A Reformed Approach to Economics: The Kuyperian Tradition

When the Dutch Calvinists immigrated to America in the latter part of the nineteenth century, they brought with them the ideas of Abraham Kuyper. Kuyper was a prolific writer, renowned intellectual, and powerful politician in Holland around the turn of the century. He even served as Prime Minister of Holland from 1901-1905. Kuyper was an expansive figure who was able to successfully influence virtually the entirety of life in his own country, and whose Calvinist philosophy was persuasive enough to energize a movement in a new one. Historian James Bratt says that “more than anyone else (one can almost say more than everyone else put together), Kuyper defined the ideology of the (Dutch neo-Calvinist) movement” (p. 14).

What Kuyper teaches is an all-encompassing Christianity, one that informs and directs our thoughts and actions in every area of life, that recognizes the comprehensiveness of the Kingdom of God, and that puts Christians to work under Christ in the Kingdom. Wolterstorff refers to it as “world-formative Christianity” rather than the “world-avertive Christianity” prevalent among many Christian groups.

While Kuyper’s ideas have touched a variety of Christian traditions, they have been particularly influential in the institutions of the Christian Reformed Church, and especially in the Christian colleges with close ties to the Christian Reformed Church. One of the issues discussed by faculty in these schools has been the relationship of Christianity with economic affairs. In his recent book on evangelicals and capitalism, Craig Gay says that scholars steeped in the Kuyperian tradition of cultural criticism have been leaders at “the progressive end of the spectrum” in the debate over capitalism. Gay is certainly correct that Kuyperians have for the most part been critical of capitalism, but it must be added that Kuyperians turn their critical eye on any theory or political-economic system supported by non-Christian foundations. Not all heirs of Kuyper are critical of capitalism, however, for the reconstructionists, or theonomists, also count Kuyper as an intellectual forebear.
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What both “progressives” and reconstructionists owe to Kuyper is their belief that Jesus is Lord of all. Where they differ is on their respective interpretations of Kuyper, and on their understanding of Christ’s lordship. It is the “progressive end” of the Kuyperian tradition in economics, which I will call Kuyperianism, that is introduced in this article, leaving to Edd Noell the task of introducing reconstructionism in a later issue of the Bulletin. Beyond this introduction the paper is divided into four sections; first, an introduction to the general Kuyperian philosophy; second, the critique of contemporary neoclassical economics; third, the attempt to develop a new approach to economics; and fourth, some reflections on the future of the Kuyperian approach to economics.

I. Neo-Calvinism, Kuyperian Style

Calvinism has been dominated by three identifiable tendencies, all of which are found to varying degrees in America’s numerous Calvinist communities. Historian of American Evangelicalism George Marsden identifies these as “doctrinalist, culturalist, and pietist” (p. 3). Doctrinalists, sometimes called confessionalists, work to develop and maintain soundly formulated creeds. Pietists focus on living the Christian life in a corrupt world; they tend toward separation and worry about the contaminating influences of secular culture. And culturalists believe “Calvinists should be transforming culture and bring all of creation back to its proper relationship to God’s law...” (Marsden, p. 9). Abraham Kuyper was a culturalist.

Kuyperians emphasize the Calvinist notion that the entire creation falls under the lordship of Jesus Christ, and thus express a deep concern for the character and development of culture. Not only should Christians serve the Lord in their worship and prayer, but in every other area of life as well. Kuyperians are no friends of dualism. Just as Calvin fought in his day against the grace/nature dualism of the Roman Catholic Church, Kuyperians today continue to contest the dualisms that arise in both Roman Catholic and Protestant traditions. Kuyperians are fond of reciting and paraphrasing what is probably Kuyper’s most famous line: “there is not a single inch on the whole terrain of our human existence over which Christ...does not exclaim, ‘Mine!’” (quoted in Bratt, p. 231).

Kuyperians argue that God created a good world, appointing Adam and Eve and their progeny as on-site stewards. Kuyperians point out that the cultural mandate was issued before, not after, the Fall, but find no reason to believe that it was nullified by the Fall. God’s Creation was still inherently good, and culture would still develop, but it could no longer develop perfectly, for cultural development would now be distorted by the effects of the curse. The curse wouldn’t last, however, for God immediately began the work of restoring the world to its full created goodness. Nor did the call to responsible stewardship change. Though we are no longer capable of serving the Lord and exercising our stewardship perfectly, we are still called to do our utmost to serve and glorify him.

The idea that Jesus is Lord over all creation comes from Calvin of course, and with this fresh insight into the meaning of Christianity, Calvin opened up all areas of life to our obedient service to God. For God cares as much for what goes on in our businesses, families, schools, neighborhoods, and farms as he cares about what goes on in our churches and “spiritual” lives. In addition, Calvin objected to the Roman Catholic believe that the Church is God’s mediator on earth, insisting instead on a direct relationship between God and his people. Kuyper says that under Calvinism domestic life regained its independence, trade and commerce realized their strength in liberty, art and science were set free from every ecclesiastical bond and restored to their own inspirations, and man

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began to understand the subjection of all nature with its hidden forces and treasures to himself as a holy duty, imposed upon him by the original ordinances of Paradise: “Have dominion over them.” Henceforth the curse should no longer rest upon the world itself, but upon that which is sinful in it, and instead of monastic flight from the world the duty is now emphasized of serving God in the world, in every position in life (1931, pp. 56-7, emphasis in the original).

Kuyperians do not hide from the “world,” but try to have a revitalizing influence on it. They are what H.R. Niebuhr calls conversionists who see their work under Christ as being nothing less than the transformation of culture (1951, Chapter 6). They evaluate what’s happening in culture and try to live so that God’s intentions for culture are progressively realized. It is in helping Christians understand how to think of their involvement in the world that Kuyper makes his greatest contribution.

In Kuyper’s Stone lectures, given at Princeton in 1898, he contends that Calvinism provides a complete life system, for it decisively treats the three issues any complete life system, or worldview*, must address: “(1) our relationship to God, (2) our relation to man, and (3) our relation to the world” (p. 42). Believing Calvinism to be the correct worldview, Kuyper worked hard to expose the faulty foundations of the day’s alternatives to Calvinist views. Kuperians today continue to discuss the importance of worldviews, and continue to fight against worldviews that deny the lordship of Jesus Christ.

Kuyperian scholars reason that any serious thinker necessarily works in the context of a foundational worldview. There is no conflict between faith and science say Kuyperians, for faith and science are both parts of an integrated whole. One cannot do science except on the basis of faith, and faith which does not lead to science is not worthy faith. Kuyper says it as follows:

Notice, that I do not speak of a conflict between faith and science. Such a conflict does not exist. Every science in a certain degree starts from faith, and on the contrary, faith, which does not lead to science, is mistaken faith or superstition, but real, genuine faith it is not. Every science presupposes faith in self, in our self-consciousness; presupposes faith in the accurate working of our senses; presupposes faith in the correctness of the laws of thought; presupposes faith in something universal hidden behind the special phenomena; presupposes faith in life; and especially presupposes faith in the principles, from which we proceed; which signifies, that all these indispensable axioms, needed in a productive scientific investigation, do not come to us by proof, but are established in our judgment by our inner conception and given with our self-consciousness (p. 200).

Worldview analysis leads the scholar in two directions. On the one hand it encourages her to criticize theoretical formulations and practical actions that spring from faulty worldviews. On the other hand, it compels the scholar to reflect carefully on her own worldview, and to base her own theoretical reflections and practical action on that sound worldview.

A contemporary philosopher in the Kuyperian tradition who has dealt with these issues is Nicholas Wolterstorff. Wolterstorff is concerned with how the scholar, especially the Christian scholar, evaluates or weighs scientific theories. After rejecting the possibility of conducting the scientific enterprise on the basis of some indubitable foundation (e.g. empiricist economics), he suggests that theories are always weighed on the basis of certain control beliefs about the world. Christians, he argues, must weigh existing theories and develop new ones on the
basis of their authentic Christian commitment.

Since (the Christian scholar’s) fundamental commitment to following Christ ought to be decisively ultimate in his life, the rest of his life ought to be brought into harmony with it. As control, the belief-content of his authentic commitment ought to function both negatively and positively. Negatively, the Christian scholar ought to reject certain theories on the ground that they conflict or do not comport well with the belief-content of his authentic commitment. And positively he ought to devise theories which comport as well as possible with, or are at least consistent with, the belief-content of his authentic commitment (p. 76).

For Wolterstorff as for Kuyper it is not possible to divorce faith from science. If we are to carefully weigh the theories of behaviorists, or Freudians, or Marxists, or Neoclassicals, or Austrians, then it is essential for us to be familiar not only with the control beliefs that underpin the theories of these traditions, but also with the control beliefs that underpin our own thinking about the world.

What this means for Christian scholarship is that our fundamental beliefs about the world must be integrated into the work of our specific disciplines. If it is true that Christ is Lord, then this basic fact must be acknowledged in any good theoretical understanding of the world. In the social sciences Kuyperians have sought to understand the meaning of Christ’s lordship by reflecting on the character of God’s created order. That is, they ask what God intended for his world before it fell into sin. There are two main ways that Kuyperians attempt to address this basic question. One way is to see creation order in the context of law and structure, while the other is to focus on the character of relationships among God, his people, and the rest of creation.

Structural Kuyperians focus on creation law and structural norms and would restructure the world so that it conforms again to God’s perfect law. The strongest philosophical case for the structural approach is made by Herman Dooyeweerd, a professor of philosophy and law at the Free University of Amsterdam from 1926-1965. Followers of Dooyeweerd try to discern God’s intended structure for the world and then work to bring the world into conformity with that structure. The leading voice among relational Kuyperians has been Wolterstorff, a professor at Calvin College for twenty five years before he recently took a position at Yale. Relational Kuyperians focus more on the fullness of life that God intended for his people and on the character of the evolving relationships among God, human beings, and the creation. Relationalists are not so worried about specific structures as they are that justice, peace, shalom, fidelity, stewardship, etc. are ever advancing. To capture the significance of the distinction I will draw on the discussion of two contemporary voices for either approach, Al Wolters and Nicholas Wolterstorff.

Structuralists believe that when God created the earth he built into it a certain structure, what is referred to by Wolters as a “creation order.” God embedded in his creation a law, to which we must adhere if we are faithfully to exercise our stewardship. Wolters speaks, for example, of laws of nature (e.g. gravity) and behavioral norms, and argues that humans have been given the responsibility to obey the norms for human life laid down by God: “we are held to account for the way we execute God’s commandments, and we are liable to punishment if we do not execute them at all” (p. 15). What he wants Christians to do is discern God’s norms and then put them into practice in the various situations that confront us. He calls on us to “positive” the norm, and thereby participate in God’s plan to restore the creation. For
example, structuralists may ask whether the State (a structural entity) is intended by God to directly address the problem of poverty, or if that task is intended by God to be addressed by, say, the family or the business.

Wolterstorf, on the other hand, while acknowledging the legitimacy of creation order as a concept, finds it unfruitful in terms of discerning God’s will for our lives now, because it focuses our attention away from real relational problems and leads us into sterile abstract discussions about the role of the State in some intuited ideal social order. Wolterstorf prefers to focus on improving relationships in a given historical context rather than making universal laws out of some rigid ordered structure. In particular, he advocates a focus on the biblical principle of shalom as we try to discern God’s will for this world. “Shalom,” says Wolterstorf, “is the human being dwelling at peace in all his or her relationships: with God, with self, with fellows, with nature” (1983, p. 69). The exact structure of those relationships may be different in different communities at different times, and he is willing to be flexible in the matter of exactly which institutional structures might best serve those ends.

One of the practical differences between the two approaches is found in their views of the concept of sphere sovereignty, a principle of social order promoted by Kuyper. Structuralists argue that it is God’s creation plan that society evolve toward ever greater social complexity and differentiation, and that the structural principle for properly ordering such a society is sphere sovereignty. This principle allows each distinct sphere (e.g., family, school, business) to develop according to its own God-given mandate. Structuralists thus are led to analyze specific spheres in an attempt to discover how each sphere can glorify God the way it was originally intended. Viewing social organization in this way has led structuralists to analyze extensively the role of the State in fostering this order, and to spend much effort in discovering exactly what the appropriate duties (i.e. intended by God in creation) of the State are. Relational Kuyperians, however, see nothing creational in the notion of sphere sovereignty. It may or may not be a helpful concept in bringing about greater justice and in leading us to a closer approximation of shalom. Why, they wonder, do we need to be so rigid? Sphere sovereignty may be helpful in understanding how to allow justice to flourish in our day and age, but it was probably not a useful concept for ordering society in earlier historical periods (e.g. in Biblical times), and it may lose its usefulness in some future era. If society develops in such a way that the State is the most appropriate institution to address a certain problem, then there is no obvious reason to deny it the privilege, even the duty, of addressing the problem. Or if it becomes appropriate for businesses to engage in education of their employees, there is no creation order reason to deny them that privilege. What we must ask at any given historical juncture, says Wolterstorf, is whether our current “array of institutions adequately serves the life of its members - that they serve the cause of justice and shalom” (1983, p. 63). He goes on to say that

The institutions in every society will perform certain functions. We must ask whether the functions that they perform in our society are being performed well, whether there are some that ought not to be performed at all, and whether there are others not presently being performed by any institution that ought to be performed. And we must ask how the functions performed are best parcelled out among the institutions of society; which should be assigned to different institutions, and which to the same (Ibid.).
Wolterstorff finds no reason to straightjacket the answer to these questions in the dubious creation order concept of sphere sovereignty. In some societies it may be that shalom is advanced when the State provides assistance to the poor; in others it may not. In either case the question is what social arrangement contributes to shalom.

In both Wolters and Wolterstorff there is a thematic tension between the absolutes of God's created order and the freedom to change and develop culture. Wolters emphasizes the creation order and creation norms, and encourages us to live according to these norms. Wolterstorff is more interested in working toward establishing the sorts of relationships among God, his people, and his creation that God always envisioned for his world. In the work of Kuypersian economists this tension remains present, rarely addressed directly, but often playing an important background role. This will become evident in section III when we consider the way Kuypersian economists think economics ought to be done. But first, let us turn to the Kuypersian critique of contemporary economics.

II. The Critique of Contemporary Economics

Much of the Kuypersian critique of mainstream neoclassical economics stems from differences in worldviews. The critique has developed on two levels. On one level Kuypersian criticize the theoretical structure itself; on a second level they criticize actual economic affairs.

On the theoretical level, Kuypersians point out that neoclassical economists long believed, and many seem still to believe, that there is such a thing as pure science, an objective science that is reliable in and of itself, and unrelated to one's religious convictions. Traditions of positivism, empiricism, and Popperian falsificationism die hard. But these epistemological foundations are a smoke screen according to Kuypersians, for their main function is to obscure the role of faith in the theoretical structure. Alan Storkey and Anthony Cramp argue that the underlying and unstated faith of neoclassical economics is rooted in naturalism. This is the belief that nature is all there is or, as Calvinist philosopher Alvin Plantinga says, that "there is no God and human beings are properly...seen as parts of nature and are to be understood in terms of our place in the natural world" (pp. 10-11). Such a view denies at the outset any distinct character of or role for human beings in God's creation.

One result of the acceptance of naturalism has been the mechanistic bent of neoclassical economics. Storkey points out that Adam Smith modeled his economics on Newton's theoretical model of moving bodies, and neoclassical economists extended and developed the model further. What Storkey finds unacceptable here is that human will, human values, and human choice are effectively ruled out as central to the analysis; instead, they are just components of the mechanism. In reality, he says, "values, attitudes and decisions shape the economy...and need to be explicitly examined with our economic analysis" (p. 7). Bob Goudzwaard (1972, 1980) points out that the mechanistic framework employs a closed system of law and causality and has no room in it for the human being making choices in response to God's call on his or her life.

What the delusion of an idealized, pure, objective science has masked is the infiltration of all sorts of additional faith statements and value judgments that slip furtively into the analysis. Kuypersians have made careful note of this tendency and have worked to uncover the basic beliefs and values judgments that vitalize neoclassical economics. Goudzwaard (1980) has identified the neoclassical notions of scarcity, individuality, instrumentality, and priceability as being freighted with a faith unacceptable to Christian scholars. John Tiemstra (1992) identifies both an ethical and a method-
ological side to the critique. On the ethical side, he notes that neoclassical economics is too wrapped up with utilitarianism, individualism and materialism, whereas on the methodological side it relies too heavily on empiricist epistemological foundations and mathematical analytical techniques. Both Eugene Dykema (1984) and I (1986b) wrote dissertations on the intrusion of faith and value judgments into neoclassical analysis. In a paper stemming from my dissertation, I argue that neoclassical economics is built on a world-view with the following components:

1. Human nature is such that humans are:
   a. Self-interested.
   b. Rational. That is, they know their own interest and choose from among a variety of means in order to maximize that interest.
2. The purpose of human life is for individuals to pursue happiness as they themselves define it.
3. The social world is a gathering of individuals who compete with each other under conditions of scarcity to achieve self-interested ends. As in the natural world with physical entities, in the social world, too, there are forces at work that move economic agents toward equilibrium positions (Hoksbergen 1986a, p. 284).

I also argue that neoclassical economics embodies within its theoretical structure certain value judgments that inspire and give direction to economic analysis. These value judgments are that

1. Individuals should get what they want.
2. Competitive market equilibrium is the ideal economic situation.
   a. Competitive market institutions should be established whenever possible.
   b. Shadow prices or market prices should be used to determine value.
3. Means and ends should be completely bifurcated into two mutually exclusive categories.
4. Means and ends should be measured quantitatively (Ibid., p. 285).

These points are perhaps nothing startling, and they have been recognized by a number of Christians who see the tension created by these underpinnings, and yet continue to work within the neoclassical context. In a recent issue of the ACE Bulletin, for example, P.J. Hill reviews Amitai Etzioni’s The Moral Dimension, and says that we must be careful not to allow ourselves to think either that the neoclassical paradigm explains everything or that it provides good moral guidance. Nevertheless, he also argues that the Christian economist can operate comfortably as a neoclassical, for neoclassical theory provides only a “powerful way of looking at the world.” It does not purport to explain everything, nor to be normative (p. 12). Kuyperian economists, however, who stress the inevitable consistency between faith and science, fear that consistency will be achieved by adjusting the faith rather than the science, and so are leery of a position like Hill’s. Kuyperians argue that as a paradigmatic approach to understanding, neoclassical economics ultimately fails, for its assumptions are at odds with what we know to be true about the world (e.g. God’s sovereignty), and neoclassical analysis often conflicts sharply with what we know to be right (e.g. consider the interests of others as well as your own).

It is often asserted that the foundation of economics as a science is the reality of scarcity and the necessity of choice. Many Christian economists accept this foundation (e.g. Richardson (1988), Beisner (1988)). The rub comes in when we discover (or ask) what scarcity and choice actually mean. Acceptance of neoclassical meanings quickly steers us into a quicksand of conceptual structures that includes autonomous self-interested individuals, value as determined by market price,
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utilitarian ethics, and so on, all of which Kuyperians find highly problematic. Kuyperians agree that Christian economists must discuss choices among competing alternatives. Certainly there is nothing unChristian in the propositions that (1) people can’t do or have everything, and (2) people have to choose among alternatives. But economists are not led by scripture to ask “How can people get more of what they want?” or “How can individual utility be maximized?” Instead, they ask how individuals and communities can take the generous provisions of God’s creation and use them to serve God’s purposes. Certainly choices must be made, allocations will result, and ends will be achieved, but the conceptual field will be radically different from that of the neoclassical theorist.

This is not to say that neoclassical economics has nothing to teach us. Kuyperian economists fully accept that in some cases it is appropriate for people to consider their own interests, and there are many cases where essentially competitive markets are the appropriate institution for the interplay of these interests. Kuyperians would also grant that the neoclassical model offers reasonable explanations for some of what we see in the world. But that’s often because sinful people actually do behave in the ways neoclassicals describe. Even so, the neoclassical model is not enough, for it leaves out too much of what Christians know to be true about our responsibilities to God, to each other, and to the world. It does not adequately explain why after decades of economic growth people in the Western world are no happier than they were in the fifties, why poverty continues to plague economically developed countries, why people often prefer cooperation to competition in the workplace, why people often do behave with interests of others in mind, or why societies where individuals actually do behave in a purely self-interested way gradually break apart. Neoclassical economists may have something to say about such issues, but Christian economists should not be persuaded that neoclassicals have the final word, for their approach is too narrow and constrained.

In addition to offending our sense of the true, neoclassical economics also violates our sense of what is right. It’s hard to deny that, despite protestations to the contrary, the above beliefs function in neoclassical economics not only as acceptable descriptions of what is, but also as norms for what ought to be. From Adam Smith on we are told first, that people are self-interested, and second, that any efforts to work for the public good are doomed to failure anyway. Chicago School analyses of home economics, where children are considered consumption goods, or of church attendance, where people attend because of a taste for the afterlife are so far off the mark of what does and what ought to go on in families and churches that one wonders how such analyses ever hit the printed page. In any case, Christians want to know the right way to make decisions about family, how best to worship God and participate in his communion, how to be a good employee or employer, how to organize the workplace, how to care for the environment, how to orient our consumption lives, and so on. We want to know how to live right, and neoclassical economics at best gives us little guidance here and at worst leads us mightily astray.

In addition to the critique of neoclassical economics as theory, Kuyperian economists have also evaluated the operation of actual economic institutions. This is natural for the Kuyperians, for theory and praxis are always intertwined. They argue that while neoclassical economics provides a certain set of spectacles for viewing economic affairs, it also advocates and legitimates certain policies and organizational structures. Moreover, it is no accident that neoclassical economics and the institutions of Western capitalist societies have developed in the same part of the world in the same historical period, for they both form part of a larger whole.
Two Kuyperian scholars who have spent much effort in analyzing the character of Western economies and societies are Douglas Vickers and Bob Goudzwaard. Vickers has written three insightful books which examine and critique the development of economic theory, the historical development of capitalism, and the current cultural condition (1975, 1976, and 1982). Goudzwaard too offers a perceptive in-depth critique of Western society (1979, 1984). On the Calvinist belief that all human beings are driven by faith, and that institutions are creations of faith-driven human beings, Goudzwaard probes Western society to detect “the central, religious motives which fundamentally direct (it)” (1979, p. xx). In a historical analysis he shows how the growth of Western capitalism as a system is paralleled by the growth of a faith in progress as the answer to our deepest questions about the purpose of life and our ultimate destiny.

Throughout his analysis, Goudzwaard refers to Western capitalism, but it is important to recognize that his understanding of capitalism may differ from standard definitions. Goudzwaard is talking holistically about the Western social-political-economic-cultural system that has evolved over the last centuries and has come to be known as capitalism. His critique is not directed at the abstract institutions of private property and free markets per se, both of which he affirms. Human freedom and its responsible use are also affirmed by Goudzwaard. His critique centers on the spirit of the age, the spark which fires the system. He views this spark as faith in progress.

According to Goudzwaard, the full-blown expression of faith in human progress came about through the gradual dissolution of the faith that directed life in medieval society. Medieval society, he argues, was dominated by a faith which directed human attention toward a spiritual relationship with God and the Church, toward eternal life after death, and away from any significant concern about life on this earth. Such views were consistent with economic, political, and social structures of the middle ages, but they could not foster any movement toward capitalism. If capitalism was to become acceptable, these ideological barriers had to be razed. In telling the story of how that happened, Goudzwaard points out that in the Renaissance and Enlightenment periods, human attention was redirected toward life on this earth, an acceptance of natural law, and a belief that life on this earth could be perfected. In Goudzwaard’s view, people came to see humans rather than God as the center of all that mattered, and they looked to establish institutions that would make life continually better here on earth; that is, they came to believe in human progress. And they turned away from God.

Not that Goudzwaard longs for a return to some idyllic vision of the medieval past. Quite the contrary, for the dominance of the Roman Catholic church, along with its dualistic worldview, kept people from serving the Lord in all areas of life. In fact, Calvin himself, in his attempt to reorient the saints toward legitimate Christian service in this world, did a lot to prepare the intellectual environment for the legitimacy of market activity. This would have been a welcome development had it not been for the unfortunate fact that the reigning ethos of the period developed not out of Christianity, but out of the secular climate of the Enlightenment. Enlightenment thinking on human autonomy and unlimited human progress came to dominate and then overwhelm the Christ-centered approach of Calvin.

On the argument that the driving faith underlying Western society today is not God-centered, but human-centered, it is not surprising to Goudzwaard that Western capitalism has had trouble dealing with unemployment and inflation, environmental degradation, the increasing income gap, social anomie, etc., for its faith in material prosperity is an idolatrous one.
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that denies the lordship of Jesus Christ, and substitutes for it human desires for an illusory happier life. In Idols of Our Time, Goudzwaard argues that the goal of material prosperity requires a means of achievement, and modern society has found that means in the idols of economic growth and technological development. Happiness, it is believed in modern society, does not come from being right with God, neighbor, and creation, but from material prosperity, which requires economic growth and technological development. For a society with such a faith, one that wishes to unleash the forces of economic growth and technological advance, the institutions of capitalism make a lot of sense. For its part, neoclassical economic theory reinforces and legitimizes both the institutions of capitalism and the self-centered individualism which drives the system.

What Goudzwaard laments in all this is that we have lost control of our lives and now live in subjection to tyrannical forces, for we have forgotten that the earth is the Lord’s and that we need to live our lives in response to him. While some may believe we can still respond faithfully to God in modern capitalist society, Goudzwaard is doubtful. In his most succinct statement on the matter, he says

Capitalism is subject to critique insofar as, for the sake of progress, it is founded on independent and autonomous forces of economic growth and technology, that is, forces which are considered isolated, sufficient, and good in themselves. These economic and technological forces are indeed related to norms of ethics and social justice, but in such a manner that these norms cannot impede the realization of these forces and the promotion of “progress.” These norms are consciously viewed as dependent upon and secondary to the forces of progress: they are placed in the service of the expansion of technology and the growth of the economy (p. 66).

Goudzwaard’s concern is that important areas of life, with their own legitimate norms and ends, are inexorably subjected to the demands of growth and progress. Education is evaluated on the basis of its contribution to the productivity of its students (e.g. human capital theory). The current crisis in education is focused around our falling behind Japan and Germany. The legal environment too is heavily influenced by the impact of laws and judicial decisions on growth and economic development (e.g. the current law and economics literature). In the recent debate over the environment, there’s a strong tendency to regard the environment as a scarce resource rather than as a gift from God to be cared for. The purpose of Vice President Quayle’s competitiveness council, for example, seems to be to undermine environmental regulations because of their detrimental effect on economic growth.

It is important to understand the broader perspective from which Goudzwaard and other Kuyperians engage in their critique. They do not suggest that modern socialism is a better system, nor that markets are necessarily bad. In fact, Goudzwaard criticizes Marxism and state socialism with similar intensity. What Kuyperians do in any social or theoretical analysis is discover the ways in which the society, the institution, or the theory strays from or is inconsistent with the Christian way of understanding our lives in society. There is nothing in the above critique which suggests that any know real system is “better” than capitalism, even though many choose to read the Kuyperians in this fashion. A consideration of the ways in which Kuyperian economists would like to see theory and society reformed should help to clarify this point.
III. A New Approach to Economics and New Directions for Western Society

There’s an old saw that you can’t replace something with nothing, which in scientific inquiry means that you can’t just trash a theory without offering a better alternative. For Kuyperians, both their critique and their alternative approach are based on their fundamental faith in the all-encompassing lordship of Jesus Christ. Any theory is misguided to the extent that it looks to discover the truth based on some other premise, and any acceptable theory will be firmly rooted in Christ’s lordship.

Kuyperians understand Christ’s lordship in the context of God’s historical-redemptive plan. This means that economic life and economic theory, just like all other areas of life, must be considered in the creation-fall-redemption-consummation context. What this requires of economists is that we reflect on the character of economic life at creation, the distorting effects of the Fall, the ongoing redemptive work of Jesus Christ and his Church, and the expectations for economic life at the consummation. By thinking in this context, what J.R. Stott refers to as “thinking straight” about our complex world, we not only come to an understanding of what is going on out there, but we also develop a good sense of what to do about it; that is, we learn how to become involved as Christ’s servants in the redemptive process.

One of the biggest differences between the neoclassical and Kuyperian approaches to economics is that neoclassical economics purports to be a “positive” analysis, with its adherents often trotting out the untenable belief that they are able thus to eschew “normative” analysis. Kuyperian analysis, on the other hand, makes no apologies for beginning with “normative” analysis, which it then uses to analyze the “positive” (see G. Monisma). Kuyperians see a constant tension between the way things are, distorted as they are by sin, and the way they ought to be, between the way we behave and the way we ought to behave. It is our calling as Christ-followers to help move our lives and our societies toward fulfilling their God-given calling. Instead of trying to find some inductible foundation for science in the natural world, Kuyperians look to Christ and begin their economic analysis by asking first, “what does the Lord desire for his creation?” and second, “what does the Lord require of us?”

If there is one word that best typifies the main idea around which Kuyperian economics develops, it is responsibility. In every thought and every act of our lives we are responding to God and his plan for our lives in his world. Other words that often surface in Kuyperian discussions of economics are entrustedness, stewardship, and normativity (see, e.g. DeVos, et al., Storkey, Goudzwaard, Tiemstra, et al., and Vickers). Because God entrusted his world to the stewardship of his children, we must ask how he intended us to care for and use the resources he put at our disposal, by which norms he would guide our decisions. Economics thus has quite a different focus than traditional definitions along the line of allocating scarce resources to alternative and competing uses. Tiemstra, et al. define the study of economics as follows:

Economics...is the study of the communal stewardship and organization of the creation to meet human needs. Or, to put it in a slightly different way, economics is the study of how people both individually and institutionally, respond to their calling to be stewards of what God has entrusted to them in the creation (p. 66).

Stewardship is, of course, a common word in the Christian lexicon, and in a general sense it means the wise use of resources. In Christian circles the term is often associated with tithing and giving,
and with using resources efficiently. Kuyperians agree that stewardship includes such matters, but point out that in a world belonging entirely to the Lord, the concept goes much deeper. Faithful stewardship requires that the uses to which we put our time, money, skills, etc. be designed to serve the Lord's, not our own, purposes. Whereas some Christians focus on wealth creation and thank God for the blessings they receive, Kuyperians see this approach as too narrow and self-centered. Blessing and stewardship are not to be separated. To the Kuyperian it makes no sense to say 90 percent of our wealth is ours and 10 percent is God's. It all belongs to God and it's all to be used in his service.

The question then quite logically revolves around what this service looks like and how we are to direct our lives and our resources. Discussions of such questions comprise the bulk of the work in Kuyperian theoretical development. For any particular area of economic life, the analyst considers the Biblical norms that apply and the historical-cultural character of the issue under investigation, and then seeks both to evaluate the current situation in light of Biblical norms and to provide guidance as to what should be done. For example, in Reforming Economics (Tiemstra, et al.), a book written by a group of scholars at the Calvin Center for Christian Scholarship, the authors derive sixteen Biblical principles, which are then used to evaluate and give guidance on economic methodology, consumption behavior, business behavior, labor union activities, and the role of government, among others.

Other scholars have discussed areas such as the environment (DeVos, et al.), unemployment (Storkey), work and careers (Hardy), private property and the role of the state (Smedes), economic justice (Beversluis), personal economic consumption and investment (Roels), the goals and conduct of business (Chewning, Eby, and Roels), welfare programs (LeSage), the role of technology (Monsma, et al.), and economic development (Hoksbergen 1986a, Wolterstorff 1983). In each case the problem is presented, Biblical norms are adduced, the contemporary situation and contemporary views are analyzed in light of these norms, and guidance is given for making the particular area of concern reflect more closely the intentions of our Lord. A recent example is afforded in the Christian College Coalition publication of Business Through the Eyes of Faith by Chewning, Eby and Roels. The authors ask the basic question of how the business enterprise can serve God. They answer that the mission of business is to extend shalom into our business relationships and there carry out the redemptive activity of Jesus, bearing witness to the transforming gospel in all its dimensions.

As Christians in business our mission is to honor God in the world of work and economics by extending his reign to all our activities. With Jesus as lord of the marketplace, our task is to love, serve, preach, and heal. We use our faith, skills, and resources to correct inequities, work toward economic justice, seek righteousness, bring hope where there is no hope, and make all things new (pp. 193-4).

Neoclassical economics and Western culture, on the other hand, hold that the goal of business is to make money. Otherwise, the argument goes, who would work, and who would run a business? For Kuyperians, however, money is a means to the end of serving God, not the end in itself. Chewning, Eby, and Roels argue that profits are not the purpose of business, but rather the breath which allows them to flourish and co the things God wants them to do. Among the proper goals of business, they say, are (1) the provision “of goods and services that enhance the lives of individuals and society,” (2) the creation and maintenance of jobs that provide meaningful work, (3) the provision of “a fair return for committed investors and owners,” and (4) “the
allocation of business resources to community projects” (p. 201).

As has already been hinted at, Kuypersians are proponents of human freedom, believing that humans have been dignified by their creator with his own image. Kuypersians thus have great respect for the individual and encourage us to use our freedom to serve God. That’s why they spend much time in ethical study. But it would be wrong to infer that Kuypersians are thereby individualists or libertarians, for they also recognize that God intended people to live in community. We each have obligations to others, and others have obligations to us. Kuypersians analyze not only individual behavior, therefore, but also the character of institutions in society, the relationship among these institutions, and the interaction between institutions and individuals.

Those who follow in the creation law tradition promoted by Wolters have worked with the principle of sphere sovereignty to analyze the proper structure of society. On this view the evolving society differentiates into a number of sovereign spheres (spheres often mentioned are the family, the school, and the business), each of which is sovereign in its responsibility to God. Each sphere is charged with discovering and implementing the Biblical norms that particularly apply to it. Businesses, for example, are charged with implementing the norms of stewardship and justice in their activities.

Because spheres are larger than individuals, and because each sphere must act in awareness and concern for the wellbeing of the other spheres, this is not an individualist model. But neither is it a collectivist model, for the role of the State is primarily to see to it that no one sphere unjustly encroaches on the rightful territory of another sphere. Yet when there is the need, Kuypersians fully expect the State to intervene on behalf of those being wrongly treated. Kuyper himself makes this very clear in his 1891 discussion of poverty:

The task of family and society...lie outside government’s jurisdiction. With those it is not to meddle. But as soon as there is any clash among the different spheres of life, where one sphere trespasses on or violates the domain which by divine ordinance belongs to the other, then it is the God-given duty of government to uphold justice before arbitrariness, and to withstand, by the justice of God, the physical superiority of the stronger (Skillen 1991, p. 71).

Kuypersians are thus wary of State power, but they are also aware of power emanating from economic and other spheres. As a result, Kuypersians are quite willing to suggest appropriate State intervention in economic affairs, for government is the institution provided by God to oversee public affairs.

The Kuypersian emphasis on the interaction between individuals and the institutions of particular spheres, in addition to the interaction among the different institutions themselves and the State, has led Kuypersians toward an analysis that has more similarities to modern day institutionalist economics than to any other school. Tiemstra (1992) proposes institutionalism as the school most akin to Kuypersian thought. Vickers (1985) has written a macroeconomics text from a post-Keynesian perspective. Storkey too seems to endorse an institutionalist approach. Affinities between Kuypersian thought and institutionalism include a high regard for value judgments, an emphasis on the economy as an evolving, holistic system, a methodology which allows consideration of a broader and more complex society than neoclassical economics allows, and the employment of realistic pattern models of explanation. Nevertheless, institutionalism, like neoclassicism, has its roots in the Enlightenment and so cannot be expected to provide a comfortable home. Some problems with institutionalism are that it accepts a Darwinian social evolution and has no...when there is the need, Kuypersians fully expect the State to intervene on behalf of those being wrongly treated.
...Kuyperians are themselves still in the process of developing ownership and full understanding of their own perspective. clear direction or end; it accepts a cultural relativism that allows no firm foundation for discerning ethical behavior; it accepts no notion of the human being as God’s image bearer, seeing human beings instead as the simple product of the evolutionary process; and it has no clear role or purpose for the economist or social scientist.\(^9\) Institutionalism may well make the same sort of contribution as neoclassicism: some good insights into some aspects of economic life, but not a final answer for the Christian economic theorist.

In most work by Kuyperian economists, their worldview approach is carried on their shirtsleeves. There is often a detailed presentation of their Christian worldview and a detailed discussion of the Biblical norms relevant to the situation being studied. One reason for this predilection is that Kuyperians are themselves still in the process of developing ownership and full understanding of their own perspective. It is a perspective, after all, that is not taught at any graduate school of economics in the United States. A second reason is our belief that to be understood we must explain where we are coming from. Since the viewpoint is not among what Peter Berger would call the reigning “plausibility structures” in academic, even Christian, circles, one needs to take the time to spell it out. Unfortunately, this often rapidly turns off interest in non-Christian readers. If they don’t accept the worldview, then why read on? That explains in part why Kuyperians have up to this point addressed much of their work to an explicitly Christian audience.

Kuyperians also believe, however, that their perspective and their analysis merits consideration from a broader audience. That’s because they believe it to be the truth about the world, as relevant to non-Christians as it is to them. It is in this vein that J.R. Stott pushes us to get into the world with our Christian ideas and work at persuading others that our views are worthy and true. Stott advocates persuad-

ing others without reference to Christian worldview and Scripture, for we can show that our ideas, our analysis, our policy proposals, etc. make sense even on terms other than our own. Vickers takes this approach in his post-Keynesian macroeconomics text. This is also the approach taken by John Tiemstra in two recent articles, one on welfare policy (1992a) and the other on regulation (1992b). In the first article he shows how caring for the poor makes economic sense, that it is not a drain on efficiency. The article on regulation argues that there are many reasons for regulating business activity, not all of them necessarily “economic,” even though orthodox theories of regulation seem to assume this. In many cases, he points out, regulation is imposed after a healthy multipolar debate about this industry, its regulation, and the public interest. Still, in addition to carefully nuanced articles like these, Kuyperians would like to have others consider their whole worldview approach. Given recent ongoing changes in both the Christian and secular academic communities, such consideration may not be far off.

IV. The Future of the Kuyperian Approach to Economics

Kuyperians, though a relatively small band, have long been on the forefront of the movement that insists that Christian faith has a lot to do with good economics. In the past century, and especially in the last few decades, however, a growing number of Christian economists from other traditions are also analyzing economic issues in the context of their faith perspectives. The establishment and steady growth of the Association of Christian Economists and the ACE Bulletin is one indicator of this welcome trend. There seem to be two overarching reasons for this new interest; first, many Christian traditions, especially Roman Catholics and modern evangelicals, are questioning their historic dualism; second, in the post-
modern world of the philosophy of science, it is increasingly recognized that metaphysical foundations and value judgments do matter to scientific inquiry.

The watershed in the Roman Catholic church came in the late nineteenth century, the same era during which Kuyper was stirring up the Calvinist faithful in Holland, with the publication of Rerum Novarum. The initiation of the era of Roman Catholic social thought was recently celebrated with Pope John Paul II’s Centesimus Annus, a centennial reflection on Pope Leo XIII’s seminal encyclical. The development of Roman Catholic thought over the last century has brought us to a point where there is a surprising degree of commonality between Kuyperians and Roman Catholics. Roman Catholic social thought, for example, emphasizes responsible moral choice, insists that people make choices in service to God and the common good, and sees the distinctive role of the free individual in the context of his obligation to the larger community (Worland 1992). The tendency to think of society as a community of sovereign, but interrelated, spheres, an idea especially advocated by Michael Novak, but now also by John Paul II, is more evidence of affinity. What I find most striking, though, about Centesimus Annus, and the most harmonious chord between the Kuyperian and Roman Catholic approach, is the Pope’s reaffirmation of a point made one hundred years earlier by his predecessor in Rome:

“We need to repeat that there can be no genuine solution of the “social question” apart from the Gospel, and that the “new things” can find in the Gospel the context for their correct understanding and the proper moral perspective for judgment on them (p. 13, emphasis in original).

Kuyperians make the same point. We cannot approach our study of the world, and hope to understand it correctly, unless we start from a Christian perspective.

But in spite of the overlap, there are also significant areas of difference. Kuyperians do not accept a hierarchical view of society, one which sets either institutions or State or Church over the rest of society. And while Roman Catholics have taken large strides away from the Thomistic hierarchical system of the medieval period, there remains in their thinking at least a vestigial hierarchical system in which the Church is God’s immediate representative over all human affairs, and in which the State is given a special role in bringing about the common good. It’s this view, after all, which seems to give the Pope the rationale for getting involved in the discussion in the first place. Another important area of difference, found especially in the writing of Michael Novak, is his emphasis on the Fall rather than the redemption. The rationale for much of Novak’s analysis of political economy is the reality and depth of human sin. Kuyperians recognize the depth of sin, but while Novak advocates democratic capitalism because it channels sin into productive activities (e.g. the doctrine of unintended consequences), Kuyperians look for ways to redemptively move beyond sin. Moreover, Kuyperians fear that market activities may not themselves be neutral, and may even sanction some types of immoral behavior and discourage the practice of Christian virtue (Dykema 1989). Novak seems to think there’s little progress to be made in overcoming sin, and theorizes about a system which converts private vices into public virtue. Kuyperians believe that, by the grace of God, we can work to overcome sin both in our individual and social lives, and thus seem to have a more optimistic view of the possibilities for redemptive change than Novak does.

Still, in spite of the differences, there is a lot of room for constructive discussion. Kuyperians have read Roman Catholic social thought, including the American bishops’ pastoral letter on the economy,
...evangelicals are gradually warming up to the integration of faith and economics.

and Roman Catholic authors like Michael Novak, and now R.J. Neuhaus, with great profit. With all the emphasis in these works on sphere sovereignty and the Creation-Fall-Redemption-Consummation context, one wonders if the Roman Catholics haven’t also profited from reading literature from the Reformed tradition.

The other Christian tradition now making strides toward greater involvement in the affairs of this world is the post-World War II evangelical movement. Originating in the separatist fundamentalist movement of the early twentieth century, evangelical Christians are now coming to realize that the Kingdom of God includes not only the hereafter, but also the here and now. The evolution of this change is chronicled in J.R. Stott’s recent book, *Decisive Issues Facing Christians Today*. Stott shows how in response to a confluence of ineluctable events, two of which were the rise of theological liberalism and Rauschenbusch’s social gospel, the newly formed fundamentalist movement rejected the historic Christian tradition of involvement in social affairs. Stott also shows, however, how the evangelical churches have gradually regained their desire to make an impact upon the world, arguing that the turning point came at the 1974 Lausanne conference which declared that “evangelism and socio-political involvement are both part of our Christian duty” (p.10). Stott then gives a theological rationale for involvement, arguing that the evangelical church needs fuller doctrines of God, human beings, Christ, salvation, and the Church. In each case the fuller doctrines have a Kuyperian ring to them.

Not all evangelicals, however, are convinced that we should do economics from a Christian perspective. Philosopher Ronald Nash, for example, makes no “attempt to produce a system of Christian economics. There is no such thing as positive Christian economics. The distinction that counts is that between good and bad economics” (p. 12). Nash accepts the distinction between an objective positive economics and a value-laden normative economics. Economists from other protestant traditions express other reservations. Lutheran Paul Heyne wrote recently in the ACE Bulletin that “our economic arguments should not be shaped in any way by our theology, which we should leave at home when we enter the public arena” (p. 6). Anabaptist Jim Halteman espouses a slightly different type of separation, arguing that Christian principles of economics apply only to those who are part of Christ’s Church.

Even among those who accept some form of dualism there has been a notable attempt over the last few decades to come to terms with the obvious importance of economic concerns in Scripture. Hence the burgeoning literature on faith and economics. Much of this literature, however, exhibits a tendency to employ Scripture as one criterion to decide which extant theory or system is best, rather than as a foundation for a new or different way of thinking about economic affairs. A large portion of the literature has engaged in a sterile debate over which economic system is better, capitalism or socialism, on the apparent assumption that these two systems encompass all possible worlds of political economy. Arguments in this debate tend to focus around whether the Marxist or the Western liberal theoretical edifice is the most solid, and Scripture is used to bolster one or the other line of reasoning. Evaluating the theological depth of this debate, Craig Gay writes that “evangelical advocates on both sides have actually been secularized without recognizing it” (p. 172).

In spite of the reluctance, however, evangelicals are gradually warming up to the integration of faith and economics. Probably the most powerful statement of broad evangelical interest in integrating faith with economics is “The Oxford Declaration,” the joint product of “over one hundred theologians and economists” (p. 7). This statement talks freely about
entrustedness, stewardship, human responsibility for each other and the creation, the lordship of Jesus Christ, the centrality of Scripture, the importance of analyzing affairs from a Biblical life and world view, work as a “means to accomplish God’s purposes,” and so on, clearly finding much common ground with Kuyperians. 

Curiously, the Kuyperian emphasis on worldviews and the importance of doing economics on the basis of what Christians know to be true about the world seems to be getting a boost from developments in the philosophy of science. Ever since Kuhn and others roiled the waters of scientific complacency in the 1960s, the vaunted pillars of empiricism, “the scientific method,” and other forms of modernism in science have been crumbling. The writings of Thomas Kuhn and Imre Lakatos, as well as people like Mary Hesse, Michael Polanyi, and Hans G. Gadamer have had a great impact on our understanding of what truth is and how we come to discover it.

In economics there has been a flood of interest in methodology as a result of all the new developments, most of it admitting that economics never followed the canons of empiricism anyway. One leading contributor to the new discussion of methodology in economics is Chicago School economist Donald McCloskey, who has caught our attention with his emphasis on rhetoric and storytelling. In impugning what he calls “modernism,” McCloskey says the purpose of the scientific method was to provide rules by which we could determine what did and did not belong to science and knowledge. But he quotes Einstein to say that “whoever undertakes to set himself up as a judge in the field of Truth and Knowledge is shipwrecked by the laughter of the gods” (1986, p. 20). After considering Mark Blaug’s plea to once again return to an objective criterion for accepting economic theories, McCloskey opines that “it sounds grand, but Einstein’s gods are rolling in the aisles” (Ibid., p. 21).

McCloskey argues that modernism is impossible, it is not adhered to, and it is “probably” not even desirable. Appeals to modernism instead give license to freighting in under cover all sorts of worldview components:

Modernism promises knowledge free from doubt, free from metaphysics, morals, and personal conviction. What it is able to deliver renames as scientific methodology the scientist’s and especially the economic scientist’s metaphysics, morals, and personal convictions (Ibid., p. 16).

Forget modernism, McCloskey tells us, for we can learn much more about how economics is done by considering the rules of good rhetoric and of good conversation, for in reality, “good science is good conversation.” What we are really trying to do in our conversation is to listen to others and then inform them about our own thoughts on the matters at hand. We will then together try to develop “reasonable” explanations, or stories (McCloskey 1990), about what is going on around us. In developing such reasonable explanations we may draw on metaphysics, value judgments, and personal convictions as well as on mathematical models, statistical data, scholarly studies, the views of recognized authorities in the field, and so on. As McCloskey writes,

There are no rules and regulations for being reasonable. Being reasonable is weighing and considering all reasons, not merely the reason that some methodology or epistemology or logic claims to be stations of the cross along the one path to Justified True Belief (p. 52).

McCloskey brings to light the growing awareness among our secular colleagues that modernism is dead and that metaphysics and value judgments are recognized by more and more people to play a
If we are to be reasonable about economic affairs, and if we are to make sense about what is happening in our lives and our world, we cannot leave out the most central truths of the universe.

The idea that we are storytellers is nothing new to Christians either. The Bible more often than not gets across its truths about the world by telling stories. This point has been persuasively made in recent years by Hauerwas and Jones (1989) and Alisdair MacIntyre (1981). H. Richard Niebuhr argued in 1931 that Christians are not only to be storytellers, but we are also part of a great story, a true story about where the world came from, what it’s all about, what we’re here for, and where it’s all headed.

Although Kuyper himself did not tell the tale, or make his case, with these metaphors, what Kuyperians encourage us to do is to explain the world, to tell the stories of our affairs, in the context of the great story of which we are a part, and of which all the other events of history and politics and economics are small chapters. If we are to be reasonable about economic affairs, and if we are to make sense about what is happening in our lives and our world, we cannot leave out the most central truths of the universe. Ultimately, if we engage in the conversation with integrity, listening respectfully to the stories of the neoclassicals, institutionalists, Austrians, and others, incorporating some of them perhaps, but then explaining what we see in economic life in full awareness of Biblical truths that others deny, then there’s good reason to expect that the stories Christians tell will, in the end, be the most reasonable of all.

ENDNOTES

1 For an authoritative history of the Dutch in America, see Bratt.
2 Calvin College has always nurtured Kuyperian thinking, but Dordt College and Trinity Christian College in the U.S. and King’s College and Redeemer College in Canada also foster Kuyperian thinking. The Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto, a graduate institution, has been strongly influenced by Herman Dooyeweerd, a Dutch professor of law and a student of Kuyper.

3 The chain of influence is as follows: Herman Dooyeweerd was a student of Kuyper, Cornelius Van Till was a student of Dooyeweerd; Rousas Rushdoony was a student of Van Till; and Gary North was a student of Rushdoony.

4 I in no way mean to suggest that one or another group are the “true” Kuyperians. Both groups learned from Kuyper and then moved in different directions. The fact that I’m calling the one group the Kuyperians is simply due to the need to find a label. And besides, the reconstructionists are already blessed with an appropriately descriptive title.

5 While the term “world and life view” might be more complete, it is also rather cumbersome. I will therefore use the more efficient term “worldview,” which Kuyperian theologian Al Wolters defines as “the comprehensive framework of one’s basic beliefs about things” (p. 2).

6 As a philosopher, Wolterstorff finds the term “worldview” too imprecise for careful scrutiny, and so prefers to work with the notion of control beliefs. Still, for our purposes here, the two terms come to much the same thing.

7 Kuyper himself discusses the idea of sphere sovereignty in the Stone-lectures, and the idea has been picked up especially by political scientists in the Kuyperian tradition. Extensive discussions of sphere sovereignty may be found in Skillen (1990), Skillen and McCarthy, eds. (1991). Wolters, too, accepts the legitimacy of sphere sovereignty as the organizational norm for a developed society.
8 I do not mean here to ignore neoclassical welfare economics, which is necessarily normative (see George Monksma). The point is that neoclassicals contend that the “scientific” part of their work remains positive or value free.

9 I am currently working on a critique of institutionalism which includes a discussion of these points. I know of no other critical review of institutionalism from a Christian perspective.

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