations of demo-cratic government because the thoroughgoing subjectivism towards which liberalism inexorably tends precludes in principle an affirmation of an objective and universally obligatory order of justice and rights, and the dignity of the human person. The resultant culture of unbridled indivi-dualism and subjectivism is scarcely a fertile soil for the cultivation of the republican virtues on which democracy depends (Grasso, 1991:109).

Although a more articulated account could be given of the nor-mativity of human life, one should appreciate the acknowledgment of a norming order (designated as an objective moral order) in Roman Catholic thought. Yet this view is still burdened by an ambiguity, because the position assumed by Grasso advocates "an overarching sense of community" as well as a "conception of a common good to which private interests must be subordinated": "Politically, we have witnessed a decline in public-spiritedness and the loss of any overarching sense of community or conception of a common good to which private interests must be subordinated" (Grasso, 1991:106). Whereas the cause of human rights, based upon the dignity of the human person appears to be liberated from the long-standing universalistic whole-parts scheme, this statement once again introduces a hierarchical whole-parts relation, which by definition eliminates the genuine sphere sovereignty of the sub-ordinated interests.

13. Concluding remark

Our main argument underlying the entire discussion is that the principles of sphere sovereignty and subsidiarity can only be properly evaluated when our understanding of temporal reality includes a view of its fundamental dimensions, embracing the central religious depth dimension, as well as those of modal aspects and entity structures. The quest for a basic denominator of the diversity within reality gave birth to the dominant individualistic and universalistic (atomistic and holistic) trends of thought found throughout the history of reflection on human society. The alternative option is briefly developed – start with an acknowledgment of the sphere sovereignty of the different modal aspects of reality and then proceed, on the basis of distinguishing between coordinational, communal and collective ways of social interaction, in characterizing individualism and universalism in terms of the unbreakable coherence between coordinational relationships on the one hand and communal and collective relationships on the other. Within this context a few brief remarks were articulated regarding the "position" of the idea of solidarity. Although the "Declaration on Religious Freedom" of the Second Vatican Council: *Dignitatis Humanae* displays promising signs of moving away from the traditional universalistic stance of Roman Cotholic social thinking, it still harbours key elements of the misplaced application of the whole-parts relation.

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