

Toward a Kuyperian Political Economy: On the Relationship between Ethics and Economics

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Abstract: *Modern economics is generally considered an entirely positive field of study, and the role of ethics and normative analysis is found to be irrelevant in contrast to facts and data. However, economics was once considered a portion of the broader field of political economy that evolved from the study of moral theology, and this origin is significant in understanding the extent to which normative analysis is appropriate in economics. Dutch theologian and statesman Abraham Kuyper emphasizes the use of sphere sovereignty to explain the relationship between different academic disciplines, and his perspective is applicable to the discussion of the role of normative analysis in economics. Kuyper found that while each sphere of study is distinct, each sphere is essentially related to the spheres that it evolves from. This paper applies the theological perspective of Kuyper to the field of economics and compares and contrasts this point of view with modern scholarly opinion on the subject.*

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1 Introduction

Modern debate regarding the relation between moral theology and economics can be traced to the emergence of the latter as a distinct discipline. Some, according to Ross Emmett (2014),¹ mark the separation between religion and economics with Richard Whately, “probably the only person who has ever gone straight from economics professor to archbishop” (p. 145). Whately (1840) argued eloquently for a distinct domain of economics in his *Introductory Lectures on Political Economy*, contending, for example, that:

if we really are convinced of the truth of Scripture, and consequently of the falsity of any theory . . . which is really at variance with it, we must needs believe that that theory is also at variance with observable phenomena; and we ought not therefore to shrink from trying that question by an appeal to these. . . . It is for us to “behave ourselves valiantly for our country and for the cities of our God,” instead of bringing the Ark of God into the field of battle to fight for us. (p. 146)²

Thus, for Whately, economics³ is a science of analysis of “observable phenomena,” for which appeal to Christian Scriptures or morality is akin to the presumption of Hophni and Phinehas, the sons of Eli who arrogantly took the ark of the Lord into battle, resulting in their deaths, the death of their father, and the capture of the ark by the Philistines (1 Samuel 4).⁴ The Scriptures, he believed, are authoritative for religion and morality, not economics (Whately, 1840, p. 20).⁵

Despite this seemingly sharp division, however, Whately is also known for using the insights of economics to make a moral case against the slave trade (Emmett, 2013, pp. 137–138). Thus, in practice he found occasion to mix the two. The separation and relation between moral theology and economics remains just as complicated today, and I will survey a variety of perspectives in the first section of this paper, arguing for a more flexible definition of “value-free” as a certain degree of methodological independence from ethics, though not arguing for an exemption from ethical demands in practice or application. In the second section, I explore the potential insights for this discussion from the work of the Dutch theologian and statesman Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920), specifically his doctrine of sphere sovereignty, the organic development

of spheres, the danger of the antithesis, and his analysis of the sphere of science in particular.

Since Kuyper's specifically economic commentary always comes in the normative form of what would more properly be called political economy,⁶ this paper is both historical and constructive. I argue that Kuyper's dialectic of sphere sovereignty offers insight into the relationship between ethics and economics as their own sovereign spheres of common grace, while nevertheless admitting that he did not ever seem to acknowledge such sovereignty for economics in his own work. According to sphere sovereignty, ethics and economics should be their own distinct spheres yet not ends unto themselves, as if they did not need one another. Due to their organic historical origins in moral philosophy, they should be related to one another through political economy. I then conclude with prospects for further exploration of the many normative economic principles and policies of Kuyper's political economy for today.

2 The State of the Question of Economics & Moral Theology

2.1 What is Meant by "Value-Free?"

Perhaps the classic statement of the value-free conception of modern economics comes from Milton Friedman (1966): "Positive economics is in principle independent of any particular ethical position or normative judgments." As such, it ought to be "an 'objective' science, in precisely the same sense as any of the physical sciences" (p. 4). Yet even Friedman does not limit economics to this, writing that economics is only "in part . . . a positive science" (p. 3). He does, in fact, admit a place for normative economics in policy decisions. Nevertheless, his position still stands as representative of the more-or-less mainstream stance of economists: that they have no need for normative judgments of value, not to mention theological principles, for economic analysis.

Yet before and after Friedman, not all economists have been satisfied with this. Alfred Marshall's *Principles of Economics*, which went through eight editions after its publication in 1890 and remained the dominant textbook in English for decades, begins by framing economics as a way to alleviate poverty and its attendant evils (Marshall, 1961, pp. 2–3). Economics, to him, exists to serve this moral good. He does distinguish between scientific observation and normative principles, but he did not so drastically separate them as did Friedman (Marshall, 1961, pp. 38–41).⁷

He even argued that objectivity in economics, for example, required the moral sentiment of sympathy for those outside of one's own class (pp. 45–46).⁸ As for religion, he argued that “the two great forming agencies of the world's history have been the religious and the economic” (p. 1).⁹ Thus, despite Whatley's anticipation of the positive-normative distinction in economics half a century earlier, even in the Anglophone world in Kuyper's time most economists, following Marshall, would likely not have made such strong claims as Friedman.

As another example, in the 1930s Frank Knight (1939c), one of Friedman's teachers, insisted, “Without an adequate ethics and sociology in the broad sense, economics has little to say about policy” (p. 422).¹⁰ This contrasts sharply with Friedman (1966), who argued that it is precisely as a positive science that economics has the most to contribute to public policy (pp. 6–7). Yet Knight rejected Christianity—along with liberalism (1939a), idealism, and socialism (1939b)—as inadequate to assist economics in this regard. In fact, despite his conviction, Emmett (2014) notes that Knight “criticized every ethical system known in his time” (p. 148).

As I will show in my second section, Kuyper would want to limit the positive aspect of economics to mere observation. Anything more, apart from a Christian foundation, would be misguided. But is this possible? For example, Walter Eucken (1951), who advocated for a more genuinely scientific economics in post-war West Germany, argued, “The scientific approach to economics is from the start distinguished from the pre-scientific by the profundity of the questions asked and the analytical penetration with which the facts are approached” (p. 105).¹¹ Eucken does not explicitly rule out the usefulness of specifically Christian insights in this task, but one would search for them in vain in his *Foundations of Economics*.¹² Yet for Eucken, it is clear that economics is not scientific *at all* if it is limited to mere observation or everyday experience:

It is not that what we learn from our everyday experience must be wrong because of its subservience to our interests. It may be either right or wrong, and what has to be found is a strict criterion and a scientific method for deciding that. (p. 32)

I am reminded of the quip of the classical economist William Nassau Senior (1828), a friend of Whatley's and first professor of political economy at Oxford: “Men who fancy they are applying common-sense to questions of Political Economy, are often applying to them only common

prejudice. Instead of opposing, as they fancy, experience to theory, they are opposing the theory of a barbarous age to the theory and experience of an enlightened one” (p. 31).¹³

Eucken is not alone in pointing out the role of bias in economic analysis. While Eucken (1951) believed a method could be found that could transcend ideology in economics (p. 28–33),¹⁴ others have been less optimistic, but do not for that reason abandon the possibility of a truly scientific economics. Economist and theologian Paul Heyne (1998c), for instance, insisted,

[I]t is sheer dogmatism to deny the possibility that one’s choice of a theoretical orientation may have been significantly affected by prior judgments concerning such matters as the value of freedom versus equality, the relative importance of individual opportunity and social harmony, the merits of democracy versus some kind of aristocracy, the risks and the possible gains from conservative and from radical approaches to social reform, or the nature of man and the meaning of the good life. (p. 20)¹⁵

Anthony Randazzo and Jonathan Haidt (2015) have recently presented significant evidence that, in fact, “economists’ value judgments permeate economics” (p. 52). They conclude by asserting that “‘value-free economics’ is no more likely to exist than is the frictionless world of high school physics problems” (p. 54). One might even argue that the shortfalls of rational choice theory as pointed out by Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky (1979; Tversky and Kahneman 1981, 1986) and Robert Frank (1987a, 1987b, 1988, 1989a, 1989b, 1996) ought also to apply to economists themselves. They too make decisions about what to study, how to study it, and how to judge their findings based on personal preferences and commitments in addition to self-interest (in this case, publishing a purely value-free article). And that is sometimes rational or at least “shrewdly irrational,” to use Frank’s (1987a) phrase.

However, Randazzo and Haidt’s conclusion might be rooted in a misunderstanding—I’m not sure most economists would disagree with it. As Samuel Gregg (2001) put it with regard to the concept of *homo economicus*, “This creature, *homo economicus*, exists only as a fiction in the minds of economists, but, as with psychologists and their rats, economists hope that the study of *homo economicus* under laboratory conditions will teach them something of the ways of *homo sapiens* in the real world”

(p. 13).¹⁶ That is, to some degree positive economic science is *meant* to be akin to “the frictionless world of high school physics.” Gregg acknowledges and distinguishes between positive and normative economics, but, using the term “value-free” a bit more narrowly than I am here, he writes, “One should, however, be aware that neither normative nor positive economics is a hard ‘science’ in the sense that chemistry and physics purport to be ‘value-free’ disciplines” (p. 11).¹⁷ Yet as Heyne (1998c) points out, even such “hard sciences” are not *completely* free from values or bias either, due to the essentially personal nature of scientific inquiry and scholarship. “Scientific knowledge grows by testing,” he writes, “but it is scientists who do the testing, not ‘objective reality’” (p. 18).

Thus, to take the term “value-free” to mean “completely objective” would be a mistake in the first place, one of which both critics and advocates ought to be wary. This is why I have used here the broader definition of value-free as a certain degree of methodological independence from ethics, though not an exemption from ethical demands in practice or application.¹⁸ This would also push back against Heyne’s rejection of the positive-normative distinction. While I agree that reducing values to mere subjective preference is problematic (Heyne, 1998c, pp. 14–21), one need not hold such a low view of values or such an absolute view of the value-free nature of positive economics to affirm the utility and possibility of such a distinction. Consider Peter Boettke’s (1998) “devil’s test,” where an angel and a devil might disagree on whether a policy should be enacted (normativity) but agree on its effects (positive analysis). Value commitments may be unavoidable, but they do not inevitably jeopardize scientific objectivity.

Indeed, even Heyne (1998a), despite his theological background, lamented the intrusion of personal (often Christian) morality into the sphere of impersonal economics. Rather, and distinct from Boettke, Heyne argued that economics has its own morality, akin to legal justice.¹⁹ “The criminal-justice system . . .” he wrote,

is not God nor is it running a face-to-face society. A judge who forgives a convicted criminal is not a candidate for sainthood but for impeachment. The morality of large social spheres is simply different from the morality of face-to-face systems. Arguments against capital punishment must take those differences into account, and so must our arguments for revised economic policies. (p. 9)

Similarly, even Ricardo Crespo (1998), who argued contra Boettke that “[e]conomics, to put it bluntly, is a moral science” (p. 201), in the same article accepted Robbins’ distinction between economics and political economy, rather arguing for its moral status based upon Aristotelean epistemology (pp. 207–208).

2.2 Interaction between Economics & Religious Principles

As for what religious (and, thus, Kuyperian) principles can add to economics, a recent symposium in *Econ Journal Watch* helps paint a picture of the wide variety of answers still on the table, from “Nothing” (Waterman, 2014, p. 234)²⁰ to quite a lot. Among those whose answer is more than nothing, David George (2014) argues for the benefits of religion for highlighting internal struggles and for shaping metapreferences (p. 160–165). Andrew Yuengert (2014) argues that economics needs theology for normativity (pp. 243–249), a point compatible with the distinction between economics and political economy. Abbas Mirakhor (2014), who would prefer the more normative approach of the classical economists (i.e. political economy), argues that religious insights not only offer ethical guidance but also alternative paradigms to *homo economicus* (pp. 186–193). Ross Emmett (2014) argues for the significance of the *imago Dei*, the relational nature of persons, and how “incarnational theology provides us God’s charity and generosity as a model of our innovation” (p. 150).

Perhaps the most Kuyperian, Eric Rasmusen (2014) argues that “what economics needs is not ‘religious formulations’ but religious *assumptions*, along with certain rhetorical *tools* of scholarship that seem out of keeping with the mathematical precision that entered economics in the 1950s.” Among rhetorical tools, he lists quotation, authority, anecdote, and humor. “These techniques, along with metaphor, poetry, allegory, are felt . . . by many to be unmodern, unscientific, and unprofessional.” But he counters that “[a]t the highest level of the profession . . . these tools have yielded spectacular successes” (p. 214; cf. Webb, 2006).

As for religious assumptions, from them “flow” both “positive and normative implications” (Rasmusen, 2014, p. 215). Rasmusen affirms the usefulness of different religious assumptions as additional tools of analysis. Certainly this would include Christian, even Calvinist, assumptions as well. In outlining how this would work, however, there is also a clear degree of methodological neutrality or positivism. “To do so,” he writes,

one does not need to believe the assumptions, and the analysis can be intellectually interesting even if one believes the assumptions are false. I, a Christian, could use my economics tool kit to clarify how one should use the Talmud to decide how much a seller should have to tell a buyer about product quality. . . . Without myself believing the policy desirable to God, I could tackle how the level of a head tax on non-Muslims . . . would affect their conversion rate if modern Egypt revived the tax. . . . Without being a Roman Catholic, I could compare the marginal costs of reducing one's time in Purgatory via different indulgences. (pp. 215–216)

Nearly echoing Kuyper on art, science, and education, he further clarifies, “Where I think economics is lacking is not in methodology but in which assumptions are made about this world and the next. . . . Neutrality is not possible, and we should think about what the different postulations corresponding to different religions imply about economic behavior and policy” (pp. 216–217).²¹

We see in Rasmusen also, like Whately perhaps, the helpfulness of economic methods to applied Christian (and other) ethics. This is a point highlighted by Victor Claar (2014) as well, viz. “the usefulness of economic thinking in addressing issues of ongoing interest to the Christian church: elevating the poor, tending to the planet, serving others through our work, and raising our children” (p. 128). Claar further outlines five potential roles for Christian economists, preferring some to others: (1) developing an alternative “Christian” economic science; (2) subversively steering economic research into areas of Christian concern; (3) taking a critical stance from an explicitly Christian perspective; (4) communicating “the usefulness of the economic way of thinking” for moral matters to “the caring public” (p. 130); and (5) working toward a more thorough integration of “hard-headed economic research and writing with deep theological underpinnings” (p. 132). I think it is fair to say that Claar finds #1 lacking, while Kuyper might see it as the goal.²² Conversely, and for the same reason he might support #1, Kuyper would likely fault #2 for being too minimalist of an approach. The others, I think, could all be fairly compatible with the Kuyperian approach I will outline in the second section of this paper. Significantly, Claar also recounts that as he studied economics he “came to view it as the science of good stewardship,” a

theological concept that owes much of its modern popularity to Kuyper himself (Kuyper, 1895/2013, p. 723–724).²³

Lastly, it should be acknowledged that there have been Calvinist economists since Kuyper's time. Goudzwaard and Jongeneel (2014) outline four distinct but not mutually exclusive Reformed "inputs" in economic theory that such Calvinist economists have employed: (1) In thematic inputs, "[f]rom one or more central themes, chosen by the author, the scenery of economic life and thought is so to speak entered from a side curtain." They continue, "The usual aim is to detect on the base of biblical texts possibly wrong accents or dark spots in economic theory, and to subsequently submit them to a positive critique" (p. 209). (2) In embedded inputs, "the science of economics is not addressed in a judgmental way." An economist taking this approach may even identify with a particular economic school (e.g. Keynesian) but yet "he is deeply convinced that economic science . . . always needs a kind of embedding, which should come from outside (a theologico-philosophical and epistemological foundation) to be able to follow a safe course in . . . 'a fallen world'" (p. 212). (3) Inputs using the methodology of welfare economics seek to replace or augment the typical social welfare functions with more normative, Christian ones (p. 214). And (4) inputs of a renewed normative institutional analysis lead "to a different style of economic analysis itself, or even a switch of paradigms." This usually takes one of two forms: The first systematically places human economic actions "against the background of a scala of—usually normatively qualified—different social institutions." The second claims that "the concept of economic causality itself is in need of a normatively oriented theoretical revision" (p. 215). It should be noted that since these largely come after Kuyper's time, they admit other theoretical influences, such as the thought of the Dutch Reformed philosopher Herman Dooyeweerd. While this is no reason to ignore these approaches, and I think that all might be compatible with the Kuyperian approach I will highlight here, it would be a mistake to anachronistically read one or another back into Kuyper's work without first taking the time to understand Kuyper on his own terms, which is the narrow scope of this article.

That said, this section's survey reveals that there is room between the extremes of pure economism and what Wilhelm Röpke (1942) called heteronomism, the dominance of ethics or any other discipline over economics. This gives us justification to explore whether applying Kuyper's

dialectic of sphere sovereignty to modern economic science may not be so foreign to the present concerns of economists after his time and up to our own. To Kuyper, then, I now turn.

3 Kuyper's Social Thought

3.1 Economics as a Sovereign Sphere

To place Kuyper's thought in its historical context, we must begin by asking if economics as a positive science, distinct from the normative discipline of political economy, was a sovereign sphere for Kuyper. My answer is no.

This might sound odd to some. After all, as John Bolt and others have noted, Kuyper (1898/1931) speaks in various sources of the spheres of agriculture, business, commerce, exchange, industry, shop, society, and trades unions (pp. 95, 130).²⁴ All of these can be termed economic, but none are synonymous with economics. "Economics," writes James Bratt (2013), "had never been the strong suit of the Antirevolutionary cause, whose leaders, coming mostly from theology and law, tended to submerge economic questions beneath political-philosophical generalizations" (p. 221–222). While Kuyper, to Bratt, improved over others in his party by going beyond the typical, naïve emphasis "that employer benevolence and employee obedience were all that Christian ethics needed, or was permitted, to mention on the matter" (p. 222), he notes that Kuyper's conception of economics does not go beyond normative political economy, at best: "Kuyper's economics, like his politics, was first to last a communal theory with a communal ethic" (p. 226).²⁵ In his 1898 *Encyclopedia*, Kuyper even insists on retaining economics as a sub-discipline of jurisprudence (pp. 142–143). Furthermore, as Joost Hengstmengel (2012) notes, "Kuyper's repeated call for the development of a genuine Calvinist science of economics"²⁶ went largely unanswered in his own time (p. 418). He notes that A. P. Diepenhorst, who finished his doctoral dissertation on Calvin and economics in 1904, was "the first economics professor at the Free University" (pp. 417–418). Hengstmengel, for his part, conjectures that "Kuyper never commented on the rise of economic positivism as such, but he would undoubtedly have resisted it, as he did in the case of scientific positivism more generally" (p. 419).

For reasons to be detailed, Hengstmengel's statement is far too ambiguous to contradict my thesis. On the one hand, as we have already

seen, understanding economics as a positive or value-free science does not require economism. On the other hand, Kuyper's dialectic of sphere sovereignty involves the relation of spheres based, in part, upon organic, historical origins—thus making far more relevant the fact that Kuyper did not in his own context acknowledge the emergence of economics as a sovereign sphere. Furthermore, Kuyper (1898/1931) did acknowledge a value-free aspect to scientific inquiry in his concept of the “lower sciences” (p. 112).²⁷ To these latter points I presently turn.

3.2 Sphere Sovereignty as Social Dialectic

Kuyper's conception of society is a dynamic, organically developing whole—history matters for Kuyper (1880/2013, pp. 18–22).²⁸ As Bolt (2001) put it, “historical awareness,” to Kuyper, “. . . helps resist temptation nostalgically to imagine past golden ages or, in revolutionary fashion, to imagine creating future utopias” (p. 75). For the modernist, “history is suppressed for the sake of a dominating idea” (p. 72).²⁹ On the contrary, according to Bratt (2013),

Sphere sovereignty rendered as divinely ordained a theory of organic social development resembling that of the German historical school, which had both influenced Groen [van Prinsterer] prior to his evangelical conversion and become entwined with various currents of Romantic social philosophy across the Continent. In other words, it came to Kuyper down the two strongest lines of his own inheritance. (p. 143)

Thus, one does not fully understand any particular area of society within Kuyper's conception of sphere sovereignty without also understanding its historical emergence in the realm of common grace. In particular, whence each sphere came conditions the goal of its vocation.

I refer to sphere sovereignty as a dialectic because, when Kuyper's emphasis on organic, historical development is properly accounted for, that is how sphere sovereignty functions. We might even say that sphere sovereignty is Kuyper's answer to Marxist social critique. Indeed, in *The Problem of Poverty* (1891/1991, pp. 43–57), his speech given at the First Dutch Christian Social Congress in the same year that Pope Leo XIII published his landmark social encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891), Kuyper actually credits the socialists of his time for having the right approach in their architectonic critique of society, even while criticizing them for do-

ing so from the wrong principles. I have argued elsewhere (Pahman 2015, pp. 26–43) that Kuyper’s social theory is significantly influenced by the philosophy of the German idealist F.W.J. Schelling. In short, we might say that as Marx (1873/1961, p. 20) claimed to turn Hegel’s dialectic “right side up again” by modifying his metaphysical dialectic into a social and materialistic one, similarly Kuyper modified Schelling’s metaphysical dialectic into a social and Calvinist one. It would be too tangential to descend into the details of how Schelling differed from Hegel, but the most important takeaway is that Schelling’s dialectic was open rather than deterministic, focused on freedom, and while acknowledging the good of autonomy insisted that it was not an end in itself, even using the term antithesis for the contrast between such a mistaken conception and what true freedom ought to be.

To demonstrate how this functions in Kuyper’s sphere sovereignty, we can begin by looking at something (unlike economics) that Kuyper *did* consider a sovereign sphere in his own time: art. Kuyper (1905/2011) remarks how Christian art first began as ecclesial art (p. 177).³⁰ However, “once it had achieved further development, art could appeal in every possible way to an independent, free, and autonomous existence” (p. 116). For the Church to try to subsume the sphere of art back within its domain would be a violation of art’s God-ordained sovereignty for it. Since the Reformation, according to Kuyper, art now exists *in* itself, but it should not exist *for* itself as well. Art disconnected from the sacred whence it came would be an expression of the antithesis, “celebrating the unnatural and the monstrous” (p. 146).³¹ As Peter Heslam (1998) put it, Kuyper’s “ideas on art run counter to ‘art for art’s sake’” (p. 197).³² While affirming the good of natural beauty, and to that extent even the good of (some) non-Christian art, the vocation of art, according to Kuyper (1905/2011), does not cease to be sacred when freed from ecclesiastical exclusivity but finds its fulfillment in revealing the sacred in all of life: “For us Christians . . . art exists in direct connection with our expectations about eternity,” he wrote. “With trembling hand, as it were, art reaches out toward the glory that through Christ will one day fill heaven and earth” (p. 144). There is no inevitability to this conception of art. This side of the return of Jesus Christ, it is a free and sovereign sphere and could descend further and further into “art for art’s sake” in antithesis to its God-ordained calling to be art for the sacred in all of life.

Thus, turning to economics, we first need to ask, “Whence did eco-

nomics come?” in order to understand its proper vocation from a Kuyperian perspective. As I’ve already noted, in Kuyper’s time and context, or at least from his own perspective, economics was a sub-discipline of jurisprudence, not its own sovereign sphere. While, as we have seen, the separation between moral theology and economics came much earlier in England, it had not yet happened when Adam Smith, typically credited as the founder of the modern discipline,³³ first published *The Wealth of Nations* in 1776. Smith himself was “a moral philosopher,” with a communal rather than individualist anthropology, and whose economic work, according to many scholars, is properly embedded within “the moral rules” and “institutional scaffolding” outlined in his works on morality and jurisprudence (Ballor, 2014, p. 127; Emmett, 2014, p. 150; Mirakhor, 2014, p. 188).³⁴ According to Heyne (1998b), Adam Smith “never discerned an ‘economy,’ a distinct sector or segment of society on which one might have a special moral or religious perspective” (p. 104).

Smith, however, is instructive for answering our question: Classical political economy came from moral philosophy and law, combined with sociological and scientific observation. And modern economics came from political economy (Alvey, 1999). From a Kuyperian perspective, economics as a discipline, then, ought to be related to ethics through political economy. While affording it some value-free ground of its own domain, it has a unique ability and duty to aid ethical analysis and political policy. Though distinct from ethics, economics should not exist for itself nor intrude upon the sovereignty of any other spheres, including ethics. One must simultaneously avoid the materialist error of imagining that any “single piece of our mental world is to be hermetically sealed off from the rest” (Kuyper, 1880/1998, p. 488) and the pantheist error of blurring the boundaries between the “[l]ines of demarcation” that God himself has drawn “throughout the entire domain of created life” (Kuyper, 1892/1998, p. 368).³⁵ Furthermore, per the organic nature of society (Kuyper, 1880/2013, pp. 19, 361),³⁶ economists have a right to associate and thus organize schools, societies, and faculties of economics.

3.3 Kuyper’s Calvinist Science

The foregoing is not enough to formulate a Kuyperian perspective on modern, “value-free” economic science, however, because Kuyper (1905/2011) actually did have a lot to say about what constitutes a properly Christian, even Calvinist, science, and he includes jurisprudence,

under which he placed economics, as a science (pp. 97–98). Additional tenets of Kuyper’s thought come to the fore in this discussion, viz. the divine decree, common grace, palingenesis, and spiritual liberty. Yet in this, Kuyper’s idealism gives way, in part, to a more realist line of thought.³⁷ At his best, he strove to adapt his social theory to the often rough contours of concrete life, as becomes evident with his concept of the “lower sciences,” rather than forcing every area of life into his preconceived dialectic.

“Calvinism,” Kuyper (1898/1931) declared in his fourth Stone Lecture, “cannot but foster love for science” (p. 112). This love, he argued, followed directly from the Calvinist emphasis on the doctrine of divine decree. The idea that all exists by God’s will, thought, and word “forces upon us the recognition of something that is general, hidden and yet expressed in that which is general. Yea, it forces us to the confession that there must be stability and regularity ruling over everything” (p. 114).³⁸ This, to Kuyper, is the theological foundation of science.

Our world, however, does not exist in Edenic perfection; it has been tainted by sin. Through sin, the antithesis rears its head once again. As Kuyper (1905/2011) writes in *Wisdom & Wonder*, “Sin . . . lures and tempts people to place science outside of a relationship with God, thereby stealing science from God, and ultimately turning science against God” (p. 51). What, then, of scientific progress? Kuyper admits, “Although being conducted almost exclusively by people who are strangers to the fear of the Lord, [modern] science has nevertheless produced a treasure of knowledge that we as Christians admire and gratefully use” (p. 53). The answer is that from the Middle Ages science has emerged from both church and state rightfully to dwell as its own sovereign sphere of common grace (pp. 34–35).³⁹ “We can explain this,” Kuyper continues, “only by saying that although sin does indeed spread its corruption, nevertheless common grace has intervened in order to temper and restrain this operation of sin” (p. 53). Thus, even when non-Christians discover what is true, it is by the grace of God and despite their depravity.

This brings us, however, to the other side of the antithesis. If “the unbelieving world” lacks the particular grace of palingenesis (regeneration) yet “excels in many things” (Kuyper, 1898/1931, p. 121), how much more so ought Christians, who do fear the Lord, confess the reality of sin, and whose minds and hearts have been renewed by the Holy Spirit. From this, Kuyper derives his distinction between what he calls normal and ab-

normal scientific perspectives. For him, there is no conflict between faith and science but rather between two competing sciences (p. 131). “The *normal* and the *abnormal*,” says Kuyper, “are two absolutely differing starting-points, which have nothing in common in their origin. Parallel lines never intersect” (p. 134). This sharp division, notes Bacote, would seem to run counter to his glowing praise for non-Christian science as the work of common grace.⁴⁰ Furthermore, his assumption of inevitable bias in scientific research resonates with Randazzo and Haidt (2015). Basic, extra-scientific assumptions and principles do affect research outcomes.

Nevertheless, Kuyper also attempts to adapt to the undeniable concrete reality that not only is there good in non-Christian science, but there are, in fact, some areas of intersection. As Bacote (2005) writes, “His concerns were simultaneously theological and practical. . . . Depending on the occasion, Kuyper’s goals called for emphasizing a general appreciation of creation or for rallying the troops to articulate and implement a uniquely Christian approach . . .” (p. 109).⁴¹ Thus, Kuyper (1905/2011) writes, “Naturally this does not mean that there is not a lower kind of science that circumvents this antithesis. To the extent that results are governed by factual observation, obtained by weighing and measuring and counting, all scientific researchers are equal” (p. 79).⁴²

There is therefore a basic empirical core of “factual observation,” the study of which is unaffected by palingenesis or the antithesis. In this sense, we may call Kuyper’s “lower sciences” truly value-free. However, Kuyper’s (1905/2011) idea of science is broad, including not just disciplines like “physics and chemistry” (p. 66), but also those like history, literature, and jurisprudence.⁴³ Oddly, however, it is precisely what in English are referred to as “hard sciences” that for Kuyper are “lower sciences.”⁴⁴ While the physicist might take offence, if economics could find itself to be one of many “lower sciences,” it would be a significant upgrade from being derided as the dismal science. And no sooner than economists are given the needle’s eye of only what can be quantified and measured, will they lead camels through it with miraculous ease.⁴⁵

Kuyper’s (1905/2011) conception of science would guard against this sort of economism, however, by insisting that “from making many observations higher science proceeds to compose a complex theory that clearly explains the relevant causes, operative principles, and interconnectedness of phenomena” (p. 65). To the extent that economics is a study of human action, it also would belong to the realm of the spirit and

thus be a “higher science.”⁴⁶ However, on at least one occasion, Kuyper (1895/2013) does affirm that there is a difference between *description* of any given economic situation and moral *prescriptions* regarding that same situation (p. 722). In general, though, it is not enough in the case of “higher science” for Christians to also participate in secular scientific research—Claar’s (2014) option #2—since this requires *more than* mere observation. Rather, they need “to begin pursuing science independently on the basis of their own principles” (1905/2011, p. 104)—Claar’s option #1. Every scientist has her own subjective starting point, lines of inquiry, and goals, and the Christian thus should not be denied the freedom to pursue science based on Christian principles. While Kuyper’s position logically leads to some degree of pillarization, his commitment to spiritual or intellectual liberty (1880/2013, p. 361; 1905/2011, p. 67) and his acknowledgement of pluralism even among Christians lead him to nevertheless insist upon free inquiry, tempered by the internal laws of each discipline (1880/2013, p. 126), for all perspectives (1880/2013, pp. 139–140).

In sum, even if a Kuyperian perspective can account for modern, value-free economics and affirm the secular study of economics as a matter, at least, of spiritual freedom, the space afforded that positive study is quite narrow; mere observation cannot be all to which economics restricts itself. Conversely, the idea of conducting economics at an expressly Christian (even Calvinist) institution, free of church and state, and of economics being undergirded and guided by Christian (even Calvinist) principles and directed toward Christian ends would not require one to utterly reject the idea of a value-free economic science nor to reject the insights of the discipline up until this time. This would hold even for the insights of non-Christian economists, due to the influence of common grace and the neutrality of empirical observation and measurement as “lower science.” At the same time, Randazzo and Haidt’s research into bias in economics may provide empirical ground for Kuyper’s insistence on the significance of palingenesis and, conversely, the danger of the antithesis.

4 Conclusion

To what extent, then, might we appropriate Kuyper’s normative policies for our own context today? This paper provides a way for seeking such a rapprochement. For Kuyper, Calvinist principles should underlie, ani-

mate, and provide the goal of any Calvinist economic science. Nevertheless, one must pay attention to the rough contours of concrete life and leave some value-free room for economics to flourish as its own sovereign sphere, providing its own insights to contribute to one's social theology. In fact, Kuyper did believe that societal principles should be judged by their effects (Kuyper, 1880/2013, p. 360). Thus, if any of his policies have since been tried and found wanting, either the policy represents a flawed application of Kuyperian principles or the principles themselves are flawed. To what extent this may be the case, however, is the subject for further research and essential for any future Kuyperian political economy.

Endnotes

- 1 Emmett cites Waterman in particular. For his treatment of Whately, see Waterman (1991, pp. 204–215).
- 2 That economics should be understood as a science, to Whately, Emmett (2014) writes, “The science of exchange was not [to him] any more hostile to Christian morality than Copernican astronomy was. But Christian social thinkers would ignore economic principles to their peril” (p. 146).
- 3 Or *catallatycs*—Whately's preferred term.
- 4 For critiques of a few modern examples of what Whately was worried about, see Boettke (2007), Du Plessis (2010), and Lunn (2011).
- 5 See Whately (1840): “We ought to employ [the Scriptures] for their own proper purpose; which is to reveal to us religious and moral truths” (p. 20). Similarly, though not identically, see Kuyper (2013 [1880], p. 35).
- 6 As Ballor (2014) notes, “Classical political economy was concerned with the management of the law of the nation or state. In this sense, it did not pretend to be beyond normative concerns or value judgments. Political economy assumed a particular view of the good or *telos* of nations” (p. 131). Kuyper's stance toward economics, I argue, fits well with this classical standpoint. By contrast, I herein adopt the distinction of Robbins (1971) between political economy and economics: “I adopted the habit of designating such interests by the old-fashioned term Political Economy to make clear their dependence on judgments of value and distinguish them from pure science.

- Thus I announced my *Economic Planning and International Order* as ‘essentially an essay in what may be called Political Economy, as distinct from Economics in the strict sense of the word. It depends upon the technical apparatus of the analytic Economics; but it applies this apparatus to the examination of schemes for the realization of aims whose formulation lies outside Economics, and it does not abstain from appeal to the probabilities of political practice when such an appeal has seemed relevant’” (p. 150, quoted in Crespo, 1998, pp. 207–208). Ballor, for his part, takes a slightly different line than I in suggesting that “theology and economics find their reconciliation in the mediating discipline of ethics” (117). I herein argue that, rather, political economy would be a better “mediating discipline.” On the evolution of the term political economy from its older French usage to that prevalent after Adam Smith, see Waterman (2008, pp. 35–41).
- 7 On the empirical nature of economics, Marshall writes, “The *raison d’être* of economics as a separate science is that it deals chiefly with that part of man’s action which is most under the control of measurable motives; and which therefore lends itself better than any other to systematic reasoning and analysis” (pp. 38–39).
 - 8 Marshall does not use the term “moral sentiment,” but Adam Smith, at least, would have. See Smith (1982, p. I.i.2.1, 13).
 - 9 This, I suspect, is in intentional contrast to Marx and Engels, who argued that the economic was the principal and ultimate, though not the sole, agency in history. See Karl Marx (1978, pp. 136–142), and Friedrich Engels (1978, pp. 760–768).
 - 10 Similarly, see Röpke (1942), 1–19, esp. 15. Emmett (2013) offers a salient insight into the relationship between Knight, his students, and the University of Chicago school of economics: “[F]ollowing George Stigler and Gary Becker . . . Knight’s students at Chicago extended the first proposition—life is economic—so far that one wondered if any room remained for Knight’s second proposition—economics is not all of life. . . . The fact that Knight refused to yield on this second is one of the reasons I have argued that Chicago rejected Knight . . .” (p. 148).
 - 11 For the context of Eucken’s project, in addition to a basic familiarity with German history in the first half of the twentieth century, one needs a basic familiarity with the methods of how economic history and theory had been set in opposition to one another in Germany,

- perhaps most notably in the debate between Schmoller and Menger. On this, see R. B. Ekelund, Jr. and R. F. Hebert (2007, pp. 234–237).
- 12 Nevertheless, according to Röpke (1957, p. 128), we can say that Christianity was certainly important to Eucken.
 - 13 Senior, for his part, argued that political economy would one day be ranked “among the first of moral sciences in interest and utility” (p. 1).
 - 14 For a more nuanced parsing of “ideology” than I can offer here, see Röpke (1942, pp. 5–6). In short, Röpke argues that while “crude political aims or sectional interests” rightly fall under the term “ideology” in the negative, Marxist sense, “that does not mean that ‘common interest,’ ‘justice’ or ‘patriotism’ are ideologies themselves” (p. 5).
 - 15 See also Röpke (1942, p. 6).
 - 16 For a critique of *homo economicus* on the grounds that it is outdated for our globalized age, see Edward J. O’Boyle (2007, pp. 321–337). See also Angelina N. Christie (2013, pp. 37–51). Christie examines attempts to bring the experimental method into economics, revealing through scientific testing some of the limits of *homo economicus*.
 - 17 For an extended treatment of why this methodological confusion is so harmful, see Friedrich Hayek (1942, 1943, 1944).
 - 18 For the role of and need for ethics and etiquette in the peer review process, for example, see Dylan Pahman (2014, pp. 1–7).
 - 19 There may be an even closer overlap here with the economics of the Dutch Neo-Calvinist Herman Dooyeweerd, who held to a normative view of economics conditioned by law and its own inner principle while being prior to, though not in practice separable from, ethics. See Hengstmengel (2012, pp. 415–429). It seems clear, however, that Heyne is arguing for ethics as a constitutive part of economics, just not the same ethics that one would apply to one’s relation with God or personal acquaintances.
 - 20 See also Andrew Morriss (2014): “Klein asks in his introduction whether there is something that our faiths bring to economic thinking that is lacking or even precluded by mainstream economics. I don’t think that there is. I do find that much of religious thinking about economics is horribly confused. But the problem is more that writers on religious doctrine have failed to understand the economics than that the economics is hampered by a lack of religious tools” (p. 197).

- 21 See Kuyper (2011 [1905], pp. 143–144) on art and the Christian assumption “about this world and the next,” Kuyper (1931[1898], pp. 140–141) on science and the impossibility of complete neutrality, and Kuyper (1998 [1880], p. 481) on the inadmissibility of a “pact of neutrality with learning that proceeds from another principle” in education.
- 22 Incidentally, Claar (2014) notes, “This avenue of influence [has been] best exemplified by economists historically connected to Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan” (p. 130). Perhaps this reflects a Kuyperian standpoint of that institution.
- 23 See Kuyper (2013 [1895], pp. 713–757) esp. 723–724, and Kuyper (2011 [1895], p. 656). See also, Nicolaas H. Gootjes (2013). Gootjes notes that, in modern Reformed thought, “It is precisely Kuyper who in his treatment of the eighth commandment made the idea of the steward into a central concept” (p. 707).
- 24 Dr. Bolt shared a helpful document in personal correspondence parsing out several of Kuyper’s lists of spheres, to which I am indebted for the list of economic spheres I’ve included here. For a few primary source references, see Kuyper, (1931 [1898], pp. 95, 130). See also Vincent Bacote, “Introduction,” in Kuyper (2011, p. 24, 29); Bacote (2005, p. 809); Bratt (2013, pp. 144–145); Bolt (2014); and Heslam (1998, p. 154).
- 25 For an excellent overview and application of Kuyper’s systematic and multi-layered approach to issues of political economy, see Goudzwaard (2013).
- 26 Hengstmengel (2012, p. 418). He continues to say that “the Kuyperian dream to construct an economics on Calvinist foundations at the Free University hardly got off the ground.” As for Kuyper’s call (see Kuyper, 1991[1891]): “One of the pitiful fruits of state monopoly, which continues to increase in this country’s universities, is that we have not yet even produced academic specialists. None of us at this Congress stands out as an expert in economics, for example” (p. 23). For an overview of the work of a short-lived Dutch school of “Calvinist economics” in the first half of the twentieth century, see Hengstmengel (2013). Of those profiled by Hengstmengel, Jan Ridder seems to have been closest to my thesis: “According to Ridder, Diepenhorst is too critical about the existing schools of economic thought, partly due to lack of distinction between theoretical eco-

- nomics and political economy. Calvinist economics should concentrate on the latter . . .” (p. 131).
- 27 See Kuyper (1931 [1898], p. 112; 2008 [1898], pp. 147–148; 2011 [1905], p. 79).
- 28 See Kuyper (2013 [1880], pp. 18–22; 1931 [1898], pp. 33–34). See also Bratt (2013, p. 143); Bolt (2001, pp. 72–79); Pahman (2015, pp. 26–43); and Skillen, “Introduction,” in Kuyper (1991 [1891], pp. 17–20).
- 29 Bolt (2001) further notes that “Christian-historical” and “anti-revolutionary” were used by Groen van Prinsterer and Kuyper “interchangeably” (pp. 78–79n254).
- 30 Kuyper (2011 [1905]) remarks as well that education followed a similar historical development (p. 117). For a more detailed treatment of Kuyper on art, see Heslam (1998, pp. 196–223) and Pahman (2015, pp. 33–37).
- 31 I take the antithesis for Kuyper to be more than simply the distinction between Christian and non-Christian. Bacote, for example, writes of the “antithesis between Christians and those not regenerated by the Holy Spirit” (Bacote, “Introduction,” in Kuyper, (2011 [1905], p. 25). More precisely, however, to Kuyper it is the antithesis between grace and sin. See Kuyper, (2011 [1905]): “In itself . . . multiformity contains nothing injurious. . . . What is injurious in this are only the *antitheses* that have arisen, whose origin could lie nowhere else than in the outworking of sin” (p. 85). Nevertheless, the latter conception (grace vs. sin) may often express itself through the former conception (Christian vs. non-Christian).
- 32 See also Pahman (2015, p. 35). It should be noted, nevertheless, that Heslam (1998) claims that in his *Lectures on Calvinism* Kuyper’s “doctrine of the antithesis . . . plays no significant role” in his discussion of art. Bacote (2005, p. 83) follows him in this as well. This, however, is clearly not the case in *Wisdom and Wonder* (e.g. pp. 179–182), upon which I draw here.
- 33 For a survey of economics before Adam Smith, see Murray N. Rothbard (1995), and Joseph A. Schumpeter (1954, pp. 48–355). For some early modern primary sources, see Thomas Cajetan (1499/2014), Martín de Azpilcueta (1556/2014), Wolfgang Musculus (1573/2013), Luis de Molina (1593/2015), and Juan de Mariana (1609/2011). Smith also was a friend of and influenced by Hume, who commented on economic matters as well. See David Hume (1752).

- 34 Mirakhor cites the work of Jerry Evensky, Elias Khalil, Gavin Kennedy, Neil MacCormick, Douglass North, August Oncken, James Otteson, and David Rose.
- 35 See also Kuyper (2013 [1880], p. 20).
- 36 See also Bacote (2015, pp. 72-73), Bratt (2013, p. 143).
- 37 Kuyper's historiography of Calvinism and science, however, was hopelessly romantic. Kuyper's story of science, Calvinism, and the founding of Leiden in his Stone Lectures, according to Heslam (1998, p. 171), was "one of his most romantic flights of historical interpretation."
- 38 See also Kuyper (2011 [1905], p. 36).
- 39 Similarly, see Wilhelm Röpke (1942). Röpke writes, "True science as we understand it was born when the early Ionian philosophers established the principle that science must be autonomous in the sense that in the search for truth the conscience of the scholar is to be the ultimate authority, independent of the heteronomous authority of the worldly or ecclesiastical rulers" (p. 6).
- 40 See Bacote, "Introduction," in Kuyper (2011 [1905], p. 25).
- 41 Bacote is speaking here about public engagement, but it accords well with what he says in his introduction to Kuyper's *Wisdom & Wonder*.
- 42 See also p. 92; Kuyper (1931 [1898], p. 139), and Kuyper (1998 [1880], p. 487).
- 43 See also Bacote, "Introduction," in Kuyper (2011 [1905], p. 26).
- 44 Kuyper (1998 [1892]) laments, "In England only what someone has measured, weighed, or counted is regarded as science" (p. 388).
- 45 On this, see Ballor (2014). Ballor compares most economists to Oscar Wilde's description of the cynic, who "knows the price of everything and the value of nothing" (p. 123).
- 46 On this basis, Crespo (1998) argues that economics should be considered a moral science. His position has further nuance, however (p. 204).

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