

Abraham Kuyper on Science, Theology, and University

Jacob Klapwijk

Abstract. This article analyzes Kuyper’s theory of science in the light of his neo-Calvinist worldview. First we discuss his thesis that there is an inner connection between faith and science. Tensions become visible between a reformational and a scholastic line of thought (1–4). The next part deals with the humanities and theology. Kuyper turns out to have been influenced by the scholastic Logos theory, yet in theology he also defends the idea of a correlation between faith and revelation (5–7). The third part focuses on the self-organization of the sciences in the university. It shows how Kuyper’s doctrine of sphere sovereignty leads to “Free Universities” independent of church and state (8–10). The final part is a critical evaluation pointing up four challenges in Kuyper’s theory of science. They concern the mediating role of worldviews, the need for a transcendental hermeneutics, the concept of transformation in science and the importance of a correlative theology based on creation (11–14).

Whoever “speaks” of Kuyper speaks of Calvinism. And whoever speaks of Calvinism risks falling directly into error. In our day and age we are easily inclined to associate Calvinism with a certain type of church organization, church confession or theology. We think for instance of the Reformed-Presbyterian church order, of the Westminster Confession of Faith, or of the theological doctrine of predestination. For Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920) these were all a part of Calvinism, to be sure. Yet for him the scope of the label extended much further. He presented Calvinism as a comprehensive vision, even as a renewed shaping of Christianity derived from biblical revelation. And it was to his mind the sixteenth-century reformers, Calvin in particular, that put this global vision front and center.

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1. Revolutionary and Romantic Calvinism

In his *Lectures on Calvinism* Kuyper describes Calvinism as a “life-system,” a life- and worldview comparable to Paganism, Islamism, Romanism and Modernism (*LC*). Central in this worldview according to Kuyper are three things: the absolute sovereignty of God, the equality in principle of all people, and the worldwide calling of the Christian. God’s sovereignty entails that He has set his “ordinances” or laws for the entire creation but that He is not subject to these laws Himself. The equality of all people means that God makes no distinction between some people and other people, and particularly not between so-called clergymen and laymen. And the worldwide calling of the Christian implies that every believer is called from whatever position he or she occupies in this world to the service of God, the reformation of the church, and the transformation of society (*LC* 19–32).

Thus by “Calvinism” Kuyper means to express not just a theological position, a confessional stance or a special type of ecclesiastical polity, but a dynamic vision that already in the days of the Reformation brought about all kinds of transformations in society, first of all in Calvin’s Geneva and subsequently also among the Huguenots in France, the Reformed in Holland, and the Puritans and Presbyterians in England and Scotland. It is a view that the Pilgrim Fathers took to the New World and that led, even there, to political, cultural and societal renewals. In short, Calvinism can be described as “world-formative Christianity.”¹

It is this revolutionary Calvinism that Kuyper sought to appropriate over a hundred years ago. He wanted to fan smoldering fire, to shine the light of historic Calvinism on modern nineteenth-century culture. This culture was a secularized or de-christianized one in which a smug and pedantic science was leading the world down a primrose path of confusion and unbelief. Kuyper accordingly considered it to be one of his foremost tasks to make the implications of Calvinism transparent for modern science. How he did so, then, is the subject of this article.

Was Kuyper really concerned with Calvinism, with the views of Calvin and his followers? At many points he surely was. Yet there is also reason to speak of “neo-Calvinism.” First, in his analysis of Calvinism, Kuyper employed a remarkable hermeneutical guiding principle, namely, that the special character of a system is not to be sought in what it shares with previous systems but in the features whereby it breaks with the past. Thus he was fascinated by those notions of Calvin that carried him as a reformer beyond medieval scholasticism.² Furthermore, Kuyper put Calvinism to his own uses by rendering it applicable to the situation in his own day, bringing it “into rapport” with human consciousness as it had developed by the end of the nineteenth century.³ And finally Kuyper frequently interpreted Calvinism in the organismic and historicizing manner of German romanticism as he had gotten to know it in a more or less Christianized form in Schelling, F. J. Stahl, and Groen van Prinsterer.

1 This is a term of Wolterstorff’s. Wolterstorff, N. 1983. *Until Justice and Peace Embrace: The Kuyper Lectures for 1981*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, ch. 1. See further *LC* 12–19.

2 Kuyper writes: “I advance the rule – that a system is not known in what it has in common with other preceding systems; but that it is distinguished by that in which it differs from those preceding systems” (*LC* 100).

3 Kuyper, Abraham 1894. *Encyclopaedie der Heilige Godgeleerdheid*, 3 vols. Kampen: Kok, vol. 1, vi.

This romantic interpretation shows up in the emphasis he places on the historical, the organic and the principled in Calvinism. In the first place, Calvinism is for Kuyper more than the personal worldview of Calvin himself. Calvinism is primarily “historical Calvinism,” that is, the entire complex of historical phenomena in the fields of church, statecraft, morality, society, science, etc. in which Christendom unfolded itself in Western Europe from the sixteenth century onward. Calvinism is also what lies hidden beneath the surface of history, to wit, an “organic system of ideas,” of often barely conscious motifs that “embodied” themselves in “historical Calvinism” and gave it, in former times, an enormous vitality. Yet even with that, not everything has been said. The inspiring notions of Calvinism go back ultimately to spiritual points of departure: the core of the Calvinist life and worldview. These core ideas are generally called “the Reformed principles.” Thus Kuyper’s neo-Calvinism is not something he takes in a simple way from Scripture or Calvin’s *Institutes*. He derives it from a kind of intuitive plumbing of what was going on *at bottom* in the entire history of the Reformation, particularly amongst the Calvinist communities.

Kuyper’s neo-Calvinism is as authentic as the views of Calvin himself. But it includes anti-scholastic, romantic and contemporary traits. The present study explores this *reformational basic conviction*, that is, Kuyper’s vision of historical Calvinism *and* the way it should be reshaped in modern times. It explores in particular how, given this basic conviction, Kuyper developed, in opposition to the predominant theories of science, a distinctive concept of science, of theology, and of the university. It was this concept to which he proceeded to give organizational shape in the Free University of Amsterdam that he established in 1880.

There is a serious complication. Kuyper’s concepts are far from always consistent, even with respect to science, theology, and the university. Kuyper was a journalist; he worked under pressure. His reformational basic conviction did not prevent him from constantly borrowing from modern humanist epistemology and then again from traditional scholastic metaphysics, however much he may have warned against such “accommodations.” Thus we need a critical analysis of Kuyper. Let us employ the same guidelines that Kuyper used in analyzing sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Calvinism. Confronted with inconsistencies, let us focus on those visionary elements in Kuyper’s thought whereby he, as a reformer, distanced himself both from humanistic and scholastic influences. Also with respect to science!

2. The Pseudo-conflict of Faith and Science

In this section let me begin with a reminder. For Kuyper science (Dutch: “*wetenschap*”) is more than natural science. Science embraces not only the physical disciplines but also the life sciences, the humanities and liberal arts, and even theology. In other words, for Kuyper science is an inclusive term. It represents the whole world of academic scholarship.

Kuyper invariably connects science with faith. One of his most striking pronouncements in his *Lectures on Calvinism* is the assertion that the so frequently cited conflict between faith and science does not exist: “Every science in a certain degree starts *from faith*” (LC 131). In other words, the so-called conflict is a pseudo-conflict, since on the one side the faith position of Christians leads compellingly to scientific reflection, while on the other side the speculative systems of non-Christian scholars, too, proceed

from religious root positions of their own. In short, all science is religiously conditioned.

Nevertheless, science is beset by a fundamental conflict. That conflict is not one between faith and science. It is a conflict between two scientific directions of thought that are diametrically opposed to each other because *both* take their departure from religious ground positions. There is a Christian and a non-Christian view of science, and they collide. The customary suggestion that as soon as a Christian perspective is introduced into the discussion objective science is pitted against subjective belief muddies the real issue, according to Kuyper. Science is opposed to science and, in the background, faith is opposed to faith.

This fundamental conflict at the heart of all science is ruled by what Kuyper has called the “antithesis of principles” (*PST* 641; *LC* 139). Since these principles are of a religious nature, we can also speak of a “religious antithesis.” Kuyper means by that the struggle between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the evil one that began in paradise, that reached its climax on the cross, and that will be fought out until the end of the ages. The religious antithesis is a struggle for the preservation or destruction of the whole of God’s creation. Kuyper sees all people as involved in this struggle lock, stock, and barrel, with their entire being. When people turn away from God, they at the same time disturb their inter-human and inner-worldly relations. In contrast, when people turn to Him in belief, they contribute at the same time to the restoration of earthly existence in the direction of the coming kingdom. This kingdom is God’s kingdom; it is neither a human attainment nor a Christian achievement.

This is not the place to go into this doctrine of the religious antithesis, let alone its theological backgrounds in the thought of Augustine and Calvin or its organizational expansion by Kuyper.⁴ I do however want to mention three implications that Kuyper draws from his Calvinian perspective in the direction of our topic, the relation of faith and science. First, according to Calvinism religion encompasses and permeates the whole of created reality. All that is creaturely is claimed by God and must be consecrated to Him. Religion, in other words, is not just a component but has a “completely universal character.” Next, Calvinism sees the whole of life, in particular human nature, as radically disrupted and deranged by sin. Therefore the Christian religion is not just another expression of a normal situation: it is directed towards salvation from sin and the power of the evil one; it is “soteriological.” Finally, human thought is not a neutral terrain in human nature, and science is not a value-free zone. On the contrary, blindness and lies have the tendency to distort the results of science on the one hand, while the Christian message implies liberation and renewal on the other. In short, science does not exist outside the religious antithesis. It needs to be based, says Kuyper, on rebirth, on the new life in Christ. Science cannot do without the light of God’s Word and Spirit (*LC* 49–59).

To render the meaning of the religious antithesis more discussable for science, Kuyper operates with the distinction between “normalists” and “abnormalists.” *Normalists* are the scientists who presume (this is their faith!) that the existing cosmos is normal, who in their view of science accept the facts not only in nature but also in culture and society uncritically as data that are the self-evident point of departure for their theory, who regard

4 See Klapwijk, Jacob 1991. “Antithesis and Common Grace.” In J. Klapwijk, S. Griffioen, and G. Groenewoud (eds.). *Bringing into Captivity every Thought*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 169–190. See *infra* Chapter 20.

human rationality as fully autonomous, and axiomatically waive any explanation featuring help from the outside.

Over against them Kuyper places the *Abnormalists*, that is, those who regard the world in its present outlook as abnormal, derailed and corrupted by sin, and dependent on salvation to attain its intended end. Thus abnormalists proceed from the cosmos as God's good creation and the human person as the bearer of God's image, but also from the mystery of sin as apostasy from God whereby human nature has been corrupted and the world dislocated. Finally, they proceed also from the wonder in born-again people, of the re-creation, the new beginning in Christ, issuing in a reborn cosmos (*LC* 130–141). Abnormalists, yes – for these people seek their point of support ultimately not in the *de facto* nature of reality or in the rational nature of man – even science is “impaired by sin” – but orient themselves to God's revealed purposes, his salvation of and ordinances for created reality.⁵

Kuyper comes to a rather militant conclusion. It is not the so-called conflict between science and faith but the perspectives of the normalists and abnormalists that mark “the principal antithesis, which separates the thinking minds in the domain of Science into two opposite battle-arrays.” And this opposition is at bottom religious in character because it arises from “two kinds of human consciousness: that of the regenerate and the unregenerate; and these two cannot be identical.”⁶

Kuyper's sketch is clear. So also its consequences? One might want to ask Kuyper if he does not go too far and overshoot his target. Is the religious antithesis really susceptible to division into groups of people? Does it allow itself to be organized into two battle orders of scientists? Or is it a conflict that arises also in the heart of believing persons? “For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing,” according to the apostolic admonition in Romans 7.

Antithesis in science? How far does the antithetical conflict in science go? Does it entail a total break in scientific communication, a complete demolition of opposing standpoints? Often it seems so:

. . . these two scientific systems of the Normalists and the Abnormalists are not relative opponent. . . but they are both in earnest, disputing with one another *the whole domain of life*, and they cannot desist from the constant endeavor to pull down to the ground *the entire edifice* of their respective controverted assertions, all the supports included, upon which their assertions rest. (*LC* 133)

Happily, soup is not always eaten as hot as it is served. More mildly, he explains a little later: “. . . in this domain also it will be seen that only a peaceful separation of the adherents of antithetic principles warrants progress, – honest progress, – and mutual understanding” (*LC* 140).

Matters become tense when Kuyper goes beyond peaceableness to appreciation, yes

5 *PST* §43. These two antithetical perspectives on science have been worked out by Dooyeweerd 1997. *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*. 4 volumes. New York: Edwin Mellen. Vol. 1, 123, 522–524. Against the “immanence standpoint” in scientific theories Dooyeweerd posits the Christian “transcendence standpoint,” for in the light of God's revelation a Christian transcends the immanent boundaries of human experience that characterize the nature of non-Christian thought. Instructive is also Dooyeweerd's 1939 article “Kuyper's wetenschapsleer” *Philosophia Reformata* 4: 193–232. See *supra* Chapter 14.

6 *LC* 132, 137. See also *PST* §48–49, on “Two Kinds of People” and “Two Kinds of Science.”

admiration of others who are of a different mind. Somewhere he calls Plato, Aristotle, Kant and even Darwin “stars of the first magnitude, geniuses of the highest degree.”⁷ He even recognizes possibilities for cooperation and a common treasury of scientific thought: “. . . it is in the interest of science at large, that mutual benefit be derived by both circles from what is contributed to the general stock of science” (*PST* 159).

The question of course is, to what extent, if at all, such appreciation and cooperation can be legitimated, given Kuyper’s antithesis claim. When Kuyper declares, “The formal process of thought has *not* been attacked by sin,” and “in almost every department there is some task that is common to all,” then appreciation and cooperation are rescued, but the impression also arises that human understanding is made partly immune to the antithesis (*PST* 159, 161). Here Kuyper suggests that the natural sciences and the subordinate labor of the spiritual sciences (philological studies, etc.) “have a very broad field in common,” a field that exists outside this religious conflict. The fundamental difference of Christian and non-Christian thinking is not denied, but the gist is that it just extends “across the entire domain of the *higher* sciences,” that is theology, philosophy, the humanities etc. (*PST* 600, 679).

The question arises whether this position still comports with Kuyper’s reformational basic conviction. The dichotomy in scientific knowledge whereby only the higher part is dependent on the divine truth of faith while the lower part is dependent on the universal validity of reason is sooner scholastic than reformational in character. It presupposes two levels of knowledge. The lower level is broadly human and relatively autonomous; it stands in the light of reason that enlightens every human being. The higher knowledge pertains to a spiritual world and faith in divine revelation; it can be seen as exclusively Christian. This dichotomy can lead at best to a series of accommodations but never to a principled reformation of science.

Must a reformational initiative always lead, then, to a conflict of opinions or an isolated Christian position? Is it only scholastic accommodation that can lead to openness, communication and scientific cooperation, be it on a lower level? A far from attractive and also far from realistic dilemma! Here and there Kuyper tries to break through this dilemma. He presents an innovative solution:

. . . every faculty, and in these faculties every single science, is more or less connected with the antithesis of principles, and should consequently be permeated by it. . . . Everything astronomers or geologists, . . . historians or archeologists bring to light has to be recorded, – detached of course from the hypothesis they have slipped behind it and from the conclusions they have drawn from it, – but every fact has to be recorded by you, also, as a fact, and as a fact that is to be incorporated as well in your science as in theirs. (*LC* 139)

Kuyper wishes *neither* to regard the lower sciences as totally independent of religious beliefs nor, on the other hand, to drive the Christian researcher into a complete isolation. Rather, he suggests that factual observations and insights from whatever side in the realm of learning should be cut loose from a possibly non-Christian or pseudo-religious “hypothesis or presupposition” and be framed in an alternative, Christian perspective. At the end of this paper I will return to this suggestion.

7 “Common Grace in Science.” In *AK:ACR* 441–460. This is a partial translation of “De Gemeene Gratie in wetenschap en kunst” (included in the separately paginated *De Gemeene Gratie*, vol. 3), 448–449.

3. Problems in Kuyper's Critical Realism

In his *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology* Kuyper explains his theory of science in greater detail. Time and again his principled reformational basic conviction shines through, but at first sight the opposite appears to be the case. In part Kuyper joins the modern theory of so-called critical realism, in part he orients himself to the medieval doctrine of the divine Logos.

Kuyper's starting point is the so-called subject-object split, that is, the modern division between the thinking subject and the world as the object of thought, introduced into philosophy by René Descartes. Descartes presented the human person as a self-contained, autonomous subject, set opposite a world of things that the subject wants to understand and control. Kuyper seems to have no difficulty with this Cartesian dualism. He presents the subject in terms of human consciousness in general. The object is the world of corporeal things including the human body to the extent that this body too can be objectified for the sake of scientific analysis (*PST* § 38). He does not pose the question whether this dualism agrees with the unique religious nature of the human person as the bearer of God's image.

In the first instance Kuyper works out the problem of knowledge in the empiricist vein of John Locke. The subject, which is to say human consciousness, is a receptive capacity. It is a susceptibility to "empirical impressions" of physical and even mental things. It is a capacity to absorb into consciousness various moments or "elements" of the object (color and scent, for example) by means of perception and sensory observation and to convert the perceptions into a mental representation of the object (*PST* §39, 42).

The object, the world of perceivable things, is more than a confused pile of all the elements perceived by the subject. For things display system and regularity; they are arranged in an orderly way. The subject is aware that the elements found in the object are connected, just as the subject is aware of a connection between the different objects and between object and subject. Therefore human consciousness must be considered capable not only of forming a representation of the elements in objective reality but also of reflecting on the mutual "relations" between them. The subject does not just observe the world; it endeavors to understand and control the world in its regular coherence and orderly course (*PST* §39).

There are passages in Kuyper's *Encyclopedia* in which he suggests that this critical arranging of sensitive impressions and this mutual relating of elements in a logical understanding of the real world arises from the human mind in the vein of Kant's *critical idealism*. Is the world perhaps a construct of the mind instead of a God-given fact of life? In that case, Kuyper, under Kant's influence, can call human reason not a passive but an "active power," active because "the setting for them [these relations] is present in our own consciousness." Then he calls these relations "the objectification of our thinking" (*PST* 76f.).

For all that, the influence of Kant's critical idealism is limited. It conflicts too much with Kuyper's reformational basic conviction that we live in a real world and that God is the creator of it. And Kant's provocative thesis that the human subject encounters nature as its "lawgiver" clashes with Kuyper's sense that the world owes its causal relationships not to the ordering capacities of reason but to the ordinances of God: they are objectively present in the world. To the extent that the human subject in his scientific analyses likewise

“orders,” he is really doing nothing other than bringing his subjective representations into agreement with the objective, God-given world. For this reason, one could speak here of *critical realism*, a theory of knowledge the foundations for which were laid in the nineteenth century by the German philosopher Eduard von Hartmann. Von Hartmann’s critical realism fits better than Kant’s critical idealism with Kuyper’s belief in a divine creator.

Yet there is something puzzling about this alleged harmony of the subjective order of thought and the objective order of the cosmos, and thus in critical realism. Is the split of subject and object in modern philosophy an indisputable truth? This post-Cartesian split, is it not a corollary of faith, of a humanistic faith in the autonomy of the human subject that has to objectify and control the world by reason? And if we take the split of subject and object to be an original given in our philosophy, then how to account for the alleged affinity and agreement between subject and object that critical realists so easily claim? How is it possible that human thought is totally equipped to see through the things at hand right on down to their most fundamental causal relationships? Kuyper’s romantically tinted answer is that our world is like a living organism. Everything in it is organically connected with everything else in it; there is thus also an “organic relation between subject and object” (*PST* 67). This suggestion marks his position but does not solve his problem.

4. Logos Doctrine and the Human Sciences

One can imagine that Kuyper, embarrassed by questions like these, turned to another theory of knowledge, the medieval doctrine of the Logos. In this doctrine the human subject and the world of objects are indeed affinitive because they are both considered to be creatures of God, fabrications of the divine Spirit, the Logos. After all, not only in the subject but also in the object logical traits can be found. The cosmos is well thought out. In its logical relationships the cosmos is the creaturely expression or objective deposit of the thoughts that inspired God as Logos at the creation of the world. To the human subject, who is the little logos that is created in the image of the divine Logos, the object therefore does not need to come across as something strange and eccentric. The subject recognizes in it something of his or her own transparency as logical subject. Conversely, the germ of the logical thoughts that are hidden in the cosmos the subject finds in his or her own mind; he or she undertakes to articulate these thoughts in science and technology. Just as an artist’s apprentice is capable of reconstructing the original concept of the master from a work of art, so humans are capable of thinking the thoughts of God after him, as it were, that is, of retracing the thoughts of God whereby He created the world. Therein lies the meaning of science and technology (*PST* §39).

This doctrine of the Logos, developed in the ancient Stoa, adopted by the Church Father Augustine and incorporated into medieval scholasticism, Kuyper borrowed from his Free University colleague Jan Woltjer.⁸ And like Woltjer, Kuyper ties this Logos doctrine to a neo-Platonic realism of ideas. Universal regularities in the cosmos – and that is what Kuyper’s “relations” are all about – are traceable to *ideas* (as in Plato), yes to ideas *in the*

8 *PST* 194, appeals to Woltjer’s rectorial oration at the VU in 1891, “De wetenschap van de Logos.” In Woltjer, Jan 1931. *Verzamelde redevoeringen en verhandelingen*, vol. 1. Amsterdam: Standaard, 1–46. The Stoic doctrine of *logoi spermatikoi* or “logical seminal ideas” that would have been implanted in the world fits wonderfully well with the organic metaphors of romanticism.

mind of God (as in neo-Platonism). The cosmos is a real, objective embodiment of the ideas whereby God once created the world. That is why the human mind as the image-bearer of God is logically moored to the objective world. Thus one can say that Kuyper's critical realism, which we described earlier, seeks its foundation in a Platonic and scholastic "realism of ideas." And with that, the Cartesian split between subject and object seems to be superseded!

Kuyper works this perspective out for the human sciences. The world is partly visible and partly invisible, that is, partly somatic or bodily, partly psychic or spiritual. The human sciences focus on the latter. In the human sciences too the issue is to appropriate elements and relations. Here the method of the natural sciences can sometimes prove useful, as in the comparative study of religious *behaviors*. Nevertheless, the human sciences have their own methodology. After all, when it comes to spiritual matters, sensory observation is inadequate to observe the diverse elements and law-like relations that can be distinguished here.

The method of the human sciences must for this reason build knowledge in another way, from the mental subject as such, the latter still construed as general human consciousness. Kuyper's example is jurisprudence. People discover what is just not because they apprehend justice via the senses or with the aid of mental representations. No, its influence is "direct," for justice is a mental or spiritual power that grips people directly and engenders a subjective affection in their consciousness. Such affection leads to a permanent sense of justice or to a sudden inspiration of what is just. Here too, at the spiritual level, people display a twofold receptivity: openness for the moment that presents itself, for instance in the notion of justice, and susceptibility to the relationships that are involved, in this case the legal order.

For Kuyper the natural sciences and the human sciences are no more than extreme poles. Much is to be found between these poles. On the one side, Kuyper mentions mixed human sciences, including linguistics and historical science. The ideal motives of shapers of history acquire material form, as in battles. On the other hand, Kuyper regards the natural sciences as often not strictly empirical-factual but also as hypothetical-constructive, as for example the biological theory of descent (*PST* §42).

It is striking that Kuyper does not always associate the human sciences with the Logos doctrine or the realism of ideas. There was apparently little inducement to do so. The problem of how there can be agreement between subject and object seems more easily resolved for mental than for natural objects of knowledge, assuming that at the mental level an object may impress its stamp directly on an inquiring subject.

In any case, any overly bold support for the Logos doctrine in the human sciences would expose its weak side. That *natural* things would be metaphysically traceable to divine thoughts – "things are thinks," Woltjer⁹ used to say with George Berkeley – already means a far-reaching "logification" of created reality. But that in its deepest being all *spiritual* phenomena, too, should be seen as divine thoughts constitutes an intellectualism carried to an extreme. This intellectualism seems to conflict with Kuyper's reformational conviction that God as Sovereign has created everything according to its own character with *different* ordinances, that is to say, ordinances for the physical cosmos and for the organic world, and in the same way not only for the domain of logical thought but also for the fields of

9 Woltjer, *Verzamelde redevoeringen*, 217.

aesthetics, ethics and religion.

Yet time and again this intellectualism affects Kuyper's understanding of the human world. Then he presents a human being as a "logos" on a micro-scale. The life of the human consciousness, Kuyper states, "recapitulates itself in the logos, taken as *thought*" (*PST* 194). Does this profile of the human individual as a logical being not conflict with Kuyper's argument about the *religious* identity of the human person? Does it not ignore the Reformed confession of God's sovereignty over all and lead to metaphysical speculations about the alleged affinity of the divine and the human logos? Can earthly creatures rethink the thoughts of the heavenly creator? And does the Logos doctrine not contradict Calvin's confession of the radical depths of sin? How can sin lead to a total dislocation if it arises merely from a deficiency of the intellect?¹⁰

5. The Architect Gone Mad

We are confronted again with Kuyper the Calvinist. Sin arises not from an intellectual deficiency but from religious apostasy. It permeates all intellectual work, even science. How? Kuyper does not accept any neutrality postulate of science: "In every theory of knowledge which is not to deceive itself, the fact of sin must henceforth claim a more serious consideration." Sin is more than human failing or self-deception. It is essentially the breaking of the bond of love in the direction of God and of the surrounding world. For the problem of knowledge, this implies that the loving, sympathetic apprehension of things from the inside has been lost. Sin in science is a fundamental "*estrangement* from the object of our knowledge." Because of sin it is only superficially and in bits and pieces that we remain able to form a picture of reality (*PST* 106–107, 111).

Because of sin we lack insight into the coherence of the world as well as into its origin and destination.¹¹ We are without a real overview. There would have to be an Archimedean point, a final point of support *outside* created reality. Sin however shuts creatures up *within* the cosmos.¹² As a result, human knowledge is one-sided, limited, and fragmentary. The human individual is an architect who has gone mad and sits locked in his cell staring out through his window at one of his own constructions. He stares fixedly at the walls and spires but the sense of the whole eludes him since he can no longer grasp the building's purpose.¹³

Thus sin leads to a disintegration and distortion of knowledge. The sciences do offer an enormous heap accumulation of knowledge in detail, but they leave the whence, why and wherefore unanswered. In the world of science this must lead to complete skepticism.

10 I have in mind here Calvin's doctrine of sin as a *corruptio totalis*. According to the scholastic philosophy of Thomas Aquinas, sin did not arise from the intellect but from the will as a lower capacity of the human soul, the "capacity to desire," which abandoned the guidance of reason and thus went off the track. Reason, conceived as the essential center of human nature, was only "wounded" as a result, not totally corrupted. It is this view that sin is at bottom only a partial or oblique impairment of human nature that Calvin sharply opposes (*Institutes*, 2.1.9).

11 The view that sin affects science via the central notions of "the origin, coherence, and destiny of things" is fundamental for Kuyper "Common Grace in Science"; cf. *LC* 113f.; *PST* §43. This view reappears in Dooyeweerd's thesis (*New Critique*, vol. 1, 68–99) that religious ground-motives influence science via a set of central notions, the so-called cosmomic idea.

12 On Kuyper's notion of an "archimedean point," be it outside or inside the cosmos (*PST* 113, 84), Dooyeweerd expands systematically (*New Critique*, vol. 1, 8–21).

13 "Common Grace in Science," 449–450.

That it has not done so is thanks to God's goodness for humankind – in Kuyper's terminology God's "common grace"¹⁴ – because He still blesses people everywhere on earth with common sense, practical wisdom and the intuitive certainties of faith. That is the reason why all science proceeds from faith, faith in our own self-consciousness, in the trustworthiness of the senses, in the correctness of the laws of thought, in the presence of the universal and regular in particular phenomena, in axioms and general principles of a research program, and in the ties that bind us with our fellow man (*LC* 131; *PST* §46). It is these intuitive and practical certainties by which non-Christians too recognize something of the God-given coherence of life, and science is preserved from total dislocation. Yet, it is only in life restored by Christ and in the light of God's revelation that science can really blossom and regain a view of life's origin, intimate coherence and goal.

6. Theology between Critical Realism and Logos Doctrine

We have to turn now to theology. In his *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology* Kuyper wanted to make his theory of the sciences fruitful especially for the science of theology. But he had a great deal of difficulty in doing so, given the disparity in the *Encyclopedia* between a modern and a scholastic line of thought.

Let us look first at the modern line of thought. Applied to theology, Cartesianism and the critical realism that arose from it turned out to be untenable for Kuyper. How can the *cogito* grasp a sovereign power that transcends the cosmos? God can never become the mere object of a knowing subject or the outcome of a rational proof:

The object of religion is not only placed outside of this object-subject, but the subject as well as the object, and the relation of both, must find their ground and explanation in this central power. . . . This extra-cosmic and hyper-cosmic character, however, of every central power . . . is the very reason that neither observation nor demonstration are of the least avail in establishing the tie between our subject and this central power. . . . (*PST* 147)

In other words, the modern duality of knowing subject and object of knowledge can never be applied to God if all created reality, thus subject and object, are dependent on a creator that transcends them. The "dependent character of theology" (*PST* §59) excludes the Cartesian split of subject and object. To know God is only possible to the extent that the Transcendent gives itself to human knowledge. How? Through revelation!

More attractive for Kuyper, therefore, was the scholastic line of thought. In this view there is not an opposition but an affinity between subject and object. Particularly in the human sciences we are confronted with mental or spiritual realities that fall beyond the reach of the sensory perception. Spiritual realities are intimate. They press directly on the human mind without any strictly conceptual apprehension. They generate a permanent awareness or a sudden inspiration that connects with the spiritual world.

This argument seems tailored to fit Kuyper's view of theology. For theology is not "science of religion." In the positivist climate of his age, "science of religion" had become a popular formula amongst theologians for saving the academic respectability of theology. Kuyper did not need such a free-floating life buoy. Theology is a "*geesteswetenschap*," a science of mental or spiritual phenomena. It does not investigate religious rituals but spiritual realities; in the final analysis it deals with God. In the human sciences spiritual

14 *LC* 121–126; Klapwijk, "Antithesis and Common Grace."

forces urge themselves on the subject, but in theology we meet God as the “central power” *in* and *above* the cosmos. Proceeding from God as the central power and from His addressing man directly in terms of revelation, theology is able to grasp both the origin of religious consciousness and the phenomena of religious inspiration and its codification in Holy Scripture (*PST* §47).

How then to define theology? Theology has to be taken literally as a “logy” of the divine (“*Godskennisse*”), a science of God, even in a very intimate sense of the word. For if human knowledge in general is already, as we saw, a kind of rethinking of the thoughts of God, then theology certainly is. It is not only knowledge *about* God but in a sense also knowledge *of* God. It is dependent on divine revelation in the sense that revelation “flows from the auto-Theology in God Himself and has Theology, i.e. knowledge of God in man, for its result.” Theology is a full-fledged human science but simultaneously a rethinking or reflection of divine self-knowledge (*PST* 263).

This theory had ensconced itself in Reformed theology in the previous centuries through the work of Bernardinus de Moor and others.¹⁵ These men were not burdened with the split between subject and object. They presented theology as a science of God’s *revelation*. But they did so in a very special way! They proceeded from the thought that theology is concerned with knowledge of God but that knowledge of God in the absolute sense is reserved for the divine Logos. Thus they concluded that this original or “archetypal” self-knowledge of God falls to the human person, created in God’s image, in an inferred or “ectypal” way. True theology is a mirroring of God’s self-knowledge. Therefore its object is not God as such but God as He has revealed Himself. *Theologia ectypa* thus seems to be a modest theology. Modern epistemology’s ambition to prove or construct everything – if need be, even God or the phenomenon of religion – is foreign to it. Ectypal theology does not seek to ascend to God or to transcend the boundary of creation. It desires to be humble and dependent on the self-knowledge of God: “ectypal theology reveals to us the self-knowledge of God according to our *human capacity*” (*PST* 256).

Yes indeed, De Moor’s ectypal theology depends on revelation. But this theology is not to be understood as being simply based on faith in biblical revelation. Revelation is considered to be the channel through which God’s absolute and archetypal logical self-knowledge reaches us in terms of an ectypal logical reflection. Kuyper continues to speak the language of the Logos theory when he asserts that human theology is intended to be a strict reflection of archetypal theology based “on logical action.” Theology is “*zich indenken in,*” that is, “thinking our way into” divine self-knowledge. It is with the help of his *logos* that a theologian is meant to appropriate and process the “knowledge of God” that is made available to him:

He [man] is not only to appropriate that which has been revealed, but he is himself a link in that revelation. This is exhibited most strongly in his logos, since by his logos he appropriates revelation to himself, and in his logos reflectively (*abbildlich*) reveals something of the eternal logos. (*PST* 264; cf. 268–269, 299)

This line of thought ends up in a kind of Reformed scholasticism. Within the framework of the Logos doctrine, theology becomes an accommodation to neo-Platonic

15 Kuyper knew about the distinction between archetypal and ectypal theology from the work of the orthodox Reformed theologians of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. He was familiar in particular with the eight-volume *Commentary on Job. à Marck* of Bernhardinus de Moor (*PST* 238, 256).

speculations about the intellectual affinity of God and man: theology presents itself as a copy (“*Abbild*”) of divine auto-theology. And this intellectualism, as amongst the ancient Greek “*theologoi*,” is strongly elitist: theology is a special entrance to God. Kuyper would certainly not go so far as to say theology is an exclusive entrance to know God, but it surely has a privileged position: “Among the different assimilations of this knowledge of God, Theology as a *science* occupies a place of its own, which is defined by its nature” (*PST* 299).

7. Theology and the Innate, Created Nature of Faith

However, there are intervals in Kuyper’s exposition where he calls himself to order. No wonder! His initial modernist interpretation of science implied distance: a logical control of the objects to be investigated. His later scholastic interpretation of science implies affinity: a logical penetration of the objects to be investigated. But can there be any such logical penetration where God is concerned? Does God as the sovereign creator not stand outside and above all subjects and objects? And is He not knowable only through faith? And is this faith a logical activity? Calvin’s emphasis on the sovereignty of God and Luther’s emphasis on *sola fide* make it rather difficult for Kuyper to chart theology either according to the modern subject-object split or according to the affinities of the Logos doctrine.

Thus at crucial moments Kuyper abandons not only critical realism but also the Logos theory of the earlier Reformed theologians. He develops reservations about the distinction between archetypal and ectypal theology. They hinge on the cardinal question of the character of faith within human consciousness, because the distinction between archetypal and ectypal knowledge of God obscures the reformational insight that the human person can know God only through faith. To Luther *fides* meant saving faith in Christ, indispensable for humans in a state of sin. Kuyper suppose, more in general, that humans have a religious sensitivity in terms of faith. Even the ultimate commitments of non-Christians go back to a fiduciary function that is inherent in human nature. Faith is not a super-natural or super-creaturally gift *added* to human nature once for all at baptism, as the scholastic tradition teaches. “Grace never creates a new reality” (*PST* 238). On the contrary, the principle of Calvinism “constantly urges us to go back from the Cross to Creation” (*LC* 118). Every concrete act of belief or unbelief goes back to faith as it is implanted by the creator in human nature (*PST* 263–269).

The doctrine of faith disrupts Kuyper’s adhesion to the Logos doctrine. Previously we noticed that Kuyper saw faith as connected with science. Given the examples he used – faith in the reliability of the senses, in one’s own ego, in the validity of the laws of logic – it may have looked for a while as if faith is just an intuitive certainty that guides scientific research. But Kuyper’s *Encyclopedia* makes it clear that “faith obtains its absolute significance only in religion” (*PST* 149). Faith is in the final analysis *pistis*, an immediate certainty in the heart that flows from a religious choice and gives direction to life. The deepest essence of faith is the innate, primeval experience of human creatures whereby they discover themselves in distinction from *and* in connection with God who has revealed himself to them as their deepest Origin. In its core, faith correlates with divine revelation. All other evidences of faith are dependent on this primeval intuition.

Faith indeed is in our human consciousness the deepest fundamental law that governs every form of distinction, by which alone all higher “Differentiation” becomes established in our consciousness. . . . This general better knowledge of faith renders it possible to speak of

faith in every domain; and also shows that faith originates primordially from the fact that our ego places God over against itself as the eternal and infinite Being, and that it dares to do this, because in this only it finds its eternal point of support. Since . . . God created it in our human nature, this faith is but the opening of our spiritual eye and the consequent perception of another Being, excelling us in everything, that *manifests itself in our own being*. (PST 266–267)

Because faith is dependent on an appearance of the divine, it is not an inborn concept in the knowing subject, no *idea innata* in the sense of Descartes. Because it has been derailed by sin, it is even less a self-evident human characteristic. Faith has become obscured and darkened! God, however, has revealed himself, also to humanity fallen in sin, and has awakened faith to a new life, in Israel and the church. Therefore in the present dispensation faith has a double face; one must always qualify it with a negative or positive sign: “Christendom and Paganism stand to each other as the *plus* and *minus* forms of the same series” (PST 302). It is a matter on the one hand of unbelief, resistance or idolatry, belief in pseudo-revelations. It is a matter on the other hand of rebirth, saving faith, belief in salvation thanks to God’s revelation. Only through faith can the subject appropriate divine self-revelation:

This entire gold-mine of religion lies in the self-revelation of this central power to the subject, and the subject has no other means than *faith* by which to appropriate to itself the gold from this mine. (PST 149)

This reciprocal relationship of faith and revelation breaks through the scholastic speculations on the logical affinity of the human and the eternal logos that had impregnated the medieval as well as the old Reformed theology. The human person, created in the image of God, stands in an open relationship to God, and this relationship is in its deepest core not of a logical but of a religious nature. Kuyper likes to appeal to Calvin’s *Institutes* (I.3.1) in this matter. In human nature a religious seed has been laid (*semen religionis*) insofar as humans were created with a sense of the divine (*divinitatis sensus*). And where this spiritual eye opens and discerns God’s appearance, there faith begins to work (PST 263–75; LC 45–46).

This Calvin-oriented view of the innate, created nature of faith is fraught with implications for Kuyper’s view of science. If all humans have a sense of the divine, it becomes clear why faith and science cannot be uncoupled. Faith is a necessary or (in philosophical language) a transcendental *precondition* for all knowledge, even for scientific knowledge, because an original awareness of God is inherent in every person, even when he or she is the performing subject of science. This conception of faith has a very particular consequence for the status of theological science. Faith belongs not only to its transcendental precondition; it belongs at the same time to its actual theme. I mean the following. The subject matter of theology is not the phenomenon of religion, nor is it God himself. And yet, theology is focused on God. How then? Two activities are implied: logical reflection and faith. On the one side theology is a logical reflection upon the correlation of faith and revelation, that is, upon the way God revealed and reveals Himself in Scripture to those who believe in Him. On the other side this logical reflection is never autonomous; it proceeds from an a priori faith in divine revelation: “The perception of a mightier Ego, which is above and distinct from our own ego, is therefore the starting-point of all religion and of all knowledge of God” (PST 267).

This correlation concept¹⁶ – Kuyper did not work it out systematically – implies a redefinition of theology, an alternative for a theology based on Logos speculation. To put it in a nutshell, theology is a study of biblical revelation, not as a religious document in itself, but *as understood in the faith community of the church*. It can only lead to a logical clarification of the revelation of God that the church cherishes in faith. “Theology as science . . . can only lead to a clearer insight into the revealed knowledge of God” (*PST* 292).

This entirely intellectualistic way excludes, meanwhile, the spiritual experience of the Church in its entirety, as well as of individual believers. . . . This, however, is inconceivable, since theology is born of the Church, and not the Church of theology. Reflection does not create life, but *suo iure* life is first, after which reflection speaks its word concerning it. (*PST* 327)

What is widely recognized today, in particular in phenomenological and hermeneutical philosophies, namely that science is rooted in the pre-theoretical daily life experiences of a community, Kuyper discovered for theology. Theology reflects and refines the faith experiences of the church community. Theology is “bound to its object such as this shows itself in its own circle in life; i.e. *in casu* the Church” (*PST* 51). Thus for Kuyper theology should bear an ecclesiastical signature.¹⁷

8. Universities as Private Corporations

We return to our general theme, Kuyper’s conception of science. Attention needs to be given to the societal organization of science. How did Kuyper want to turn his fundamental view of science into institutional practice? His solution is well known: the free university!

The popular conception is that Kuyper had in mind an academic institution that would practice the sciences in the spirit of Calvinism and that he therefore wanted a “free” university. Even more popular is the view that Kuyper wanted to give “his” university in Amsterdam a confessional hallmark and that he therefore wanted to break the connection with the state. But these notions gloss over Kuyper’s argument that *all* scientific investigations should be free, that no thinker should be bound in conscience, and that academic institutions too must be allowed to develop in freedom without disguised subservience to other institutions.¹⁸

Kuyper was a champion of the emancipation of culture. Societal groups should be able to set themselves up as private communities so that all the spiritual energies of a folk

16 Kuyper occasionally defines theology as a theoretical reflection upon the *correlation* of faith and revelation. More often, in his Logos doctrine, he postulates a *continuity* between faith knowledge and theology, as we saw above. The result is an intellectualizing of both faith and revelation. I do not deny that a certain kind of knowledge is inherent in faith. But faith knowledge has an *analogous* character; it does not represent logical but religious insights. Take confessions, psalms and prayers. In contrast to the statements of systematic theology, such expressions cannot be subjected to the logical rules that hold in theoretical arguments.

17 In *PST* Kuyper develops a broad view of the systematic coherence of all the sciences and especially of theology and its subdivisions. For a discussion of his encyclopedia of the sciences and his encyclopedia of theology, see Klapwijk, J. 1987. “Abraham Kuyper over wetenschap en universiteit.” In C. Augustijn, J. H. Prins and H. E. S. Woldring (eds). *Abraham Kuyper: zijn volksdeel, zijn invloed*. Delft: Meinema, 82–86. See *supra* Chapter 18 for a revised and translated version of the original article.

18 Kuyper applied this even to theology: “The persistent heretic must be banished from the Church; a professor whose presence is a menace to the highest interests of a school must be dismissed; but from the field of theology no one can disappear, unless he leaves it of his own free will” (*PST* 596).

might be unleashed. Thus he chose decidedly for a “free university,” apart from his personal sympathies for Calvinism. He was also fundamentally opposed to any linkage of science to an ecclesiastical confession, even with respect to the Free University of Amsterdam, nowadays known as the VU University Amsterdam. Only theology, as we saw earlier, could for reasons of substance not do without an ecclesiastical setting.¹⁹

A free university is to Kuyper a university that is free from both state and church. Neither ecclesiastical nor political authorities should interfere in the formulating of problems or in the self-organization of the sciences. In the Middle Ages and also at the beginning of modern times, ecclesiastical supervision had hindered the self-development of science. A symptom of this was the case leveled against Galileo. Later, guardianship arose from the side of the state. A symptom of this for Kuyper was the Dutch Higher Education Act of 1876, which converted theology into some kind of science of religion. Theology was linked by law to historical, exegetical and philosophical disciplines, and dogmatic (systematic) theology was thrown out of Dutch universities. For Kuyper this directly occasioned the founding of the Free University (*PST* §96). But the basic error of his times as he saw it was not the misapprehension of theology but ignoring the insight that science can develop itself under the supervision of the state just as little as it can under the curatorship of the church.

Kuyper elaborated his conception of a free university on historical grounds, for systematic reasons, and on principle. Concerning the first, Kuyper recalled how the original medieval universities, those of Paris, Bologna, etc., were founded as private corporations. State universities were unknown. Science and the university formed a *respublica litterarum*, a world of its own of lettered and educated people alongside the worlds of the church and the state. Yet the church rather quickly found ways to be admitted into the academic world. The church was apprehensive about heretics; the universities were apprehensive about ecclesiastical privileges. In the eighteenth century the universities fell more and more under the influence of the national state. In part they were set up as government institutions; in part they were bent in their direction. Science was hired as a servant of the state. Kuyper could make the most of this “self-demeaning prostitution” of science.²⁰

In Kuyper’s day the state seemed as a rule to restrict itself to financing the state universities. Yet Kuyper writes with great foresight: “It cannot be said often enough, money creates power *for* the one who gives *over* the one who receives” (*SS* 478). In this connection he calls attention to contrary developments in the direction of the original model of “free corporations.” He refers to a selection of private universities in the United States, but also to the Belgian Leuven, the Swiss Freiburg, the (then still) British Dublin, and not to forget, the Free University of Amsterdam (*LC* 140; *PST* §96). From a historical standpoint the model of the state university is in fact an obstacle standing in the way of the entire process of the emancipation of culture.

19 At the Free University a reservation was made with respect to theology. Kuyper did not want theology as an academic discipline to be tied to ecclesiastical supervision. But he emphasized that theology should not free itself from the *object* of its study, that is, God’s revelation as this is experienced in the faith community of a church. He compared this practical link with the connection between medical science and hospital health care, and between jurisprudence and the administration of law in a given country (*Encyclopaedie der Heilige Godgeleerdheid*, vol. 1, 521). In that sense a binding of theology to the creeds of a church could be defended.

20 “Sphere Sovereignty.” In: *AK:ACR* 477—referenced below as *SS*.

9. Universities as a Sovereign Sphere

Kuyper's systematic argumentation in favor of free universities is another story. It is based on the doctrine of sphere sovereignty. *Souvereiniteit in eigen kring* or *Sphere sovereignty* was the title of Kuyper's address at the dedication of the Free University in 1880. The main idea Kuyper summarized in the winged statement: "there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over *all*, does not cry: 'Mine!'" (SS 488).

The doctrine of sphere sovereignty may be regarded as an elaboration by Kuyper of Calvin's basic idea of the absolute sovereignty of God. God holds all power on earth – power over the realm of nature, over the peoples and nations, over the course and destiny of history, and over culture and society. Even though the earth is bent under the burden of injustice and evil, God does not abandon his creation. He exercises in particular authority over the diverse communities in society, which Kuyper calls "spheres." These communities exist by virtue of the will of God, who has given each sphere its own inner law of life. Through these "ordinances" the life of society is subjected to God's almighty power.

Since Christ's resurrection this power is in his hands: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Matthew 28:18). God's sovereignty resides since Easter in the sign of Jesus' messianic kingship (SS 467). Nowhere in the world do we come directly upon God's exercise of power in Christ, but *indirectly* Christ proves his authority to the utmost, namely through people who in one way or another have received a mission, an office, a function: political rulers, church authorities, parents, nurturers, employers, and so forth. Everywhere that people have been placed over other people in the distinct spheres of society, authority is exercised "by the grace of God" or, more precisely, by authorization of the *messiah incognito*.

Is not all exercise and misuse of power sanctioned beforehand in this way? Quite the contrary! The purport of sphere sovereignty is in the first place that all earthly authority is a *derived* authority. It is not an autonomous human power but always a mandate subjected to the rule of God and to messianic criticism. Authority exercised by people must be accounted for.

The purport of sphere sovereignty is, secondly, that earthly authority is *distributed* authority. In order to prevent the misuse of power, God has entrusted the fullness of his power to no single person or circle in society; no potentate can claim it as a "divine right." Human societies have always been divided into spheres: kings, priests, magicians, heads of family have always functioned alongside each other, having their own competency. Usurpation of power, by a royal dynasty for example, remains possible, but sooner or later it evokes resistance from adjoining spheres (SS 467f.). And that will occur all the more strongly in a modern society where the spheres have been emancipated.

Sphere sovereignty is, thirdly, a *creational structure*. "It lay in the order of creation," Kuyper says (SS 469). This view was developed by the German Calvinist and political philosopher Johannes Althusius and formulated as a doctrine for society by the Dutch statesman Groen van Prinsterer, who delimited the church and the state from each other as "sovereign spheres." For Kuyper sphere sovereignty had become a crucial matter in modern times, since this period also witnesses the rise of two alternative doctrines, the doctrines of absolute state authority and absolute popular sovereignty. Both doctrines flew in the face of Kuyper's conviction that all authority in society to be ultimately anchored in the

sovereign will of the creator.

Sphere sovereignty is in the fourth place a *pluralist* notion. Alongside the church, economics, family life, science and art, Kuyper wanted to honor the state as a sphere of its own with its own rules: the administration of law and justice (*GG* III:71f.; *SS* 467–68). But he rejected the glorification of the state or of the so-called sovereign will of the people. His doctrine of sphere sovereignty can be seen as a pluralist vision against the monolithic doctrines of state sovereignty and popular sovereignty.²¹

Kuyper grants the state a special position vis-à-vis the other spheres. The state is called to keep the different communities “within just limits,” that is, within the bounds of law. Public justice implies that the state is meant not only to offer the protection of law to individual citizens. It is also meant to do justice to the other communities, for communities can also be threatened in their existence. The state must create public conditions that allow non-state communities to flourish. In that sense the state is the “sphere of spheres” and can even be described as the “master planner.”²² Even with respect to science!

This brings us back to the academic world. The universities and the sciences practiced there constitute for Kuyper a sovereign sphere. Here we find the systematic reason why universities ought to be free institutions. But the state cannot completely withdraw from the scene. As soon as science forms a visible organism, it is up to the state “to define its sphere of justice” (*SS* 477). The state must create public conditions for the free development of science but can have no say on the terrain of science itself. Not even when it comes to appointments! The state has no “spiritual criterion,” no mental yardstick by which to judge academic decisions. Any interventions of government are as intolerable an anomaly for the freedom of science today as interference from the side of the church was in the past).²³

10. Universities as Worldview Oriented

Kuyper considers the concept of free universities *historically* defensible, given the origin of Europe’s universities. He considers it *systematically* defensible in terms of sphere sovereignty. He also considers it defensible *as a matter of principle*, given the inner-connectedness of faith and science. To be truly free, science must be able to develop itself consistently, also in a university setting, on the basis of a faith perspective or worldview orientation. With that, we return to the starting point of this article.

Even this principled line of thought in favor of a free university is as such not aimed at claiming an exclusive place for a Calvinist university. The intention is that every academic institution should profile itself according to the life principle that drives it, whether that be Catholic, humanist, evolutionist or whatever. The life-view tie must be strengthened and

21 *LC* 85–90; *GG* III: 80–82. In Kuyper’s doctrine of sphere sovereignty, pluralist and romantic motifs are tangled together. The spheres are described as independent, created after their own ordinances, but by the same token as “organic parts” of society as a whole (*LC* 90–91). This romantic approach leads to a holistic theory of society that Kuyper then proceeds to limit by posing the state as mechanical *opposite* society as organic.

22 *SS* 468, 472, 477. Because of this asymmetry Kuyper sometimes associates sphere sovereignty only with communities *within* human society. The sovereignty of the state and, eventually, that of the church are then juxtaposed to society (*LC* 90–91, 79).

23 *SS* 478. Kuyper does not carry his systematic argumentation to the limit. In some cases he admits the need for financial support by the state, provided “that it works only for the liberation that would have scholarship again seize ‘sovereignty in its own sphere’” (*SS* 478).

“unnatural bonds” should be cast off, beginning with the tie to the state (*LC* 140).

But then also the tie to institutional churches! The existence of Catholic, Lutheran or Calvinist next to public universities and colleges does not necessarily imply formal ties to a church denomination or confession. Kuyper meant only to say that principles are such that they have an all-round power over people. They can drive people not only towards their own type of church but also towards a unique type of statecraft, of science, etc. But Kuyper rejects any lateral linking of church and science just as firmly as he rejects any lateral linking of state and science or of church and state. Kuyper desires a “secularization” of science, not in terms of religious neutrality or absence of ideology but in terms of separation from ecclesiastical supervision. The responsibility of scientists has to be distinguished from and separated from the responsibility of church authorities. In some circumstances theology may be a case apart.²⁴

This third, principled line of thought is characteristic for Kuyper’s *Lectures on Calvinism*. The universities that set themselves up as free institutions because of their historical origin and systematic view are presented here as having a favorite position to organize research and education in keeping with their own intellectual-spiritual motivation. In contrast it is in the state universities that the academic staff may feel hindered in thinking through the implications of their principles and in working with kindred spirits, and where the illusion is cherished of a fully objective, neutral or principle-free science.

I must add that in the closing part of his “Sphere Sovereignty” Kuyper amalgamates the systematic and principled lines of thought that he distinguishes elsewhere. He does so when, in defense of the Free University in Amsterdam, he wants to “ask for the sovereignty of our own principle in our own scholarly sphere.” This argument is confusing. Kuyper may have had good reasons to emphasize the legitimacy of his VU as an institution based on Calvinist principles. But can this intellectual-spiritual position be defended by an appeal to sphere sovereignty? Can we speak of “the royal right of each principle to ‘sovereignty in its own sphere’?”²⁵

Sphere sovereignty can set boundaries between different terrains of life (state, church, business, family life, university, etc.). But it cannot demarcate different spiritual principles (Paganism, Humanism, Calvinism, etc.) in the same way. The different terrains are “sovereign” in the sense that they have laws of their own that may go back to creation ordinances. But the worldview differences between paganism, humanism, nihilism, Calvinism, etc. are anything but sovereign positions, for they do not result from creation

24 I quote: “A strong confessional church, but no confessional civil society, no confessional state. This secularization of state and society originated, in its deepest ground, from Calvinism” (*GG* II: 175). Only for theology did the VU University specify a confessional tie for practical reasons, that is, in connection with the training for the ministry in a specific denomination. See VU 1895. *Publicatie van den Senaat der Vrije Universiteit in zake het onderzoek ter bepaling van den weg die tot de kennis der gereformeerde beginselen leidt*. Amsterdam, thesis 1.

25 *SS* 481. Kuyper is not always consistent. In some cases he attributes sovereignty not only to communities as wholes like the state and the church but also to the component parts as townships and villages or dioceses and parishes (*LC* 96). However, in the latter the matter is one not of heterogeneous spheres but of homogeneous groups, that is, of comparable parts of the same whole. Amongst homogeneous groups a practical division of tasks is required, not a fundamental delimiting of competences, an appeal to relative autonomy rather than to sphere sovereignty. Sometimes Kuyper even goes further and individualizes the notion of sphere sovereignty referring to the “liberty of conscience” or the “sovereignty of the individual personality” (*LC* 108).

ordinances but from human choices and decisions. They penetrate *into* the spheres of life, giving the institutions there a spiritual (or ideological) direction. These directions are not self-evident at all. They are controversial, giving rise to differences of opinion and theoretical disputes. For the VU, or for any academic institution with a religious or worldview background, this implies that its spiritual identity is vulnerable, open to criticism, not to be legitimized by an easy appeal to sphere sovereignty or creational orderings.

In a certain sense one could say that Kuyper was born a century too soon. Our times have developed a much more critical attitude towards the so-called objectivity thesis or neutrality postulate of the sciences than Kuyper encountered in the positivist climate of thought of the nineteenth century. And even though in our secularized world we often speak about our deeper motivations with less self-assurance than former generations did, it remains a pressing question whether our thinking is not based on similar root convictions, whether for example the present-day debates on fair trade or a sustainable planet are not guided by comparable worldview paradigms, and whether the sophisticated research programs of our universities should have to suffer under the yoke of bureaucratic state planning or merciless marketing strategies. Those are some of the critical questions that have surfaced in our age, and Kuyper would have recognized himself in them!

Critical Evaluation of Kuyper's Theory of Science: Four Challenges

Kuyper presents the human person to us as a fundamentally religious creature that God has set on this earth to be the bearer of His image. Culture and society, even the world of science, in his view ought to reflect this ultimate commitment to God. At the same time Kuyper acknowledges that this bond with God has been thoroughly disrupted. Hence his diligent efforts for the Christianizing of culture and his struggle against the secular humanism of the Modern age.

Is this view still practical in our postmodern era, which not only has declared God dead, but which has also dethroned humanity, and in which indeed nihilism and materialism rule the roost? Anyone who picks up on Kuyper's message and wants to pursue it will have to disengage it from the form that its author chose. Kuyper did not limit his program to the re-Christianizing of the private spheres of family, church and school. On the contrary, he wanted to carry it through in all the terrains of life. He did so by establishing separate Christian organizations. He expanded Groen van Prinsterer's motto, "In our isolation lies our strength," in the nineteenth century to a militant neo-Calvinism over against the revitalization of Catholicism, an upcoming socialism, and the conservative civil order of the so-called Liberal bourgeoisie. In the Netherlands this striving led to "pillarization," that is to say, a splitting up of society on the basis of worldview features, in which the divided segments of the population established their own schools, political parties, labor unions, radio and television stations, daily newspapers, hospitals and the like. This pillarization, so aptly characterized by Harry Van Dyke as "institutionalized worldview pluralism," began to crumble only after the Second World War.

In our century of digital networks, expansive market economies and worldwide ecological crises, we can hardly even imagine the ordered vision of society that Kuyper aimed to achieve. His vision also raises objections. After all, he often extended the idea of a religious antithesis into an organizational antithesis, into a division that aimed to separate

the Christian part of the people from the rest of the nation. How biblical is this? Christ does indeed speak of a struggle between the Kingdom of God and the power of the Evil One, a struggle in which we human beings are involved lock, stock, and barrel. However, is it not above all a spiritual struggle? Is it not a struggle that believing persons must first of all pinpoint within themselves, in the rebellion against God that they encounter in their own heart or life?

Nevertheless, Kuyper continues to fascinate with his dream to call the whole people back to the service of God and to even place the world of scientific learning in the perspective of the coming Kingdom of God. Is this message still relevant for us today? Which challenges lie hidden in his theory of science for our times? I will name four. They focus successively on worldviews, transcendental hermeneutics, transformation in science and correlative theology.

11. Worldviews Function as Mediators

Kuyper confronts us in his *Lectures on Calvinism* with the question: what is the basis of our religious view of reality? Is the Christian religion in a general sense our starting point? Or do we seek to join a concrete existing worldview, a life-system that has its roots in the Christian faith and simultaneously renders this faith operative in a given historical situation? Kuyper leaves no doubt about his choice for the latter. He chooses for Calvinism, the worldview that in the age of the Reformation not only restored the relation with God but also took up the challenges of modernity and so ushered in a prominent new era in history.

Kuyper's question entails a prime challenge for Christian philosophizing. Do we begin from a religious starting point in general, for instance the Christian ground-motive in the spirit of Dooyeweerd, or the Holy Scripture in the spirit of Vollenhoven? Or do we, along with Kuyper, place a more specific relation between philosophy and religion? Must we not position ourselves in the religious tradition of Christianity and look there for those worldview conceptions that can help us along in the spiritual struggle with the problems of our own time?

Kuyper and Dooyeweerd clash here. Kuyper wants to take into account the impact of worldviews on philosophical reflection. Dooyeweerd wants to keep worldview and philosophy separated for, although both are religiously determined, they nevertheless are of a different nature and have a distinct task. Worldview is pre-theoretical; it offers practical orientation in our lives. Philosophy is theoretical; it offers scientific reflection.²⁶ Kuyper would not deny this last point, but he emphasizes nevertheless:

- (a) All philosophy has a starting point in a religion or pseudo-religion.
- (b) Religions and pseudo-religions become concrete in worldview (or ideological) conceptions.
- (c) These worldviews function as mediators between religion and philosophy.

What do these three theses mean for us? Christian philosophy, also in the mode of reformational philosophy, rests on basic concepts that have been formed in history as an expression of a worldview. Are these basic concepts exclusively Christian or reformational? Not necessarily, because in our time, frames of reference are often broader and worldviews opener than in previous centuries. As a matter of fact, in Kuyper's Calvinism we already

²⁶ *New Critique*, vol. 1, 128, 156–168.

detected all kinds of novel ideas. Be that as it may, we are at present surrounded by a whole universe of worldview key concepts, such as stewardship, durable lifestyle, ideological critique, personal integrity, the preservation of creation, universal human rights, etc., that have been historically mediated and that can still be acknowledged to be authentically Christian.

Philosophia Reformata offers a good example of this shift towards worldview. In many articles an explicit appeal to a religious ground-motive or to Scripture is simply absent. However, authors do struggle with all kinds of central values that the reader recognizes to be worldview applications of the Biblical message. Looking back we even find this worldview orientation in the philosophy of Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd themselves! Dooyeweerd's religious ground-motives of the West are replicas of the life-systems in Kuyper's *Lectures on Calvinism*. Moreover, the theory of both thinkers of the modal spheres is a philosophical elaboration of the idea of sphere sovereignty in Groen and Kuyper.

12. From Transcendental Critique to Transcendental Hermeneutics

Along with worldviews we get saddled with philosophical pluralism. After all, every worldview presupposes a viewer who has an outlook on the world from a specific point of view. In other words, worldviews are by definition bound to place and time, and therefore also subject to a change in perspective. Where there are shifting worldviews, there pluralism in philosophy will arise.

Even Kuyper struggled with philosophical pluralism. He sought affiliation with the *Weltanschauung* of the Reformers of the sixteenth century, but it was not enough for him. He did not want to define his Calvinism strictly in terms of the small city state of Calvin's Geneva. Instead he wanted "to connect it with the human consciousness, such as it had developed itself at the end of the nineteenth century."²⁷ That is why it is correct to speak of "neo-Calvinism."

What Kuyper wanted also affects us. Must Christian philosophy issue into a worldwide theory, applicable *urbi et orbi*? Or should it be timely and topical by constantly anticipating new developments in thought and new relevant problems? Must the Christian colleagues in the Far East, Africa or Latin America articulate their philosophy in exactly the same way as we in the Western world? Is Christian philosophy in principle not a philosophy *in loco*, anchored in the Biblical message but with a local elaboration?²⁸

Inherent in philosophical pluralism is the threat of relativism. A counterweight is needed. Let us therefore esteem philosophy in the spirit of Dooyeweerd as a theoretical reflection that distinguishes itself as a "transcendental critique." I mean that philosophy needs to give critical account of the fundamental presuppositions that guide theoretical thought, not only in the form of religious ground-motives, but also of worldview convictions. For even though worldviews do not belong to the field of theorizing, when they have an effect on theories they need to be accounted for philosophically.

How do worldviews operate in theoretical discourse? They throw a certain light on the discussion. They offer a paradigmatic frame of reference within which arguments are critically weighed. More precisely, they form the hermeneutical or interpretative horizon

27 *Encyclopaedie der Heilige Godgeleerdheid*, vol. 1, vi.

28 Klapwijk, J. 1987. "Reformational Philosophy on the Boundary of the Past and the Future." *Philosophia Reformata* 52: 126–131.

within which a theory needs to prove itself. Take the theory of evolution. The discussion on this issue between creationists, naturalists and others is often very unsatisfying. Why? Because the opponents are preoccupied with the facts, but hardly ever give critical account of the hermeneutical horizon within which they bring up these facts for discussion.

Kuyper is different. He is aware of the hermeneutical impact of worldviews and life-systems and indeed puts his cards on the table as far as his Calvinism is concerned. He challenges us, in fact, to broaden the transcendental assignment. This implies that we must seek to bring to light in the philosophical discussion not only the religious motives (Dooyeweerd), but also the worldview presuppositions that often form the proper cause of the difference of opinion between us and our opponents. In short, the time has come to make the transition from a transcendental critique to a transcendental hermeneutics of theoretical thought. This last may also be called a “depth hermeneutics.”²⁹

13. From Synthesis and Antithesis to Transformation in Science

Kuyper takes his starting point in the reformational basic conviction that each person has at depth a religious character and that, in the center of his conscious life, there is an open window to eternity. Thus he breaks with the Scholastic thesis that the human person has a rational nature, a nature that on the one side can develop freely, and on the other side has an inclination to the grace of God as its supernatural perfection. In other words, in Scholasticism scientific reason is autonomous, with a proviso. Whenever reason clashes with faith – which is the openness of the intellect to a higher, supernatural enlightenment – reason must submit to the latter, to the faith of the Church.

Kuyper rejects this relative autonomy of reason that leads to a dual or synthetic view of science and faith. Thus he also rejects the intellectual character of faith as a receptivity of reason for the divine gift of grace. Faith is not a supra-natural orientation; on the contrary it belongs to the creational or natural equipment of humanity. In all circumstances faith gives direction to human activities, also to the project of science. People can turn away from God, but this choice too is religiously determined. For this reason, Kuyper sees in world history the manifestation of a religious division between the reign of God and the forces of evil, an “antithesis of principles” that pervades culture and science.

The big question now is: does this religious antithesis end up in a scientific antithesis? Does it necessarily lead to an organized split between worldly and believing science, a struggle of life and death between the “normalists” and the “abnormalists”? This is indeed at first sight the import of Kuyper’s argument.

Upon reflection Kuyper recoils from this radical position. At that point he does not conceal his admiration for Plato, Aristotle, Kant and Darwin and makes an appeal for cooperation between Christians and dissenters. He then seems to fall back into the scholastic dualism of nature and grace, reason and faith. The sciences, at least the lower sciences, are supposed to be secular and free from religious beliefs.

However, there is a third option, as I have argued in this article. At a crucial moment Kuyper asks the question whether the religious antithesis must necessarily lead to a scientific split and hence the establishment of a separate science. Then follows the challenging

29 Klapwijk, Jacob 2008. *Purpose in the Living World? Creation and Emergent Evolution*. Translated and edited by Harry Cook. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 191–210; Klapwijk “Reformational Philosophy,” 115–126.

proposition: Christians can offer space for the factual insights of people of another mind by critical appropriation. How? They can appropriate the factual insights by disengaging them from the religious “hypothesis” on which they are built and by incorporating them in the body of their own science. For factual knowledge is no neutral information; it always functions in a greater meaningful context. In short, being a Christian in science demands an active effort of those involved, namely to frame the facts in a new hermeneutical context, that of faith. In Kuyper’s last proposal the Christian religion does not change the facts, but it puts them in a new light. Faith does not present itself as a supernatural counterbalance for science. Nor does it involve a scientific split, an antithetical alternative for mainstream science. But it does lead, time and again, to transformation, that is to a reinterpretation and revaluation of the subjects that are raised in scientific discussions. For a more detailed elaboration of this proposal.³⁰

14. Towards a Correlative Theology Based on Creation

No science was nearer to Kuyper’s heart than theology. If theology is, as the word itself suggests, the study of God, does it issue into knowledge *about* God or is it perhaps even knowledge *of* God? Put even stronger: does it have to do with divine self-knowledge in the sense that the divine Logos mirrors itself in a special manner in the human logos, more precisely in the logical consciousness of the theologian?

We have to realize that the Logos doctrine has an affinity with the Scholastic position discussed above. Does the key role of the human logos imply that we have an intellectual access to God? Does theology imply that we can think and speak about the Supreme Being without believing? At once the question arises: how does *theo-logical* thinking relate to faith?

At crucial moments Kuyper looks for an alternative to the Scholastic approach. In such a case he primarily appeals to Luther. He points to the Reformer’s *sola fide* and *sola Scriptura*. We can only have knowledge of God through believing in God’s revelation in Christ and in Scripture; God has revealed Himself through the ages to his people in *faith*. Knowledge of God is therefore a reciprocal relation, for faith is by its very nature oriented towards revelation and revelation by its very nature is intended to solicit faith. To say, as Scholastics do, that theology is a *logical* reflex of the divine Logos is implicitly to deny this correlation. (I prefer to use the term “correlation,” which can be found as early as the *Apology* of Luther’s colleague Melanchthon, even though the word is not typical of Kuyper.³¹) So, what about theology as an academic discipline? It can be defined as the subsequent logical reflection on the intimate bond between revelation and faith. It is a logical and methodological application of this very correlation.

Kuyper distances himself even farther from Scholasticism by appealing to Calvin. Faith in God does not result from grace as an additional reality, a super-natural gift of divine grace infused in human nature in baptism. In Calvin’s view faith has its basis in

30 See Klapwijk, Jacob 1986. “Antithesis, Synthesis, and the Idea of Transformational Philosophy,” *Philosophia Reformata* 51: 138–154 and “Epilogue: The Idea of Transformational Philosophy.” In J. Klapwijk, S. Griffioen, and G. Groenewoud (eds). *Bringing into Captivity Every Thought*. Lanham: University Press of America, 241–266.

31 Melanchthon: “the promise and faith stand in a reciprocal relation” and “the promised mercy correlatively requires faith”; in Latin: “*promissionem et fidem correlativa esse*” and “*promissam misericordiam correlativè requirere fidem*” (*The Apology of the Augsburg Confession* [1531]. Tredition Classics 2011, Part 9).

creation itself. The human person has been created so that he or she has by nature a “sense of deity,” even though this capacity has been disrupted through sin and needs to be restored by grace, that is, by God’s benevolence towards those who repent.

Here I see the relevance of Kuyper’s analysis for present-day theology. His view of the connection between faith and revelation is different from Rudolf Bultmann, Paul Tillich and many others. In their method of correlation the relation between subject and object of modern theory of science holds center stage. Bultmann wants to attune the meaning of the gospel to the concrete life situation of the modern subject. Tillich seeks to interpret the symbols of Biblical revelation as answers to the existential questions of the finite human person. Both approaches imply a restriction of the Word by deriving the standard for the Word’s meaning from the subject.

Kuyper’s conception comes much closer to the method of correlation in Gerrit C. Berkouwer. Berkouwer, too, criticized the polarity of subject and object in Modern theology from the start.³² Nevertheless, Kuyper surpasses also Berkouwer on a very basic point. Berkouwer’s conception of correlation is ambivalent in so far as it emphasizes that faith comes from hearing of the Word, the message of Christ’s redemption. However, precisely in this redemptive historical meaning of the word there cannot be any strict correlation between faith and revelation. After all, it is the preaching of the cross that brings about faith in Christ as the redeemer!

However, is faith merely the fruit of the cross? Is it not also the fulfillment of the creaturely destiny of humankind? Kuyper’s position is so challenging because along with Calvin he constantly wants to return from the cross to the creation (*LC* 118). Dooyeweerd writes correctly: “Abraham Kuyper was . . . the first to regain for theology the scriptural insight that faith is a unique function of our inner life implanted in human nature at creation.”³³ Well then, in this creaturely deepened sense of the word Kuyper displays for us the correlation of faith and revelation as the indispensable link, a source of energy never to be relinquished even in a strictly methodical pursuit of theology.

The gains of this methodological position seem to be quite evident when one takes into consideration that the theology of the twenty-first century will have to prove its mettle on a global stage, that is to say, over against the major world religions and Western secularism. Its message will have to sound as a message of redemption and salvation in the spirit of Berkouwer. However, this message can only take hold when it appeals to something that slumbers in all humankind, a sensitivity for the divine that, however much distorted and suppressed, is created and grafted in human nature right from the beginning and must therefore also be capable of evoking recognition amongst people today.

32 Moor, Johannes C. de 1980. *Towards a Biblically Theological Method: A Structural Analysis of Dr. G.C. Berkouwer’s Hermeneutical-Dogmatic Method*. Kampen: Kok, 67.

33 Dooyeweerd, H. 1979. *Roots of Western Culture: Pagan, Secular, and Christian Options*. Edited by Mark Vander Vennen and Bernard Zylstra, translated by John Kraay. Toronto: Wedge Publishing Foundation, 91.