

16

The Viability of Kuyper's Idea of Christian Scholarship

Daniël F. M. Strauss

1. Stating the Problem

The idea of Christian Scholarship crucially depends upon a correct understanding of human thought in its integrality. The decisive issue is whether one proceeds from first juxtaposing “faith” and “reason.” When this is done an unbridgeable gulf is introduced – and it seems very difficult if not impossible to come to an integral and radical understanding of the possibility of Christian Scholarship. By looking at the shortcomings still present in Kuyper's conceptions in this regard it will be required to give an indication of the way in which an alternative approach opens up a new understanding of the viability if the idea of Christian Scholarship.

2. Scholastic Influences

The initial position of classical scholasticism was dualistic: human reason, not radically affected by sin but merely “wounded” by it, served as the natural light illuminating humankind's life in all “worldly” affairs. This domain, guided by natural reason, formed the relatively autonomous substructure for the domain of supra-natural grace where the church and the Bible were located. The state, as the highest natural form of life, should accomplish the establishment of the premier natural goal in life, namely goodness, whereas the church, as hierarchical supra-natural institute of grace, should bring humankind to its supra-natural perfection, i.e., his eternal well-being. In *Quadragesimo Anno*, the Papal encyclical of May 15, 1931, this perspective is formulated as follows:

Surely the church does not have the task to bring man to a merely transient and defective happiness, since it has to take him to eternal well-being.¹

3. Reformed Scholasticism

Reformed scholasticism tried to re-establish the bond between these two “domains” – without obeying the reformational acknowledgement of Christ's rule over all of life consistently. Dooyeweerd phrases it as follows:

In Reformed Scholasticism, nature can never be conceived of as the antipode of grace or as its

¹ Schnatz, H., ed. 1973. *Päpstliche Verlautbarungen zu Staat und Gesellschaft, Originaldokumente mit Deutscher Übersetzung*, Darmstadt, 403.

relatively autonomous substructure. For, in conformity to Augustine, Reformed Scholasticism always binds the natural light of reason to the light of Scripture. In so doing, moreover, it falls into the same misconception regarding the relationship of theology and philosophy that I pointed out earlier in connection with the great church father. Theology is supposed to take the non-Reformed philosophy of the schools under its wing, in order to accommodate it to orthodox Reformed doctrine and to keep its latent dangerous tendencies under control. It will be very suspicious of a Reformed philosophy that does not bind itself to theology, for it is theology, as the “queen of the sciences” (*regina scientiarum*), that is supposed to come up with the Scriptural principles to which the other sciences must conform.²

With Kuyper this reformed scholastic position developed into a twofold dualism. On the one hand Kuyper continued the liberating perspective of the reformation, given in his frequently quoted proclamation of Christ’s kingship over all spheres of life: “There is no thumb-width within the entire domain of human life of which Christ, the Sovereign of all, does not claim: ‘Mine.’”³ On the other hand he maintained crucial elements of the tradition of reformed scholasticism. The second dualism alluded to manifests itself within this second line of thought. It concerns Kuyper’s distinction between common grace and particular grace.

Kuyper eliminates Christ from the domain of “common grace.” Christ, as Head of particular grace (and the “church”), cannot exert a direct but only a “sideways” (*zijdelingse*) influence on the sphere of common grace.

Notwithstanding burning only within the walls of the institutional church, the Christian religion spreads its light through the windows of the church widely outside it, illuminating all differentiations and ties of life, expressing themselves in diverse manifestations of human activity. (*GG* II:272)

For this reason the congregation of Christ, with its “influence on state and civil society,” aims at nothing more “than a moral triumph,” not applying confessional ties nor exercising authoritarian rule (*GG* II:270). Through its “side-ways” operation the church-institute aims at “carrying human life to a higher level, to enrich and purify it, and to allow it to mature in its fullness” (*GG* II:49). This position is faithful to the position defended by Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), the supreme medieval champion of Roman Catholic thought. Thomas Aquinas advocates that the conviction that “grace” does not abolish “nature,” but perfects it – *gratia naturam non tollit, sed perficit*.

That Kuyper in this line of his thought de-formed the radical and integral meaning of God’s creation into two opposite realms/domains, could also be seen from the way in which he distinguished between state and church: “The point of departure of the State is contained in the given nature, that of the church, on the contrary, is supra-natural” (*GG* II:110). And further on the same page: “The opposition is and remain thus that the starting-point of the state is to be found in creation, in nature and in common grace, whereas the starting-point of the church lies in the recreation, in the miracle and in particular grace.”

In the testimony of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod about human rights from the year 1983 we read the following correction to dualist worldviews:

2 Dooyeweerd, H. 1949. *Reformatie en Scholastiek in de Wijsbegeerte*, Franeker, 62. Dooyeweerd, H. 2012. *Reformation and Scholasticism in Philosophy: Volume 1 The Greek Period*. Collected Works Series A, Volume 5(1). Grand Rapids: Paideia Press, 38.

3 Quoted by Veenhof, C. 1939. In *Kuypers Lijn*, Goes: Oosterbaan, 28. See *AK:ACR* 488.

Dualist world-views always misconstrue the biblical idea of antithesis. The antithesis gets defined, not in terms of a spiritual warfare which is being waged in every sector of life, but along structural lines. It places one set of societal structures off against another – for example, church against state, a mission station against a political party. Christians then end up fighting the wrong battles.⁴

The genuine reformation of human thought means a radical “metanoia,” “turn-around,” of the human heart: the heart which, being reborn in Christ, would re-direct one’s life in its entirety into obedience to God. To explore the image used by Kuyper: Scholasticism confined the “light of Scripture” within the walls of the church institute; reformed scholasticism, according to Kuyper, opened the “windows,” enabling the “lamp of the Christian religion” to illuminate human life outside the church; a truly reformational and therefore radically Christian attitude must penetrate to the light of God’s Word which, through the life-giving Spirit of God, enlightens the root of human existence renewed by the redemptive work of Christ such that the Christian can blossom in all walks of life – active in serving and honoring God whether you eat or drink. This alternative formulation, that shows full continuity with Kuyper’s emphasis on Christ’s rule over all of life, provides us with an encompassing starting point in the assessment of Christian scholarship and the ideal of a Christian University.

4. “Twofold Scholarship” (“*Tweeërlei Wetenschap*”):

Anticipating modern philosophy of science

In the second volume of his *Encyclopaedie der Heilige Godgeleerdheid* (1894) Kuyper advances his idea of “twofold scholarship.”⁵ He relates it to two kinds of people – people who differ because their lives depart from diverging starting points manifested in opposing directions, also within the domain of the intellectual enterprise.

Kuyper emphasizes, alluding to regeneration, that this difference finds its origin outside the human consciousness.⁶ It does not mean that Christians and non-Christians live in different worlds – their scholarly activities are directed towards penetrating into a cosmic order.⁷ As a consequence he does not want to claim a twofold truth because there is no room for two representations of reality that differ in principle. What is considered to be mutual by both kinds of science and scholarship is the concern for a common business, namely that of practicing science, as well as the disposal over a similar sensory apparatus and a shared logic serving the assessment of arguments and demonstrations.⁸

Although we may want to formulate what is shared and what is distinct differently, it is clear that Kuyper did have a clear understanding of the distinctiveness of *structure* and *direction*. This insight indeed captures the core understanding of the biblical revelation because it entails the ultimate rejection of every approach dividing creation into two realms – one that is good and another one that is evil.

The Bible does not localize evil in a terrain, but in the apostate direction of humankind’s

4 *RES 1983 Testimony on Human Rights*. Grand Rapids: The Reformed Ecumenical Synod, 76.

5 “Tweeërlei wetenschap.”

6 Kuyper, A. 1894. *Encyclopaedie der Heilige Godgeleerdheid*. Amsterdam, 98.

7 *Ibid.*, 11.

8 *Ibid.*, 102ff. Less than two decades after this edition of the *Encyclopaedie* appeared intuitionistic mathematics started to question the universal validity of the logical principle of the excluded middle.

heart, while salvation equally is a directional matter (seek the kingdom of God – on every terrain). If we look at philosophy and the various academic disciplines from the depth perspective of worldview, the most remarkable given is that we are constantly confronted by what we could call a surrogate salvific appeal. In other words, in the multiplicity of non-Christian approaches to scholarship we are invited to a way of liberation, we are requested to move away from one terrain of creation to the “kingdom of freedom/virtue/self-perfection/goodness/autonomy” etc. That means that the directional contrast between good and evil is understood in structural terms, i.e., is identified with specific opposed terrains. For Greek philosophers, for example, evil is found in the material world; for the existentialist philosopher of the twentieth century, it is found in societal structures which threaten the freedom of the individual; for the neo-Marxist and the social conflict theorist (cf. Hegel, Simmel, and Dahrendorf) it is found in the authority structure of social collectivities as such (super- and subordination); for other thinkers in the supposed inevitability of natural causality, and for still others in the emergence of freedom which an individual is supposed to possess. This apostate style of practicing science – in philosophy and in special sciences – constantly indicates the way to the good, to the meaning of life and to freedom.

Each of these ways to salvation rests on a wrong evaluation of a well-created part of creation which, with an inner inevitability, leads to a depreciation of something or some facet within creation (a fundamental characteristic already of the ancient heresy of gnosticism), while at the same time it leads to the idolization (absolutizing) of something else within creation – a point of departure of all idolatrous service which brings honor, meant for the Creator, to a creature.

The acknowledgement of the directing role of faith in scholarly, so-called “rational,” activities more than half a century later surfaced anew in the emergence of the modern philosophy of science where Popper advanced the penetrating critical insight that faith in the rationality of reason is not itself rational – he speaks about “an irrational faith in reason.”⁹ A similar position is advocated by Stegmüller when he states: “A self-assurance of human thought is excluded, wherever one may consider it. One can never reach a positive result without pre-suppositions. One has to believe in something in order to justify something else.”¹⁰ In reaction to Kant’s famous thesis, expressed in the foreword to the second edition of his *Critique of Pure Reason*, namely that one has to set aside knowledge in order to make room for faith.¹¹ Stegmüller adds: “A person does not have to set aside knowledge in order to make room for faith. Much rather one already has to believe something if that person wants to speak of knowing and science at all.”¹² He furthermore asserts that an ultimate certainty is required, for without it would be impossible even to start: “Some form of an absolute knowledge must exist; without it we would not have been able to begin”; “We must already “possess” absolute evidence, that is we must already

9 Popper, K. 1966. *The Open Society and its Enemies*, Vol. II, London, 231.

10 Stegmüller, W. 1969. *Metaphysik, Skepsis, Wissenschaft*, 2n. ed. New York, 314.

11 Kant, Immanuel 1787. *Critique of Pure Reason*, xxx.

12 Stegmüller, W. 1969. “Man muss nicht das Wissen beseitigen, um den Glauben Platz zu machen. Vielmehr muss man bereits etwas glauben, um überhaupt von Wissen und Wissenschaft reden zu können” (1969: 33 – *Neue Einleitung*).

believe in it.”¹³ Finally, and perhaps his most remarkable formulation in this regard reads: in science one believes, in religion one knows (or: one claims to know)!¹⁴

In addition to this we have to refer to the notion of a paradigm in the work of Kuhn,¹⁵ later on designated as the disciplinary matrix. In more general terms one can say that modern philosophy of science realized that no single intellectual discipline can operate without (implicitly or explicitly) proceeding from an underlying theoretical frame of reference, from a theoretical view of reality.

In order to appreciate the contribution already made by Kuyper in this regard we must recognize the intermediate position of Dooyeweerd. Throughout the history of philosophy theoretical thought struggled with ontological questions, such as that regarding the relationship between unity and diversity, universality and individuality, constancy and dynamics, knowledge of what could be grasped conceptually and knowledge transcending the grasp of concept formation (idea-knowledge), and so on. Dooyeweerd claims that all theoretical thinking is in the grip of a basic (transcendental) idea in which one finds an idea of the mutually cohering diversity within reality, an idea about the totality of this diversity and an idea concerning the origin of the former. The key elements in Dooyeweerd's account derive from basic biblical perspectives articulated in Kuyper's legacy. The biblical starting point of Christian academic reflection in the Kuyper-Dooyeweerd tradition entails:

1. Accepting God's Law for Creation;¹⁶
2. Acknowledging the interrelatedness and dependence of created reality;
3. Confessing the rule of Christ over all domains of creation;
4. Subjecting oneself to the key to knowledge: the biblical basic motive of Creation, Fall, and Redemption;
5. Knowing Christ as the fullness of creation (Colossians 1:15–20);
6. Upholding the distinctiveness of “structure” and “direction”¹⁷
7. Avoiding any absolutization of something within creation.

This many-sided but integral and coherent biblical starting point motivates and underlies the reformational philosophical tradition that guides our remarks below (Calvin, Kuyper, Dooyeweerd).

5. The Viability of the Idea of Christian Scholarship

The themes and distinctions discussed below are meant to illuminate the presence of inevitable issues confronting not only philosophy but also the special sciences. The

13 “Irgendein absolutes Wissen muß es geben; ohne dieses könnten wir überhaupt nicht beginnen”; “Absolute Evidenz müssen wir schon “haben”, d.h. wir müssen an sie bereits glauben, . . .” (1969, 194).

14 “. . . in der Wissenschaft wird geglaubt, in der Religion weiß man (oder: behauptet man, zu wissen)” (1969, 212).

15 Kuhn, T. 1970. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. 2nd rev. ed. Chicago.

16 Kuyper correctly emphasizes that mere observation does not yield scholarly endeavors as such – the various disciplines emerge only when what is observed is related to a general law – and philosophy finally has to combine what is unveiled in this way in one encompassing grasp (Kuyper, A. 1959. *Het Calvinisme*, 3rd impression: Kampen: Kok, 91).

17 This distinction, already alluded to earlier, needs a qualification. The structure of creation is not “direction-less” and the direction is not “structure-less.” Therefore, we should distinguish between God's direction-giving structure for creation and the structured direction manifest in the God-obedient or God-disobedient response of humankind.

elaboration of Kuyper's thought in Dooyeweerd's philosophy has demonstrated that the answers given to these perennial questions are determined by a theoretical view of reality (a transcendental ground-idea) which, in turn, is in the grip of an ultimate commitment (in Dooyeweerd: "religious ground motive").

We start our brief reflection in this context by looking at the problem of unity and diversity.

Unity and diversity

Kuyper first introduced the principle of sphere sovereignty in order to account theoretically for the diversity within creation.¹⁸ Dooyeweerd explored and deepened this insight by enriching it in two directions:

- (i) the interrelationship between the different (sphere-sovereign) modal aspects of reality is accounted for in terms of the principle of *sphere universality* (modal analogies/anti and retrocipations) as developed by Dooyeweerd. In doing so Dooyeweerd widened the scope of the principle of sphere sovereignty beyond distinct societal zones to the fundamental dimensions of created reality (modal aspects and entities);
- (ii) interlacements within the domain of concrete things, events and societal relationships – where the internal sphere sovereignty of interwoven structures are kept intact – are called *enkaptic*.

These insights in principle free us from the one-sidedness of monistic isms and also from the reductionistic opposition of atomism and holism.

Universality and individuality

Universality characterizes God's law for creation. It also constitutes a side of whatever is subjected to God's law in creation. In its lawfulness/orderliness/law-conformity every individual entity, event or societal collectivity, in a universal way, shows that it is subjected to a correlating God-given law. The being human of this person, and the being alive of this plant are instances of the mentioned universal orderliness.¹⁹ The humanistic ideal of autonomy, i.e., that the human being is a law unto himself or herself, proceeds from the antinomial assumption that the conditions for being human and the human being meeting these conditions coincide!

Coherence of irreducibles

Perhaps it can be claimed that one of the most basic philosophical problems confronting the various academic disciplines concerns the "coherence of irreducibles." All

18 Initially Johannes Althusius (1557–1638) pointed out that the diverse societal collectivities distinct from the state ought not to be seen as parts of the state since each of them has its own laws proper to it. Althusius writes: "It can be said that individual citizens, families, and collegia are not members of a realm [i.e., the state – DFMS]. . . . On the other hand, cities, urban communities, and provinces are members of a realm" (*Politica Methodice Digesta* [1603, 3rd ed. 1614], trans. by Carney, F. S. 1965. *The Politics of Johannes Althusius*, London, 16). Concerning societal life forms distinct from the state Althusius declares: "Proper laws (*leges propriae*) are those enactments by which particular associations are ruled. They differ in each specie of association according as the nature of each requires" (16).

19 In other words, in being human (universal side) every individual human being, in a universal way, exhibits its subjectedness to the (equally universal) God-established law for the existence of human beings.

monistic approaches in philosophy and the special sciences are implicitly answering this question in the negative. Panpsychism – for example the orientation of de Chardin – attempts to reduce every phenomenon to a psychical perspective. In a similar way, the classical mechanistic approach in physics, following Galileo's discovery of the kinematical law of inertia, has tried, at least in its main trend, to view all physical bodies exclusively in terms of mechanical movement.²⁰ However, Planck's discovery of the quantum and the establishment of the second main law of thermodynamics, i.e., the law of non-decreasing entropy (indicating the irreversibility of physical processes), revealed the untenability of this monistic mechanistic approach in modern physics.

What is normally referred to as “primitives” in logic and foundational studies, indeed pertain to the “irreducibles” mentioned above. These primitives also reflect the inherent limitations of concept-formation and definition – in the final analysis every definition can only define something in indefinable terms. Whenever one tries to define a truly primitive notion, the inevitable result is (antinomic) reduction.

Constancy and dynamics

Heraclitus' concern for the dialectical opposition of constancy and change inspired his famous statement: we cannot step into the same river twice, for fresh and ever fresh waters are constantly pouring into it. Cratylus, a pupil of Heraclitus, confronted Plato with this problem of constancy and change, as can clearly be seen from Plato's dialogue with that name. In this dialogue, Plato had to account for the nature of knowledge in terms of something more fundamental than change. He found it in what he termed to be the essential form of what is known.

Eventually Galileo grasped the fact that uniform motion (constant motion) is a primitive notion and therefore not in need of a physical cause. The physical meaning of a cause always implies certain effects, i.e., dynamic changes. What needs a cause is not motion, but a change of motion²¹ – for instance acceleration or deceleration. This implies that the phoronomic (kinematic) facet of reality is indeed a (foundational) condition for energy-operation (with its implied causes and effects). Physical changes pre-suppose some form of continuation (persistence, constancy), for only on the basis of something persistent is it meaningful to point towards changes. This insight paves the way for an understanding of the impasse of historicism. According to historicism everything – law, morality, art, faith, language, and so on – is taken up in the flow of historical change and is everywhere only comprehensible as elements of a historical process. Contrary to this claim we are accustomed to speak of legal history, art history, economic history, and so on. But if law, art, and economics are nothing but history, we in fact must deal with the contradiction of a historical history. Whatever is history, cannot have a history; and whatever has a history, cannot itself be history. The irony is that historicism, reducing every facet of reality to the historical mode, thus has eliminated the very meaning of history – if everything is history,

20 The most comprehensive, but perhaps last attempt to reduce all physical phenomena to kinematical movement, is found in the mechanics of H. Hertz – he was the first to broadcast and receive radio waves and established that light and heat are electromagnetic waves.

21 Cf. the analysis of Stafleu, M.D. 1980. *Time and Again: An Analysis of the Foundation of Physics*. Toronto/Bloemfontein, 80.

there is nothing that can have a history!²² We may expand this analysis by demonstrating that uniqueness (diversity) is correlated with coherence – but it will take us too far. We rather conclude our discussion by briefly reflecting upon the implication of the principle of sphere sovereignty on the choice and meaning of the basic concepts employed by the various disciplines. Indirectly this entire analysis depends on the ontological exploration of Kuypers’ basic insight by Dooyeweerd.

6. Inevitable Choices Underlying the Special Sciences – Basic Concepts of Disciplines

Every single scientific discipline uses concepts of function (they differentiate into elementary basic concepts and compound basic concepts) as well as type concepts.

Some examples: The concepts *entropy*, *volume*, *mass*, *acceleration*, and *uniform motion* are all physical *concepts of function* (elementary basic concepts), whereas the concepts of elementary *particle*, *atom*, *molecule*, *macro-system*, and *galaxy* are *type concepts* (thing concepts); the concepts *birth*, *growth*, *differentiation*, *integration*, *adaptation*, *maturation*, *ageing*, and *dying* are biological *concepts of function* while the systematic classification of the plant and animal kingdom concern *concepts of types* (*phyla*, *classes*, *orders*, *families*, *genera*, and *species*); the concepts *social order*, *social stratification*, *social constancy* and *dynamics*, *social differentiation* and *integration*, *social solidarity*, *social conflict* and *consensus*, *social control* and *power*, *social significance* and *interpretation* are all (elementary) basic concepts of sociology – they differ from the typical totality concepts referring to societal collectivities such as the *state*, the *firm*, the *school*, the *church*, and so on; the concepts *legal object*, *jural subject*, *subjective right*, *legal norm*, and so on are all (compound) basic concepts of legal science, to be distinguished from the structural (typical) differences between diverse *spheres of law* in a differentiated society, such as the domain of *public law* (encompassing *criminal law*, *constitutional law*, *administrative law*, and *international public law/law of nations*), *civil* (or: *common*) *law* (protecting the *personal freedom* of the individual within the legal intercourse of a differentiated society), and *non-civil private law* (the irreducible spheres of competence unique to non-state societal entities).

Analogical basic concepts

What we have called the elementary basic concepts of scientific disciplines actually reveal the inescapable inter-modal coherence existing between the different sphere-sovereign aspects within creation. Because it accounts for the coherence between different aspects of creation, any special scientific discipline delimited by one modal aspect only, inevitably has to use analogical (modal) concepts which are also used by other disciplines, be it that the latter use them in a manner colored by their respective (modal) points of view. A few examples may elucidate this point sufficiently.

22 It should be noted that the inter-modal nature of every antinomy does imply a logical contradiction (which is intra-modal), but not vice versa. Descartes’ definition (i.e., reduction!) of movement as a “change of place” implies the following logical contradiction: if body is its place, and if movement is a change of place, then a body can only move if it changes “essentially” – implying that it cannot move (or, succinctly: a body can move if and only if it cannot move). The illogical concept of a “square circle,” however, does not pre-suppose any (inter-modal) antinomy, since it only concerns the (intra-modal) logical error of not correctly identifying and distinguishing between the two spatial figures concerned. This distinction between antinomy and contradiction is overlooked in Hart’s 1984 work: *Understanding Our World*. Lanham: University Press of America, 132, 133.

Wholeness/totality

The concepts whole, coherence and totality appeal to the original irreducible meaning of the spatial aspect. Something continuous (such as a one-dimensional line) evinces an uninterrupted connectedness, i.e., all its parts cohere. But if all the parts are present, then the whole/totality is given! The apparently “purely arithmetical” definitions of Weierstrass, Dedekind, and Cantor deal with the idea of sets of numbers as infinite totalities, implying that the unique character of the spatial aspect is essential in their attempt to reduce space to number – an obviously circular argument! Regarding the totality character of continuity, Paul Bernays (the well-known co-editor of *Die Grundlagen der Mathematik* – in collaboration with David Hilbert) remarks: “(it) undeniably belongs to the geometric idea of the continuum. And it is this characteristic of the continuum which would resist perfect arithmetization.”²³

To this one should add his final assessment of arithmeticism in mathematics:

The arithmetizing monism in mathematics is an arbitrary thesis. The claim that the field of investigation of mathematics purely emerges from the representation of number is not at all shown. Much rather, it is presumably the case that concepts such as a continuous curve and an area, and in particular the concepts used in topology, are not reducible to representations of number [*Zahlvorstellungen*].²⁴

Most variations of holism use some or other non-spatial modal perspective and then explore within that context the (analogical) meaning of the original spatial whole-parts relationship. In every non-spatial aspect the whole-parts relation is differently qualified. Certain developments in the modern concept of matter illustrate this point amply. The very nature of spatial continuity initially suggested that physical space shares the spatial feature of being infinitely divisible. It eventually turned out not to be the case. In a commemorative article dedicated to Carl Weierstrass (1825–1884), the famous mathematician David Hilbert points out that those maintaining that matter is continuous and therefore infinitely divisible, are mistaken. Contrary to the popular conception that “nature does not make leaps,” continued empirical research and systematic reflection²⁵ confirms that “nature indeed makes jumps.”²⁶

Whereas the original meaning of space (with the implied whole-parts relation) entails both its continuity and infinite divisibility, physical space, on the contrary, is neither continuous nor infinite(ly divisible)! The interrelation between the physical and spatial aspects clearly implies that there are both similarities and differences: physical space and original space are extended – their similarity, but only the latter is continuous and infinitely divisible, distinct from the former which is discontinuous and finite – their difference. In a similar way it can be shown that the true meaning of every other aspect of creation can only be understood when it is analyzed in its unbreakable coherence with all

23 Bernays, Paul. 1976. *Abhandlungen zur Philosophie der Mathematik*. Darmstadt, 74.

24 Ibid., 188 (cf. Sketch 5 – p.13).

25 The “Wirkungsquantum h ” by Planck (1900) and the formulation of Einstein’s theory of relativity (1905, 1916).

26 Hilbert, David. 1925. *Über das Unendliche*, *Mathematische Annalen*, 81–82. Hilbert also points out that the conception of reality as being infinite depends upon Euclidean geometry. By employing non-Euclidean geometry (such as it was done in Einstein’s theory of relativity), it was shown that the unlimitedness of physical space does not warrant the inference of its supposed infinity (1925: 83).

those modes of reality differing from the one under consideration. When this coherence is viewed in its concentric relatedness to the central commandment of love we may discern a differentiated multiplicity of articulations, depending upon the modal aspect chosen as point of entry. For example, from the perspective of the economic aspect we meet the meaning of the central commandment of love in the call to stewardship; from the point of entry of the jural mode we discover the meaning of the central commandment of love in the call to justice; and so on.

7. Some Implications for the Current Postmodernism Debate

Against the fore-going background it should not be difficult to appreciate the following assessment: four modal points of entry played a dominant role in the intellectual history of the West, namely atomism (the numerical point of entry); holism (exploring the spatial whole parts relationship); organicism (using the biotic aspect) and the quest for meaning (accentuating the sign-mode of reality – this approach recently received a new impetus through postmodernism).

Without degrading the liberating consequences of thinking through the implications of the principle of sphere-sovereignty in a cosmological perspective, it must be noted that Kuyper consistently followed the organic mode of thought – a mode of thinking that may be seen as the dominant orientation of the nineteenth century. It almost provided a subtle but all-encompassing framework giving shelter to trends of thought that are radically diverging in other respects (just compare Darwinism with Kuyper’s basic ideas). In the state, for example, Kuyper saw an ethical organism and even advocated the idea of an organic right to vote (ascribed to the head of the household only!). Interestingly Dooyeweerd initially also consistently used the term organic in order to bring to expression his understanding of the coherence present in creation. This mode of thinking is abundantly present in his Inaugural Address and in his 1931 work on *The Crisis in Humanist Political Theory*,²⁷ but only a few remnants are to be found in his magnum opus of 1935–1936 *De Wijsbegeerte der Wetsidee*. Long before postmodernism explored the notion of meaning (by emphasizing ambiguity and the grand all-claim – metanarrative(!) – that everything is interpretation, Dooyeweerd sensed the significance of the hermeneutic turn by the end of the nineteenth century and therefore switched from the organic mode to the meaning mode: “Meaning is the mode of being of all that has been created.” The meaning-idea started to function in such an encompassing way in his thought that the term meaning was merged into every core insight he developed within his systematic philosophy: just look at phrases like meaning-nucleus, meaning-kernel, meaning-structure, meaning-moment, inter-modal synthesis of meaning, the process of meaning-disclosure, the meaning-character of reality, the fullness and totality of meaning, the origin of all meaning, refraction of meaning (his well-known image of the cosmic time as a prism), and so on. Whereas Kuyper (and Dooyeweerd) anticipated the philosophy of science that developed since the fifties and sixties, Dooyeweerd anticipated the rise of postmodernism! However, an assessment of these issues will lead to problems that require a separate treatment.²⁸ The reformational

27 *Collected Works of Herman Dooyeweerd*. 2010. Series B, Volume 7. Grand Rapids: Paidiea Press.

28 Compare Strauss, D. F. M. 1996. Rationalism, historicism, and pan-“interpretationism.” Proceedings of the 1992 Conference on Faith and Science – Pascal Centre: *Facets of Faith and Science, Volume 2: The Role of Beliefs in Mathematics and the Natural Sciences*. Jitse M. van der Meer, ed. Toronto: University Press of

tradition, from Calvin and Kuyper up to Dooyeweerd remained sensitive to the spirit of the age throughout. At the same time we have to realize that to some extent they (and we!) were (are) all victims of implicit and overarching modes of thought successively capturing an entire epoch in the intellectual history of the world. Christians ought to be humbled by this insight, because it liberates us from the sinful and tempting hubris manifested in an overestimation of provisional and fallible human work. However, the presence of God, through His Spirit and through the upholding of the order of creation in Christ, ultimately testifies to a reliable and trustworthy anchorage transcending the relativity of our unique historical situation and transcending our meaning-bound and meaning-variant existence. The dynamics of our on-going calling to be sensitive to the spirit of the age in a changing world, does not ever manage to eliminate the constancy of God's creation order, since the dynamic disclosure of creation cannot take place at the cost of this order but only on its basis.