



Herman Dooyeweerd. "Geloof en wetenschap," in *Geloof en Wetenschap*. (Uitgavetische van de Calvinis-Studentenbeweging, 1938), 26–28. A provisional translation.

This volume contains the papers and Bible readings delivered at the 21st Calvinist Student Congress in Lunteren, August 1938.

FAITH AND SCIENCE

by Prof. Dr. H. DOOYEWEERD¹

The problem concerning the relationship between faith and science has, in the prevailing philosophy, arisen from a lack of critical self-reflection.

Because of this, it has been overlooked that the real issue with which one wrestles in this mistaken formulation does not concern the relationship between faith and science, but rather that between two different standpoints of faith that are in conflict with each other.

That this is indeed the true state of affairs becomes immediately clear when one considers that a genuine tension between faith and science can only arise when the two are set over against one another as independent entities. It was the dogma of the self-sufficiency of science within its own domain that immediately called forth an antagonism in human consciousness. But was this dogma itself anything other than a confession of faith?

In the scholasticism of THOMAS AQUINAS, it is founded on a religious conviction regarding the relationship between "nature" and "grace." Human "nature," concentrated in the naturalis ratio (natural reason), is here conceived as the "forecourt of grace." Science, belonging to the "natural sphere," can, according to this conviction, be practiced only in the light of "natural reason." Faith, on the other hand, provides a higher, supernatural knowledge, which brings the natural to a higher perfection, but which by no means can be accepted as the starting point of science.

In the late medieval nominalism, this view is abandoned, and a complete rupture between grace and nature, faith and science, is proclaimed.

This view too is religiously grounded, and when, later in the Renaissance, the autonomy of reason was mobilized against churchly faith, and when the ensuing Enlightenment period proclaimed the sovereignty of science over the entire life- and world-view, it was once again a standpoint of faith being asserted against the standpoint of ecclesiastical faith.

This is also recognized by IMMANUEL KANT, who seeks to rid science of its faith-claims precisely in order to make room once more for faith itself. He formulates the problem of the relation between faith and science on the basis of the modern humanistic worldview.

¹ Prof. Dr. H. Dooyeweerd was kind enough to provide a short summary of his impromptu speech on "Faith and Science".

It was no longer, as in the Middle Ages, the question of how the dogma of Christian faith could be reconciled with a science that proceeded in principle from the dogma of the inner self-sufficiency of natural reason.

Humanism, as a life- and world-view, had already accepted the sovereignty of human reason across the entire line, and could acknowledge Christian doctrine only in a thoroughly secularized, this-worldly, and therefore fundamentally denatured form.

It was no longer the problem of the relation between “nature” and “grace” that entangled modern man in an inner conflict of faith, but the problem of the relation between the new humanistic ideal of personality — in which the Christian doctrine of the freedom of the Christian person had been secularized — and the new humanistic ideal of science, which had enthroned the method of natural science under the illusion that thereby the entire cosmos could be scientifically subjected to the sovereign personality.

The scientific ideal was itself religiously grounded in the ideal of personality, but when consistently carried through, it had to abolish that very ideal.

For it had no room for moral freedom and autonomy, but stood and fell with belief in the absolute validity of natural-causal determination of all events.

Having fought against the ecclesiastical faith in miracles, this scientific ideal was compelled equally to wage war against the humanistic faith in the creative freedom of the human personality.

But even in this form, the supposed conflict between “faith” and “science” was in truth an inner faith-conflict, arising from an intrinsically dualistic religious stance toward God and the cosmos.

The “solution” to this conflict proposed by Kant, which even today, in Christian circles, is regarded as definitive, in fact brought about no real “boundary” between believing and knowing, as is commonly supposed, but merely a boundary within humanistic faith itself, between the scientific ideal and the personal ideal. The belief in the self-sufficiency of science was limited to the domain of natural phenomena; the belief in the moral freedom of the sovereign personality was, on the other hand, reserved for the sphere of norms and value judgments.

But this dualism could never truly resolve the inner faith-conflict within humanism. Already Kant posited the primacy of practical reason, in which he grounded the belief in the moral autonomy of the personality, over theoretical reason. In truth, the belief in the autonomy of science within the realm of natural phenomena was, for Kant, rooted in the belief in the moral freedom and autonomy of the personality. The scientific ideal had indeed sprung from the religious ideal of personality.

Indeed, all science is grounded in a religious starting point, which through our faculty of faith is either consciously confessed or not.

DR. A. KUYPER has with great sharpness brought forward this state of affairs, which can only be recognized through true self-knowledge in the light of God's Word-revelation.

The matter is, namely, that the entire false conception of the inner self-sufficiency of scientific thought rests on the misunderstanding that in “reason” lies the center, the root of man's natural existence.

Over against this, in the Scriptural line, Calvinistic scholarship must once again confess with power the truth that behind all the temporal functions of human nature — including the rational — there lies a religious center, a religious root, which Scripture calls “the heart, from which are the issues of life.”

This “heart,” in that sense, is our full selfhood, our “I-ness,” and must therefore never be identified with any function — whether with reason or with feeling.

The so-called Philosophy of the Cosmonomic Idea (*Wijsbegeerte der Wetsidee*), which along Kuyper’s line has developed a system of Calvinistic philosophy, begins therefore in its Prolegomena with an exposition of the necessary religious presuppositions of all science, which alone make science itself possible.

It has demonstrated the uncritical dogmatism in the common conception that presents the self-sufficiency of theoretical thought as a purely scientific postulate, whereas in truth it is nothing other than the dogma of an apostate faith.

The medieval formulation of the autonomy of reason as the autonomous “forecourt” of grace rested in fact on the impossible attempt to reconcile pagan philosophy, which had sprung from an apostate religion of reason, with the Christian faith.

The Roman Catholic conception of nature and grace embraces a pagan view of created human nature, which must come into insoluble conflict with the Christian view.

The Reformation, which taught the radical corruption of human nature, proceeded again from the Scriptural view of this nature — namely, that it is centered in the “*heart*” as the religious root.

That this *Christian* starting point, when also embraced in the realm of science, must lead to a radical transformation of the theoretical view of the cosmos, and thereby of the very *foundations of science*; this has been set forth in full detail by the Philosophy of the Cosmonomic Idea.