

## Like Bright Stars

### Abraham Kuyper on the Nature and Vocation of the Scholarly Sphere

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This article argues that Kuyper’s philosophy of education, principally as outlined in his *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology, inter alia*, undergirds his social theory and thus should inform our understanding of his social thought. In the first section, I briefly summarize Kuyper’s answer to a series of questions regarding the nature of science. In the second, I build upon Kuyper’s philosophy of education to examine his understanding of the nature and *telos* of Calvinist educational communities, universities in particular. I conclude by examining new avenues for future research.

***Calvinism cannot but foster love for science.***

~ Abraham Kuyper<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

While Abraham Kuyper’s prominent role on behalf of Christian schools *vis-à-vis* the secular state during the nineteenth-century Dutch “school struggle” has been thoroughly analyzed by contemporary scholars and even applied outside of his context—such as in the work of Charles Glenn, for example<sup>2</sup>—less study has been devoted to Kuyper’s understanding of the Christian university’s self-identity and, moreover, composition. This is not to say that no one has done so, however, but that they have generally done so more in the course of exploring other issues. Peter Heslam’s study of Kuyper’s Stone Lectures, for example, devotes an entire chapter to Kuyper’s fourth lecture, “Calvinism and Science.”<sup>3</sup> Of course, for Kuyper “science” did not mean just the “hard” sciences but all

academic disciplines. It would be better to think of Kuyper's remarks on science, whether in his Stone Lectures, *Common Grace*,<sup>4</sup> or his *Encyclopedia*,<sup>5</sup> as remarks on the nature of higher education in general and Calvinist higher education in particular. As Jacob Klapwijk notes in his study, "for Kuyper science is an inclusive term. It represents the whole world of academic scholarship."<sup>6</sup> Indeed, Heslam acknowledges as much as well. Nevertheless, while Heslam's work is helpful, this article somewhat challenges his claim that Kuyper "never developed a systematic philosophy of science (*Wissenschaftslehre*)."<sup>7</sup> On his own terms, Kuyper to some extent seems to claim—and do—the contrary in his *Encyclopedia*.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, for the purposes of this article, Kuyper's conception of the nature, origin, and advancement of science requires further explication. This article argues that Kuyper's philosophy of education, principally as outlined in his *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology*, *inter alia*, undergirds his social theory and thus should inform our understanding of his social thought. In so doing we shall see that while Kuyper seeks to offer, à la Hegel, a simultaneously realist and universal grounding for the nature of science, his Calvinism adds a theological character that makes his philosophy of higher education—and educational communities—distinctly Christian.

Thus, in my first section, I briefly summarize Kuyper's answer to a series of questions regarding the nature of science. To wit: What is science? What is a science? How is science possible? What is the science of encyclopedia? What is a theological encyclopedia? And last, how is science impaired by sin?

In the second section of this article, I build upon Kuyper's philosophy of education to examine his understanding of the nature and *telos* of Calvinist educational communities, universities in particular. This includes his conception of the sphere of education (1) as centered on the university; (2) as founded on God's word both in the Scriptures and in the natural world as expressed in historic Calvinism; and (3) as uniquely called by God to form educators, students, and graduates in a vocation of pious and pure living to seek and to find the truth and be a light of higher learning in each town and village throughout the nation and the world. Put in this context, I argue that while Kuyper himself refers to the state as the "sphere of spheres,"<sup>9</sup> science could make a claim to that title as well. It, too, "encircles the whole extent of human life."<sup>10</sup> Due to its all-encompassing scope and social vocation, I argue Kuyper's theological philosophy of science undergirds and informs his social thought, inviting new avenues for future research.

## Kuyper's Calvinist Philosophy of Science

### What Is Science?

To answer our first question, to Kuyper science is the ordered body of knowledge discovered and developed by all humanity of the interrelations of the elements of all things. As he puts it, "If the subject of science ... lies in the consciousness of humanity, the *object* of science must be *all existing things*, as far as they have discovered their existence to our human consciousness, and will hereafter discover it or leave it to be inferred."<sup>11</sup> Kuyper continues in a manner that mirrors Hegel's discussion of consciousness and self-consciousness in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*,<sup>12</sup> writing, "This unit divides itself at once into three parts, as not only what lies outside of the thinking subject, but also the *subject* itself, and the consciousness of this subject, become the object of scientific investigation."<sup>13</sup> Moreover, after an analogy involving the healing properties of Peruvian bark, Kuyper insists that "the idea of science implies, that from the manifold things I know a connected knowledge is born, which would not be possible if there were no relation among the several parts of the object."<sup>14</sup> Because Kuyper believes the world to be an organic whole, science too, as the accumulated body of all human knowledge of "all existing things," must be an organic whole as well. "Oh, no single piece of our mental world," he says elsewhere, "is to be hermetically sealed off from the rest, and 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!'"<sup>15</sup>

### What Is a Science?

I have already mentioned Hegel in the foregoing. In fact, Kuyper speaks about the nature of science throughout in terms reminiscent of the German academy of his day, as we will see moving forward.<sup>16</sup> This comes through especially in his use of the terms *subject* and *object*.<sup>17</sup> A clearer definition of these terms for Kuyper allows us to answer our second question: "What is *a* science?"

As already stated, Kuyper believes that the subject of science as an organic whole "lies in the consciousness of humanity." Why? Because humanity is the subject that does the investigation and systematization of "all existing things." Thus, *subject* implies agency and consciousness to Kuyper. The object, conversely, is the reality being acted upon and studied. And science is the systematic body of knowledge produced by the agency of the conscious subject studying an object. We may even say that science is a synthesis of subject and object to Kuyper. So to answer the question, "What is *a* science?" we need to ask, "*Who*

is studying *what?*” Under these definitions, Kuyper would never say that the subject of physics is the physical world, for example. That is the *object* of physics. The subject of physics is physicists. They are the ones who, through studying the physical world, advance humanity’s knowledge of physics (see figure 1).

**Figure 1**  
**The Science of Physics**

<b>Science</b>	<b>Subject</b>	<b>Object</b>
Physics	Physicists	Physical World

Thus, *a science* is the ordered body of knowledge discovered and developed by scientists (subject) of the interrelations of the elements of the object(s) of their particular discipline, whether that be physics, law, psychology, philosophy, theology, or anything else.

### **How Is Science Possible?**

This is not enough to Kuyper, however. The possibility of scientific inquiry demands an explanation as well. Kuyper grounds this possibility on a threefold relationship between the subject “humanity” and the object “all existing things.” As he writes elsewhere, “there is not only a creation but also a Logos in the creation, and man, created in the image of God and therefore a logical creature, has the capacity and the calling to use his logical thought to reflect upon this Logos which shines in all creation. And this . . . is the beautiful, exalted, sacred task of science.”<sup>18</sup> In particular, the object of any scientific study must be related to (1) our nature, (2) our consciousness, and (3) our thought world. Here, Kuyper seems to draw upon the Christianized Neoplatonism of the classical Christian tradition.<sup>19</sup> We are created in the image of God and as microcosms according to our nature [1], and as rational beings in our thought world [3]. Because the world is created by God, all things contain a discernable *ratio* with regard to their interrelations, whether or not the nature of their elements can ever be fully known by us. When we become conscious [2] of their relation to our own nature [1] and thoughtfully reflect [3] upon their own internal relations, then our knowledge is properly called science.<sup>20</sup> No mere collection of facts merits the term, except in the lowest conceivable sense of the word; to Kuyper, only systems can be called science, or, at least, “higher” science.<sup>21</sup> “Thus understood,” concludes Kuyper, “*science presents itself to us as a necessary and ever-continued impulse in the human mind to reflect within itself the cosmos, plastically as to its elements, and to think it through logically as to its relations;*

*always with the understanding that the human mind is capable of this by reason of its organic affinity to its object.*"<sup>22</sup>

### **What Is the Science of Encyclopedia?**

That established, for Kuyper, encyclopedia is not simply a book containing brief summaries of various topics. Rather, encyclopedia is the science that has for its object science itself. He explicitly credits Fichte and Hegel with first articulating the conception of encyclopedia to which he subscribes: "[T]he idea of system in the conception of Encyclopedia came to the foreground with full consciousness only when Fichte took science itself to be an object of science, and when Hegel, in the same track, wedded the name of Encyclopedia to this idea. Science, as such, now became an object of scientific investigation; the idea of system became the chief aim in Encyclopedia; and from the material of each science so much only was taken as was necessary for the proper understanding of its organic life."<sup>23</sup> Drawing upon Hegel, we might say that to Kuyper encyclopedia is science become self-conscious. Notably, Hegel's own philosophical *Encyclopedia* has been called "an abbreviated summary of the entire system" of his thought.<sup>24</sup> Thus, Kuyper's own self-conception of his *Encyclopedia* would suggest that it may be the most systematic expression of his thought as well. Kuyper furthermore credits Immanuel Kant for "investigat[ing] the thinking subject, and thereby [giving] rise to a riper development of the organic conception of science,"<sup>25</sup> underscoring the importance of the subject and its consciousness to understanding the organic whole of science as outlined in the foregoing. Yet Kuyper's *Encyclopedia* is not general but explicitly theological. So we must next establish what that meant to him.

### **What Is a Theological Encyclopedia?**

According to Kuyper, "[A] proper Christian Philosophy must needs construct its conception of the whole of science, and in this organism of science vindicate the honor of a theistical theology."<sup>26</sup> He credits Friedrich Schleiermacher as "the first theologian in the higher scientific sense, since he was the first to examine theology as a whole, and to determine in his way her position in the organism of science."<sup>27</sup> Kuyper does not draw upon these sources from the German academy uncritically, but I acknowledge them here because, first of all, Kuyper himself believed it was important to do so, and second, because doing so helps to situate Kuyper's project in his *Encyclopedia* within a larger historical context: the history of the philosophy of science. From Kant through Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel, *inter alia*, the first to make a real contribution toward a proper theological

encyclopedia, according to Kuyper, was Schleiermacher. It is due to their accomplishments that Kuyper undertook his own project with a ready-made definition and goal, namely, “*the scientific investigation of the organic nature and relations of Theology in itself and as an integral part of the organism of science.*”<sup>28</sup> While Kuyper has specific criticisms for all of his forebears in the science of encyclopedia, for the purposes of this article I will limit myself to noting only one general objection, viz. that they downplay or ignore the distorting effects of sin upon scientific investigation.<sup>29</sup>

### How Is Science Impaired by Sin?

It is in addressing this deficiency, among others, that we can best see how Kuyper’s project remains essentially theological and Calvinist. In order to examine the cosmos (oneself inclusive), one must, in a sense, step out of the cosmos, but sin keeps one’s consciousness trapped within it.<sup>30</sup> Contra Hegel et al., Kuyper claims that “in every theory of knowledge which is not to deceive itself, the fact of sin must henceforth claim a more serious consideration,” because “sin works its fatal effects also in the domain of our science, and is by no means restricted to what is thelematic (i.e., to the sphere of volition).”<sup>31</sup> He explores eight ways in which sin works formally upon our minds, which I can only list here:

1. *falsehood*;
2. *mistake*;
3. *self-delusion* and *self-deception*;
4. *imagination* that blurs the boundary between reality and fantasy;
5. the influence of other people injured by sin, including in the normalizing of false or mistaken language and terminology;
6. physical perturbances *through the body*;
7. sin-disorganized *relationships of life*; and
8. the damaging effect that one injured part of our consciousness inflicts upon others as part of an organic whole.<sup>32</sup>

Furthermore, sin also effects our consciousness through our self-interest. “An Englishman,” he notes, “will look upon the history of the Dutch naval battles with the British fleet very differently than a Netherlandish historian; not because each purposely desires to falsify the truth, but because both are unconsciously governed by national interests.”<sup>33</sup>

Kuyper then identifies another class of influences as those resulting “from the injurious effect worked by sin immediately *upon our nature*,” naming (1) “the *darkening of our understanding*” or consciousness; (2) a lack of the requisite love for nature that the study of it requires; (3) “an *estrangement* from the object of our knowledge,” which he calls, “the greatest obstacle in the way of our knowledge of it”; (4) the internal “break in the life-harmony in our *own selves*”; and (5) the weakening of our senses.<sup>34</sup>

Finally, what Kuyper calls “the chiefest harm”: “the ruin, worked by sin, in those data, which were at our command, for obtaining the knowledge of God, and thus for forming the conception of the whole.”<sup>35</sup> In this we can hear an echo of Kuyper’s Stone Lectures<sup>36</sup>: Only God transcends the cosmos, and true science is impossible so long as our perspective is bound within it by sin and ignorant of God’s sovereign decree.<sup>37</sup> “If . . . in our sense of self there is no sense of the existence of God,” Kuyper claims, “and if in our spiritual existence there is no bond which draws us to God, and causes us in love to go out unto him, all science is here impossible.”<sup>38</sup> Under these conditions, “every scientific production of the knowledge of God must fail. . . . From which it follows at the same time that the knowledge of the cosmos as a whole . . . is equally bound to founder upon this obstruction wrought by sin.”<sup>39</sup> While Kuyper does acknowledge and even builds upon the scientific endeavors of those who do not acknowledge the damage wrought by sin yet manage to advance science through common grace, he nevertheless calls it “the most difficult obstacle in the way of all true science.”<sup>40</sup> To supply what Kuyper leaves here implicit, and to conclude this section on a more promising note, we may say that the answer to sin and its expression in the antithesis of distorted science that mistakenly treats this world and our consciousness as normal and untarnished by sin, is *palingenesis* through the gospel of Jesus Christ, “who is Sovereign over *all*.”<sup>41</sup> In the next section, we shall see how, above and beyond this, Kuyper specifically endorses a confessionally Reformed worldview in both the structure and mission of the university.

## The Vocation of the Scholarly Sphere

### Centered on the University

Kuyper does not conflate the sphere of science, higher education, or scholarship with the university, but he does believe the latter to be at the heart of the former.<sup>42</sup> “*Scola* is not a school of learning,” Kuyper writes, appealing to Alsted.<sup>43</sup> “*Scola* is the *res publica litterarum*, the entire republic of letters, that distinctive sphere of society which indeed centers on the university yet pervades

the country with young men who thirst after knowledge and with men of learning who illumine our towns and villages like bright stars.”<sup>44</sup> Thus, we should expect the institution at the heart of the scientific sphere to reflect Kuyper’s understanding of the organism of science as detailed in his *Encyclopedia* and outlined in the first section of this article.

Indeed, Kuyper’s organicism compels him to conceptualize the university and its faculties as ultimately united in one universal task (as the name “university” should imply<sup>45</sup>). “[I]f . . . the one scholar cannot do without the help and support of the other, then a university too has to have a division of labor. Thus a faculty is really a group of men who collaborate in investigating one part of the great field of academic learning, and a university is a combination of faculties who together aim at investigating the whole field.”<sup>46</sup> The “whole field,” of course, is “all existing things,” and the possibility of this investigation is founded upon our creation in the image of God and as microcosms. The structure of the university thus maps onto “all existing things,” including human society. Indeed, Kuyper frequently refers to the disciplines as spheres, and perhaps this explains why he never seems to have made a hard distinction between intellectual spheres and life spheres<sup>47</sup>—the former are necessarily linked to the latter through the synthetic connection between subject and object at the heart of his definition of science.

Thus, Kuyper believes the university ought to be divided into no more and no less than five distinct faculties, each representing a fundamental human relationship. He writes,

The principium of division is the subject of science, i.e. *Man*. This leads to the coördination of *man* himself with *nature*, which he rules, and with his *God*, by whom he feels himself ruled. And this trilogy is crossed by another threefold division, which concerns “man” as such, even the distinction between *one* man and *many*, and alongside of this the antithesis between his *somatic* and *psychic* existence. Thus the subject was induced in the *Theological* faculty to investigate the knowledge of God, and in the faculty of *natural philosophy* to pursue the knowledge of nature; to investigate the somatic existence of man in the *Medical*, his psychic existence in the *Philological* faculty and finally in the *Juridical* faculty to embrace all these studies that bear upon human relationships.<sup>48</sup>

To summarize, then, (1) the *Theological* faculty investigates our relationship to God; (2) the *Juridical* our relationships to each other; (3) the *Philological* our relationship to our own souls; (4) the *Medical* our relationship to our bodies; and (5) the faculty of *Natural Science* our relation to the natural world outside of ourselves. All academic disciplines are, then, subdivisions within these five



faculties, though Kuyper admits that their boundaries are not always so clear and that sometimes overlap is required, such as in the case of Ethics, for example, which he includes in both the Theological and Philological faculties.<sup>49</sup>

Due to his Calvinist grounding of the nature of science as rooted in God's divine decree and yet also tainted by sin, Kuyper insists that this investigation furthermore requires a single worldview across all faculties. "[I]t is a foregone conclusion," he writes, "that those men must proceed from the same fundamental conviction, otherwise the work of one does not square with the work of another, in which case they would make no progress."<sup>50</sup> For Kuyper, that worldview is the Reformed worldview, and the Calvinist university must be bound to God's word in Scripture and nature through historic Reformed principles.

### **Founded on God's Word**

It is not enough to Kuyper for a university simply to be founded upon Scripture, nor even upon God's revelation in Scripture and the natural world, but one must choose a worldview through which these will be interpreted consistently across disciplines in order to preserve the unity of science.<sup>51</sup> Once again, Kuyper prefers the Reformed worldview.

Why is not Scripture enough? Because Scripture itself testifies that God speaks through nature as well. We see this in various passages, such as, "The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork" (Ps. 19:1) or "since the creation of the world [God's] invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead" (Rom. 1:20). Thus, grounded in a Scriptural understanding of God, Kuyper does not believe the phrase "word of God" should be restricted to the Scriptures: "By 'God' we are to understand a self-conscious, personal Being," he writes, "and by 'word of God' the communication to our human consciousness of an idea that was in God."<sup>52</sup> He continues, "Speech goes out from what God does and has done. God speaks to us in nature. All history speaks of God. There is a word of God in our reason. There is a word of God in our innermost sense of the divine."<sup>53</sup> In addition to Scripture, the word of God comes to us "in nature and history, in reason and conscience."<sup>54</sup> And Kuyper insists, citing article 2 of the Belgic Confession,<sup>55</sup> that the Reformed tradition has always acknowledged this.

Why is this important? Because of "the reality of sin," which "points to a fall and imputes guilt, and further that this fall had a threefold effect: a darkening of our minds, an impairment of our willpower, and a pollution of our desires. It follows from this that without spectacles, as Calvin put it, we can no longer

read the book of nature, and that we can know neither from nature nor from the light of our reason whether, and if so how, we can escape the power and guilt of sin.”<sup>56</sup> Thus, while Kuyper acknowledges the common grace of God in general revelation, he still insists on the importance of special revelation and *palingenesis* for science, viz. to aid our vision of God’s word *in* general revelation and, of course, *for* our salvation.

Nature and Scripture, however, only get one so far. Indeed, “not all Christians agree that the further revelation of God which supplements the revelation in creation is given to us exclusively and solely in Scripture. On the contrary, on this point Christ-believers are completely at odds with one another.”<sup>57</sup> As examples, Kuyper notes how Roman Catholics also acknowledge the deuterocanonical books of the Old Testament, Tradition (historic Councils inclusive), and “the *ex cathedra* pronouncements of the bishop of Rome.” He claims Lutherans also acknowledge the authority of apocryphal books, “ascribe binding authority to the ancient ecumenical councils (not the later ones), call the clergy *ecclesia docens*,” and prioritize the New Testament so far above the Old that “they consider the New Testament their real Bible.” Last, he calls out the Anabaptists for acknowledging the authority of the “inner light” to the point that “the more one advances in spiritual maturity the more the authority of Scripture diminishes and the authority of ‘inner light’ increases.”<sup>58</sup> By contrast to these other traditions, Reformed principles—the “fixed starting points” for a Reformed worldview<sup>59</sup>—dictate that “biblical exegesis is bound . . . only to reverent scholarly inquiry, provided always that such inquiry be free.”<sup>60</sup> Somewhat circularly, he clarifies that “reverent scholarly inquiry” means “you take Reformed principles as your basis.” Given the context, we may supply that what sets the Reformed worldview apart is its emphasis on Reformed exegesis as exemplified in the historic Reformed confessions.

This is important for maintaining a unified task of the whole university in the midst of the division into faculties and disciplines. “[G]iven the division of labor,” Kuyper notes, “the moment the research is related (as it should be) to your fundamental principle all unity of investigation is out the window, unless you have made sure that everybody’s understanding of Nature and Scripture, both in their mutual relationship and their meaning, is the same as far as the basic principles are concerned. Only men who have arrived at one and the same worldview . . . can work together as architects in building the common house.”<sup>61</sup> This does not mean dictating every aspect of each researcher’s agenda, however. Rather, “the intention is that the scholars will first of all thoroughly investigate the multifaceted word of God in Nature and Scripture in order in this way to demonstrate the scientific soundness of the Reformed principles *and where*

*necessary to refine and carry forward their historical lines.*<sup>62</sup> Thus Reformed scholars should both “combat” principles falsely put forward as Reformed and also refine the Reformed tradition where it is discovered that it “is not in accordance with the multifaceted word of God in Nature and Scripture.”<sup>63</sup> Kuyper appeals to his own *Encyclopedia* as an example of what he has in mind.<sup>64</sup> Nevertheless, he does concede that “at the founding of . . . a [Reformed] university . . . some formula or other would have to be included in its charter or bylaws.”<sup>65</sup> He even notes that “a university is to be congratulated if it has a connection with [Reformed] churches such that those churches support it in confessing and upholding God’s word according to its purest interpretation.”<sup>66</sup> He further insists that this connection should include “the appointment of professors in the theological faculty,” even while acknowledging that “both church and academy have to insist on their rights” as distinct spheres.<sup>67</sup> Nevertheless, Kuyper has faith that “that knot will be tied if those who are called to the task pray to God for the gift to do so.”<sup>68</sup> And it is to that pious character of the sphere of science, and its social calling, that I now turn.

### Called to Be a Light for Others

According to Kuyper, “The *scola*—or if you prefer, the circle of people with an academic education—is a God-ordained order in society by virtue of a divine calling. . . . [I]t implies pure living and sincere piety. Scholarship is not abstract learning separate from life.”<sup>69</sup> As Craig Bartholomew notes, “Kuyper appeals for scholarship done out of prayer and before the face of God.”<sup>70</sup> Because of sin, it is not enough to have the right principles, one must also strive to live a pure and pious life, and one’s studies must ultimately be for the benefit of society and the glory of God. Says Kuyper, “Only from faith does the spark fly upwards that lights the passion for science in your breast—the faith which feeds on God’s revelation and submits to it, and which personally gives you the blissful knowledge that you are a child of God; but as applied to the *scola*, also a faith that makes you serve the Lord of glory in your studies and gives you the unshakable conviction that God elected you for these studies. To have the *cor ecclesiae*, the doctrine of election, applied to your studies, is the goal of every Reformed university.”<sup>71</sup> Even in “the good old days” of Alsted, says Kuyper, “people were aware that men of science lived by a distinctive principle, moved in a separate world, and were called by God to fulfill a special task in the whole of human society.”<sup>72</sup>

Thus, the scholar inhabits a sort of elite class of society to Kuyper. Indeed, in Kuyper’s context college enrollment was significantly lower than it is today.

“Nature out there,” says Kuyper, meaning outside the university, “. . . is hard for 99 percent of the human race.”<sup>73</sup> The privilege of being one of the chosen few to study, not to mention to teach, at a university comes with great responsibility. It should be a source of humility and gratitude to God rather than elitism. “[T]he real man of science,” Kuyper contends, “does not look down upon” the business of life in the outside world “with contempt. On the contrary, he senses that to live such a life should really have been his lot too, and that he, bowing under God’s ordinances if that were his occupation, would have found happiness and honor in it.”<sup>74</sup>

Nevertheless, despite their separate station for the duration of their studies, scholars are meant to “illuminate our towns and villages like bright stars.”<sup>75</sup> Contra Lessing, merely seeking the truth is not enough. The Reformed scholar knows that “[t]he ultimate purpose of seeking is finding,”<sup>76</sup> and it would be poor stewardship to bury one’s talent in the ground, to borrow the image from Jesus’s parable (cf. Matt. 25:14–30). As Bartholomew notes, “For Kuyper, God made us logical beings, so we should trace his reason in the creation, his Logos, study it, publish it, wonder at it, and spread that wonder to others. Scholarship also proclaims the glory of God’s name. Scholarship is thus about far more than just accumulating facts or getting a degree to get a job. The purpose of scholarship is threefold: to bring light to the hidden things of God, to give us joy in digging up the gold hidden in the creation, and to contribute to the well-being of human life.”<sup>77</sup> The church needs theologians; the state needs advisors; children need teachers. In every town and village across the nation, there ought to be a scholar that people can turn to for expert counsel, to connect them with the truth so far as it has been discovered in the past, revealed in the present, and may be found in the future. To Kuyper, “Christian scholarship not only serves the church but the entire country.”<sup>78</sup> Indeed, as Bratt notes, Kuyper modelled this in his own life in many ways, including through his journalism: “The *Standaard* editorship was the one post Kuyper would hold for the rest of his career,” writes Bratt, “and the role where he could combine all the others through which he passed in the meantime—preacher, teacher, and politician. The paper was the only place where most of his followers ever heard him, but there they heard him to great effect. For many it provided a post-elementary school education, a sustained induction into politics, culture, and social affairs.”<sup>79</sup>

Building on the foregoing, we may constructively say that to Kuyper the scholar, as the local representative of the sphere of science, ought to act as a navigator, or perhaps even a cartographer, for others as they seek to negotiate the uncertain waters of our life together, under God, and in the world God created. While all scholars are limited by the scope of their particular disciplines,

all ought to have an encyclopedic understanding of how their discipline fits into the entire organism of science, that systematic map of “all existing things.”<sup>80</sup> And science should ever expand its horizons as each generation, by the grace of God, builds on the knowledge of the past to establish a clearer picture of God, his people, and his world, both for the demands of the present and the unknown needs of generations to come.

## Conclusion

In summary, while Kuyper himself treats science as one of many spheres and even seems to privilege the state, to some degree, as the “sphere of spheres,”<sup>81</sup> it should be clear that the scope of science for Kuyper was broader than the world itself. The structure of science necessarily mirrors the structure of all reality, and thus it acts as an ever-expanding map of our relations to “all existing things.” Furthermore, the vocation of science as a sphere, and of scholars within their particular disciplines, is to be a resource for others, providing a clearer picture of the relations and boundaries between all the various spheres of life. Understood on his own terms, Kuyper’s theological philosophy of science undergirds and informs his social thought. It is my contention, then, that a greater grasp of the former would necessarily bear fruit for those who seek to develop and apply the latter today.

Constructively, one might ask to what extent Kuyper’s philosophy of higher education could be appropriated by other, non-Reformed traditions. Kuyper, at least, seems to imply that the point of difference would be not so much the structure of the university, which is anthropologically grounded, but rather the worldview adopted by the institution’s staff and bylaws. Could a Roman Catholic or Evangelical or Eastern Orthodox philosophy of scholarship—or a university, for that matter—be built upon Kuyper’s foundation? What might that look like? Where would other traditions fundamentally differ from Kuyper’s approach?

Similarly, the university faces an identity crisis today. As Michael Bräutigam has noted, “the university is in danger of developing into a ‘mutliversity’ or ‘diversity.’”<sup>82</sup> No doubt many likely believe we have crossed that point long ago. The current model often not only lacks any discernable unity between faculties or even within them, but its financial viability is in serious doubt. While this may be cause for despair, I think Kuyper would see an opportunity in it—reason for hope—and perhaps his model of the Christian university could be a way forward for those who hope to develop a new model of Christian higher education to weather the academy’s trials today and in the foreseeable future.

In addition to these constructive avenues for research, critical approaches are possible as well. For example, to what extent do Kuyper's five faculties fulfill his intention to comprehensively reflect "all existing things" as they relate to the human person in the structure of the university? Is there a place, perhaps, for a separate faculty devoted to the study of manmade things, such as a faculty of Engineering and Technology? It would seem that the needs of our own day now require such a faculty in the academy. What about virtual realities? Being manmade, they could fit the previous suggestion, but perhaps the different nature of that reality as quasi-immaterial merits a separate faculty of Computer Science.

The Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam now has nine faculties,<sup>83</sup> but it is unclear to what extent all of them could be justified on Kuyper's anthropological terms. For example, why is the faculty of Dentistry separate from the Medical faculty? On what grounds has the faculty of Theology become "Religion and Theology"?<sup>84</sup> One could view these developments negatively, but perhaps they should also prompt us to ask to what extent Kuyper's division of the faculties may have been too idealistic. One might also wonder how scalable his university model is beyond a certain size, but perhaps the question should go the other way: to what extent has the insatiable expansion of universities undermined their existence as unified wholes, that is, as *universities*?

The answers to these and similar questions are outside this paper's scope. Nevertheless, if my analysis has been accurate, it could serve as a basis from which such questions could be answered by any who wish to follow in Kuyper's footsteps, whether in the Neo-Calvinist tradition or any other, today.

## Notes

1. Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1931), 112.
2. Glenn includes a section on Kuyper in his historical study of educational models. See Charles L. Glenn, *Contrasting Models of State and School: A Comparative Historical Study of Parental Choice and State Control* (New York; London: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011), 123–53. See also idem, “Democratic Pluralism in Education,” *Journal of Markets & Morality* 21, no. 1 (Spring 2018): 117–40. Furthermore, it should not be overlooked that Kuyper’s famous “Sphere Sovereignty” speech was given at the opening of the Free University and has higher education as its central focus. See Abraham Kuyper, “Sphere Sovereignty,” in James D. Bratt, ed., *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* (Grand Rapids; Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans; Carlisle, 1998), 461–90.
3. See Peter S. Heslam, *Creating a Christian Worldview: Abraham Kuyper’s Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 167–95; Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 110–41.
4. See Abraham Kuyper, *Wisdom & Wonder: Common Grace in Science & Art* (Grand Rapids: Christian’s Library Press, 2011), 31–104.
5. See Abraham Kuyper, *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology: Its Principles*, trans. J. Hendrick De Vries (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1898). The English translation is an abridgment containing half of the first volume, all of the second, and none of the third. For the full version in Dutch, see Abraham Kuyper, *Encyclopaëdie der Heilige Godeleerdheid*, 3 vols. (Amsterdam: J. A. Wormser, 1894).
6. Jacob Klapwijk, “Abraham Kuyper on Science, Theology and University,” *Philosophia Reformata* 78, no. 1 (2013): 20.
7. Heslam, *Creating a Christian Worldview*, 167. He continues with an important caveat, however: “Nevertheless, his ideas on science and their embodiment in the Free University are largely responsible for the fact that, out of all the countries in the Western world, the Netherlands was the one in which evangelical Protestantism suffered the least serious decline in intellectual influence during the heyday of science and secularization in the first half of the twentieth century” (167–68).
8. Heslam is correct, however, to the extent that “philosophy of science” has come to mean “philosophy of natural science” today.
9. Kuyper, “Sphere Sovereignty,” 472.
10. Kuyper, “Sphere Sovereignty,” 472.
11. Kuyper, *Encyclopedia*, 65.

12. See G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. J. B. Baille, rev. 2nd ed. (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd; New York: Macmillan, 1949), 33–45 (consciousness), 46–79 (self-consciousness).
13. Kuyper, *Encyclopedia*, 65.
14. Kuyper, *Encyclopedia*, 65.
15. Kuyper, “Sphere Sovereignty,” 488.
16. Klapwijk sees this as an “inconsistency” in Kuyper’s thought: “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.’” Klapwijk, “Abraham Kuyper on Science,” 20. While this may be a legitimate line of criticism—and one others have leveled against him, too—Kuyper’s appropriation of terms and concepts from German idealism seem justifiable to me given his belief in common grace. And as I note elsewhere, Kuyper is not uncritical of these sources—in fact, he criticizes them specifically at points where they are clearly in variance with his Calvinism: for example, their failure to appreciate the damage wrought by sin on all of life and their pantheism. Klapwijk only addresses common grace in a later section of his article. That said, whether common grace is truly sufficient to save Kuyper from inconsistency is an open question. Bacote, for example, describes Kuyper’s doctrines of common grace and the antithesis as being in tension: “Though he was able to motivate the *kleine luyden* to public engagement, tensions can be found in Kuyper’s public theology. Chief among these is the issue of antithesis and common grace. It can be argued that Kuyper’s decision to emphasize Christian distinctiveness or the opportunities of common grace depend on the occasion, as can be seen, for example, in the Stone Lectures on science and art.” Vincent E. Bacote, *The Spirit in Public Theology: Appropriating the Legacy of Abraham Kuyper* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 150.
17. Oddly, Klapwijk traces this to Descartes and Locke—whom Kuyper does not mention in this context—only later mentioning Kant and Eduard von Hartmann, the latter of whom Kuyper only mentions much later in a discussion of the inspiration of lyrics. See Kuyper, *Encyclopedia*, 521, 523. Kuyper also mentions von Hartmann in his Stone Lecture on art, again focused on aesthetics, not epistemology, science, or the nature of consciousness. See Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 148. Of course, Kuyper was aware of all these figures, and it may be true that “[v]on Hartmann’s critical realism fits better than Kant’s critical idealism with Kuyper’s belief in a divine creator,” but Hegel seems a more natural fit to me given Kuyper’s explicit framing of his encyclopedia as akin to Hegel’s. See Klapwijk, “Abraham Kuyper on Science,” 24–25.



18. Abraham Kuyper, “Scholarship: Two Convocation Addresses—The Secret of Genuine Study,” in idem, *On Education*, trans. Harry Van Dyke, Collected Works in Public Theology, ed. Jordan J. Ballor and Melvin Flikkema (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2019), 103, henceforth: “The Secret of Genuine Study.”
19. Klapwijk claims Kuyper is appropriating a distinctly medieval doctrine in his use of the term *Logos*, saying that the doctrine, originating with the Stoics, was first picked up by St. Augustine and then adopted by medieval scholastics. See Klapwijk, “Abraham Kuyper on Science,” 25–27. This narrative is insufficient and misleading. The doctrine was made prominent by the Stoics (though it goes back at least to Heraclitus), then incorporated into Middle Platonism (e.g., Plutarch), and from there to Hellenistic Judaism (e.g., Philo of Alexandria), the New Testament (e.g., St. John’s Gospel), the ante-Nicene fathers (e.g., St. Justin Martyr), and the Neoplatonists (e.g., Plotinus). That it is not uniquely Augustinian or (Western) scholastic is evident from the many hymns of the Eastern Orthodox Church that still refer to Christ as the divine Logos today, such as the hymn of the sixth-century emperor Justinian sung after the second antiphon during the Divine Liturgy every Sunday. The Eastern Fathers, such as St. Athanasius the Great, St. Maximus the Confessor, and St. John of Damascus, regularly refer to Christ as the Logos as well. I point this out because it may perhaps explain why despite some occasional misgivings about scholastic intellectual excess, Kuyper was not afraid to employ the doctrine of the Logos. It is, indeed, scholastic and Stoic, as well as Neoplatonist, but it is also thoroughly Christian. There is less tension here than Klapwijk perceives. Furthermore, his claim that Kuyper “borrowed” the doctrine from Jan Woltjer (26) is doubtful given Kuyper’s own familiarity with many of the sources just listed. Klapwijk suggests that it is due to Woltjer’s influence that Kuyper ties the doctrine to Neoplatonic realism, but the Neoplatonists themselves already did that long before Kuyper or Woltjer, and the Church Fathers, including St. Augustine, did the same, as did the scholastics.
20. See Kuyper, *Encyclopedia*, 67–83.
21. See, for example, Kuyper, *Wisdom & Wonder*, 65; Abraham Kuyper, “Scholarship: Two Convocation Addresses—The Goal of Genuine Study,” in idem, *On Education*, 123, henceforth: “The Goal of Genuine Study.” See also Kuyper, “The Secret of Genuine Study,” 112: “The watchword of science is order.”
22. Kuyper, *Encyclopedia*, 83, emphasis original.
23. Kuyper, *Encyclopedia*, 11–12.
24. Klaus Brinkmann and Daniel O. Dahlstrom, “Hegel’s *Encyclopedia* Logic,” introduction to G. W. F. Hegel, *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, vol. 1, ed. Klaus Brinkmann and Daniel O. Dahlstrom (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), viii.

25. Kuyper, *Encyclopedia*, 675.
26. Kuyper, *Encyclopedia*, 676.
27. Kuyper, *Encyclopedia*, 675.
28. Kuyper, *Encyclopedia*, 54, emphasis original.
29. In addition to his *Encyclopedia*, from which I draw in the following section, Kuyper touches on this elsewhere. See, for example, Abraham Kuyper, “Bound to the Word: How Can a University Be Bound to the Word of God?” in idem, *On Education*, 76.
30. On this, see also Klapwijk, “Abraham Kuyper on Science,” 21–22, 28.
31. Kuyper, *Encyclopedia*, 106–7. Elsewhere, Kuyper claims that “sin points to a fall and imputes guilt, and further that this fall had a threefold effect: a darkening of our minds, an impairment of our willpower, and a pollution of our desires.” Kuyper, “Bound to the Word,” 76.
32. For the foregoing, see Kuyper, *Encyclopedia*, 107–9.
33. Kuyper, *Encyclopedia*, 110.
34. See Kuyper, *Encyclopedia*, 110–12.
35. Kuyper, *Encyclopedia*, 112.
36. See Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 121–26; Heslam, *Creating a Christian Worldview*, 171–74.
37. See Kuyper, *Encyclopedia*, 113.
38. Kuyper, *Encyclopedia*, 112–13.
39. Kuyper, *Encyclopedia*, 113.
40. Kuyper, *Encyclopedia*, 114.
41. Kuyper, “Sphere Sovereignty,” 488.
42. Klapwijk seems to conflate the institution with the organism in his account. See Klapwijk, “Abraham Kuyper on Science,” 35–37.
43. For Alsted’s own *Encyclopedia*, see Johann Heinrich Alsted, *Scientiarum Omnium Encyclopaediae*, 4 vol. (Leiden: Huguetan and Rauaud, 1649).
44. Kuyper, “The Secret of Genuine Study,” 100.
45. On this, including some reference to Kuyper, see Michael Bräutigam, “A Queen Without a Throne? Harnack, Schlatter, and Kuyper on Theology in the University,” in Gordon Graham, ed., *The Kuyper Center Review*, vol. 5: Church and Academy (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 104–18.

46. Kuyper, “Bound to the Word,” 89.
47. On this ambiguity, see Kent A. Van Til, “Abraham Kuyper and Michael Walzer: The Justice of the Spheres,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 40 (2005): 286; Craig G. Bartholomew, *Contours of the Kuyperian Tradition: A Systematic Introduction* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 157–58. See also Richard Mouw, “Calvin’s Legacy for Public Theology,” *Political Theology* 10, no. 3 (2009): 443–44, regarding how this ambiguity was exploited in South Africa as a support for Apartheid. Heslam helpfully distinguishes between a primary use as “social spheres” and a secondary use as “ideological groups.” Heslam, *Creating a Christian Worldview*, 159, though, again, such distinctions must be acknowledged to be unclear in Kuyper’s own work.
48. Kuyper, *Encyclopedia*, 190.
49. On this, see Dylan Pahman, “Toward a Kuyperian Ethic of Public Life: On the Spheres of Ethics and the State,” *Journal of Reformed Theology* 12 (2018): 413–31.
50. Kuyper, “Bound to the Word,” 89.
51. Klapwijk picks up on this as well. See Klapwijk, “Abraham Kuyper on Science,” 37–39.
52. Kuyper, “Bound to the Word,” 74.
53. Kuyper, “Bound to the Word,” 75.
54. Kuyper, “Bound to the Word,” 75.
55. Kuyper, “Bound to the Word,” 75. Specifically, Kuyper quotes the passage that reads, “First by the creation, preservation, and government of the universe; which is before our eyes as a most elegant book, wherein all creatures, great and small, are as so many characters leading us to ‘see clearly the invisible things of God, even his everlasting power and divinity’ [Romans 1:20].”
56. Kuyper, “Bound to the Word,” 76. Regarding the reference to Calvin, see John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 1, trans. Henry Beveridge (Edinburgh: T&T Clark; London: Hamilton, Adams and Co.; Dublin: John Robertson and Co., 1863), 64 (1.6.1).
57. Kuyper, “Bound to the Word,” 76.
58. Kuyper, “Bound to the Word,” 77.
59. Kuyper, “Bound to the Word,” 81. For more on what Kuyper meant by “Reformed principles,” see Klapwijk, “Abraham Kuyper on Science,” 20.
60. Kuyper, “Bound to the Word,” 80.

61. Kuyper, "Bound to the Word," 90.
62. Kuyper, "Bound to the Word," 91, emphasis added.
63. Kuyper, "Bound to the Word," 91.
64. Kuyper, "Bound to the Word," 91.
65. Kuyper, "Bound to the Word," 92.
66. Kuyper, "Bound to the Word," 93.
67. Kuyper, "Bound to the Word," 93.
68. Kuyper, "Bound to the Word," 93.
69. Kuyper, "The Secret of Genuine Study," 113.
70. Bartholomew, *Contours of the Kuyperian Tradition*, 298.
71. Kuyper, "The Secret of Genuine Study," 114.
72. Kuyper, "The Secret of Genuine Study," 101.
73. Kuyper, "The Secret of Genuine Study," 103.
74. Kuyper, "The Secret of Genuine Study," 103.
75. Kuyper, "The Secret of Genuine Study," 100.
76. Kuyper, "The Goal of Genuine Study," 119.
77. Bartholomew, *Contours of the Kuyperian Tradition*, 298.
78. Bartholomew, *Contours of the Kuyperian Tradition*, 301.
79. James D. Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper: Modern Calvinist, Christian Democrat* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 83.
80. In personal correspondence on May 2, 2019, Harry Van Dyke helpfully informed me that several faculties at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam developed and taught introductory "encyclopedia" courses for some of their disciplines. Unlike Kuyper's theological encyclopedia, none of these were formally published at the time. I will let Van Dyke's own words (to his best recollection, quoted with permission, and only lightly copyedited) summarize this practice:

Prof. Herman Dooyeweerd allowed the student union to privately "publish" his 5-vol. *Encyclopaedie der Rechtswetenschap*. (I was privileged to attend these lectures in 1964–65.) Volume 1 of these "syllabi" (as they were called) has been translated into English and was published by Paideia Press in 2012. The other volumes are currently being worked on by translators.

Prof. Meyer Smit circulated a 40-page syllabus entitled *Encyclopaedie der Geschiedeniswetenschap*. It was never published or translated. However, his more or less philosophical-encyclopedic study, which he wrote for a graduate seminar, has been published in translation in his *Toward a Christian Conception of History* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2002), 363–79.

Similar introductory courses were taught in the Social Sciences (by Professor S. U. Zuidema), in the Medical Faculty (by Professor G. Lindeboom, then by Professors J. Metz, and still later by Jacob Klapwijk), and in the Natural Sciences (first by Reijer Hooykaas, later by ? [I] can't recall by whom).

To my knowledge, none of these lectures were ever reproduced, printed, or published.

Most of these (required) courses for incoming students in the different departmental disciplines were taught by members of the Philosophy Department, which for some two decades was aptly named the Central Interfaculty. When Prof. Smit fell ill, I was assigned to teach the course for the Art History students, later also for the first-year History students.

81. Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty," 472.
82. Bräutigam, "A Queen without a Throne?" 118. However, Bräutigam, it should be noted, ultimately prefers Harnack and Schlatter's approach of staying within the state university system than Kuyper's free university model.
83. See their website, <https://www.vu.nl/en/about-vu-amsterdam/organization/faculties/index.aspx>. Out of curiosity, I also investigated Calvin University, Redeemer University College, and Dordt College. None evidenced any obvious influence from Kuyper in the division of their programs, departments, or faculties, respectively. For Calvin, see <https://calvin.edu/academics/majors-programs/>. For Redeemer, see <https://www.redeemer.ca/academics/academic-departments/>. For Dordt, see <https://www.dordt.edu/academics/faculty-information>. However, perhaps Dordt's "Divisions" would be a better approximation for Kuyper's faculties. See <https://www.dordt.edu/academics/faculty-information/departments-division>. This may be the closest to Kuyper's model outside the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. There are only three Divisions: humanities, natural sciences, and social sciences. These, at least, may have some analogue to Kuyper if we take "humanities" to be roughly equivalent to "philology" and "social sciences" as, albeit charitably, equivalent to "jurisprudence." Theology and Medicine are taught at Dordt, but they do not form Divisions of their own.
84. It seems likely that Kuyper would have opposed such a move, although he was explicitly opposed to a faculty of religion *instead of* theology, not necessarily a faculty of "Religion and Theology." See Kuyper, *Encyclopedia*, 211–19. That said, as he conceived it religion should be a discipline of Philology, inasmuch as it deals with the soul's *sensus divinitatis* common to all religions.