

Slowly Reading

Capitalism and Progress

Bob Goudzwaard's 1976 work

**an exegetical commentary
of the various formulations of his
Research Hypothesis
that frames his “diagnosis of Western Society”.**

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Preface

This document brings together translations of the various prefatory statements, forewords and prefaces made by Bob Goudzwaard to his *magnum opus* **Kapitalisme en Vooruitgang** and **Capitalism and Progress**. The aim is to identify the prevailing hypothesis of this work and to examine how he went about putting it to rigorous scientific test. As this is done, it is possible to trace the line of Bob's own intellectual development. He did not put forward his work as the end of the story so much as a tentative suggestion for how we may *begin* to appreciate not only the "world we have lost"¹ but also deepen our insight into the religious drive of the "world we have inherited."

This examination will be by way of an "exegetical commentary".

I am grateful to many who have assisted in this effort and especially for help from Joost Hengstmengel of the Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam for making and sending a scan of the Appendix "Toekomstmodellen, en het OESO rapport "Facing the Future" Bob's response to the 1979 OECD report that was included in the revised 1982 edition. On its own that Appendix demonstrates how Bob Goudzwaard saw the intense relevance of his hypothesis for the ongoing global effort to address the many sided crises that we face.

There are many others who have been of help along the way including Rudi Hayward who initially suggested - I don't even know how long ago that was - that Bob Goudzwaard's work needed to be "read slowly". Thanks also to fellow readers of Bob's work who have helped me in this project.

*Quotations from this translation and commentary may be freely used so long as proper credit is given to the piece so used. Those who would use, reproduce or store large portions of the commentary for these texts whether they have been translated from the Dutch or already published in English should keep in mind the actual editions of **Kapitalisme en Vooruitgang** / **Capitalism and Progress** from which the excerpts are to be made. Correct citation not only shows due respect for the scholar who provides the sourced fragment but keeps the way open for subsequent scholarship to be able to check the reference first-hand and thereby facilitate further critical enquiry.*

BCW
4.8.26

¹ Peter Laslett **The World we Have Lost** London: Methuen. 1965.

The material and commentary will be presented below as follows:

- An Introduction READING SLOWLY (pp.1-6)
- **Foreword** to the first Dutch edition 1976 (7-9)
- **A line-by-line commentary**, sentence-by-sentence, of the Preface, first edition, 1976 (pp.10-21).
- the Forewords to the Second and Third Editions with brief commentary (p.22)
- **A paragraph by paragraph commentary** of the Preface to the English edition of 1979 (pp. 23-30)
- **A paragraph by paragraph commentary** of the Introduction (1979)/ Prologue (1997): Statement of the Problem (pp. 31-41)
- **A paragraph by paragraph commentary** on the Epilogue (1979/1997) (pp. 42-45)
- **A paragraph by paragraph commentary** of the Preface to the New Edition (1997) (pp. 46-51)
- A translation of the Appendix to the Dutch 1982 edition of **Kapitalisme en Vooruitgang** “Future Models and the OECD Report ‘Facing the Future’” pp. 301-314. (with only brief commentary) (pp.52-57)
- Some selected passages for close reading (pp.58-75):
 - EVALUATIVE INTERMEZZO (C&P 33-35), (pp.58-63)
 - THE VICTORY OF UTILITARIANISM (C&P 139-141) (pp.64-66).
 - DISCLOSURE OF SOCIETY (C&P 186-7), (pp.67-69)
 - NO READY BLUEPRINT, (C&P 187-189) (pp.69-73)
 - THE BARRIERS REVISITED (C&P 189) (pp.73-75)
- Conclusion (p.75-76)

Here is a list of the titles of Dutch and English editions of **Capitalism and Progress**.

1. **Kapitalisme en vooruitgang : een eigentijdse maatschappijkritiek** (Capitalism and Progress: a contemporary social critique) Assen : Van Gorcum, 1976, 285 pages. ISBN: 9023213874
2. **Kapitalisme en vooruitgang : een eigentijdse maatschappijkritiek** (Capitalism and Progress: a contemporary social critique) (2e edn) Assen. Van Gorcum. 1978, 307 pages. ISBN: 90-232-1583-4
3. **Capitalism and Progress: a Diagnosis of Western Society** (translation of 2nd Edition of *Kapitalisme en Vooruitgang* 1978) 1979 This edition published 1979 through special arrangement with Wedge Publishing Foundation, Toronto by Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan. ISBN: 0-8028-1809-9 (Eerdmans); 0-88906-106-8 (Wedge)
4. **Kapitalisme en vooruitgang : een eigentijdse maatschappijkritiek** (2e edn) Assen. Van Gorcum. 1982, with new Appendix. ISBN: 9023219295
5. **Capitalism and Progress: a Diagnosis of Western Society** (translation of 2nd Edition of *Kapitalisme en Vooruitgang* 1978) 1997 First published in the UK by Paternoster Press, Carlisle UK. ISBN: 0-85364-770-4
6. **Kapitalisme en vooruitgang**. met “Ten Geleide” Govert Buijs. 5de druk. (Tekst op basis van de vierde, uitgebreide druk van Van Gorcum Assen 1982) 2024 Buijten & Schipperheijn Motief Amsterdam ISBN: 9789463692854

Reading Slowly

Bob Goudzwaard's *Capitalism and Progress*

Hypothesis and Method

A colleague has suggested that Bob Goudzwaard's writings can be of great benefit, particularly if those reading what he has published do so "slowly". He was referring to Bob's diagnosis of Western society. I agree. *Capitalism and Progress* needs to be thought about, methodically and systematically. This booklet is written with the aim of assisting those who would read this "classic" work in 2026 and beyond as students seeking to understand our contemporary situation. I'm writing to assist such students to read *Capitalism and Progress* "slowly" and will document my efforts to do so too. This is a commentary on Bob's text, what he has written about his own project in the Prefaces of the book's editions with some passages selected for further analysis.

I have concurred with the suggestion that this book be read "slowly", reflecting upon my experience teaching university courses in which students were required to read major texts of sociological theory. Some of my most satisfying teaching "results" were from former students telling me of the benefit that came from being required to read texts slowly, carefully and methodically in a "Theory" course I taught. I had come to the view that they needed time to think about the complex statements appearing on the page in front of them, learning to cross-examine them and explore, step by step how the author developed an argument and then to slowly and methodically think about what they had read and put those thoughts in writing.

In the social sciences students will be confronted by texts that are said to explain important aspects of our complex socio-cultural world and our experience of it. As part of the task of learning to think scientifically about social life, students should also write about what they have understood from their reading of such texts, aided by lectures, and then evaluate these views by referring to their own social experience.

To become involved in social science in conventional academic courses should lead to fresh, reflective respect for our experience of social life, and part of that will then involve reading "classic" texts claiming to give definitive insight about our social lives. We think about our experience and the proposed scientific explanations of why and how we live as we do. And as we do so, we turn to developing our own account, thinking it through and writing it down. Reading, thinking and writing are activities to which we learn to give due respect as we, students of social life, develop insight about our social life and our responsibilities therein. Scientific reflection presupposes such complex literate, reflective activity.

Students can struggle to find satisfaction in their studies. And part of the struggle has to do with what they are studying and all the moreso when their studies involve complex issues within which they are involved in everyday terms. But any difficulties they may bring to their studies are not reduced by an academic class-room experience that is driven at a pace that does not allow students to judge whether they have (yet) mastered their course, let alone been able to do so in a "slow and methodical" way, even a "leisurely" encounter with what they are reading as part of the course. Reading scientific treatises is demanding, hard work. It takes time "to read, mark, learn and

inwardly digest” (to use words from a 1662 *Book of Common Prayer* petition). It is not only a matter of the student “making time” to do the kind of methodical reading that is required. Their social situation may not allow them to do so!

Of course there will be personal issues that prevent any student’s “slow reading”. But there are also issues about the way a curriculum is formed, and about the assumptions made about students who have enrolled, and the time-line of courses by which a student’s understanding of course materials is assessed. This is a large topic that could go off in many directions but suffice to say, we also see a massive impact upon teaching and learning in this time with the efflorescence of social media “communication” and the powerful commercial forces driving this. These days, across the globe, people share the mobile phone, in a new technologically induced environment, and it is possible to enrol in courses and submit work “remotely”.

I am therefore writing this with the following set of complex questions in mind. Let me emphasize that I am not here presupposing answers to these questions.

- Am I wrong to ask whether many “slow readers” have proceeded through the various stages of their education to actually miss the value of what has been set before them? Has the pace, by which the curriculum is driven, contributed to students receiving qualifications that attest to an ability to fulfill course requirements before they have properly and critically grasped the issues they have been laid before them?
- With students enrolled *en masse* in “higher education” how can we be sure that the process hasn’t taken on a momentum that regularly over-rides the particular *intellectual* needs of students, whatever the discipline, as they are taught within a learning régime that allows for an equivalence between training in scientific thinking and a course’s time-line as defined by the university’s management? Have political and legislative efforts to make “higher education” widely available done enough to ensure such education is not malformed by the demands of regimented processing, and academic marking schedules? Has higher education properly distinguished between intellectual formation and job training?
- Is it not possible that, in what is called “higher education”, students for some time have gained certificates that attest to their having completed a course, but from which, due to various pressures under which they have had to study, the student’s qualifications do not coincide with any truly deepened intellectual insight? Could it be that genuine self-critical understanding has been stunted due to a *systematic* social and cultural inducement that students complete their courses in the presumed time-frame *before they can satisfy themselves that they have attained the intellectual competence that they consider* should be the standard for such qualifications?
- In brief: has state-controlled, market-oriented, or market-driven public education given students the time and leisure to read and comment upon the basic materials of their disciplines? Or has the “growth” of the “enterprise university” contributed to a generation of deluded graduates, produced by similarly deluded academics? Has the structure of post-secondary education subjected students to an inducement to graduate before they have properly satisfied themselves that they can competently understand and reflect upon the disciplines in which they have been trained and will graduate?

This is all very well someone may say, but when students have to work a couple of night jobs in order to pay for their course, there may not be the time to read the books that their course handout says they should read, let alone to read them slowly.

This state of affairs cannot be denied and currently students **world-wide** are enrolled in “higher education” courses that make many demands upon them, even as they are subject to distracting demands like jobs that enable them to pay for their courses, their food and their rent.

But I write this, at this juncture, to assist those who, within the inherited educational culture, have organised themselves to take the time to do the slow reading that they have come to believe is necessary to develop their understanding of the world in which we live, and to do so via a close and “slow reading” of Bob Goudzwaard’s book **Capitalism and Progress** (initially composed between 1975 and 1978). Bob’s book is a good one to read slowly because it can also help us understand why “reading slowly”, also in courses that investigate “capitalism and progress”, could become problematic. This book encourages the development of a “way” of thinking that coincides with the renewal of a way of life that has learned to push back against social and cultural forces that would malform our life, ignoring our own need for conscientious self-reflection - in this case our intellectual and educated “life”.

That renewed way of life will resist the social and cultural pressures that arise from a materialistic outlook oriented to growing one’s wealth guided by a faith in progress. We stand in need of “removing barriers” (a phrase we note Goudzwaard uses to frame his treatise) that prevent “slow reading”, *that prevent students from truly catching up with and appreciating the value of **their own** thinking*. This booklet is part of an attempt to encourage a fresh generation of Christian intellectual honesty that will not be bribed by the inducement of “pieces of paper” that are said to ensure a job sometime after the end of the course.

To put it like this sounds very much like I will be contributing to a movement that will be very much on the fringe. It sounds like an education process that presupposes students will develop a personal ethic that refuses to “graduate” before attaining the intellectual standard they require, rather than what their academy upholds by its taken-for-granted, managerial time-line. Yes, the sirens of “*Yes but don’t we have to be realistic?*” can already be heard singing their doleful anthem in the aether.

Capitalism and Progress as “a diagnosis of western society” is chosen for close exegetical examination because it can not only educate us, it can also help us develop cultural insight about the strengths and weaknesses of our schooling, of our education and miseducation. By reading this volume slowly we may gain understanding of how the capitalist ideological flattening of God-given responsibilities, lubricated with a progress mythology, stunts our learning even as we graduate with highest grades. It is a work that was composed in the late 1970s and its relevance has not diminished for us in 2026.

These opening paragraphs contain my suspicions about student learning and how public education is organized these days. It’s not only in Australia, where I live, and it is not only in the “West”. These opening paragraphs give expression to what I have learned about my own learning. And my aim here is to assist (fellow) students.

So I wonder: may there be young Christians and others wondering if a Biblically-directed “diagnosis of western society” might help them think about their schooling and education? Might Bob Goudzwaard’s discussion of **Capitalism and Progress** shed new light upon the way our lives are being lived, the demands upon us in our education? Dare we explore how our lives have been *shaped and misshaped* leaving us with what we confront of the world’s many problems here and now, today?

I do not deny that there is an intense, spiritual, dimension to this. The hypothesis of **Capitalism and Progress** was formulated to deepen critical self-understanding in the midst of our social structures and cultural life. We need to learn about the spiritual forces driving *our own education*; we need deepened insight about our responsibility lest we allow ourselves to misconstrue who we are in our student task.

So, will **Capitalism and Progress** be of true benefit? I have set myself the task of writing a commentary examining the various *Prefaces* Bob wrote for four editions of this work. The aim is to carefully trace the logic of his statements.

For some of his prefaces, we will consider, by one sentence at a time, his account of why he wrote this book. I make some observations, then move on to the next sentence. I hope in this way to track down his own explanation of the book's content. How did the author, having read it, understand what he had tried to do? By reading his own explanations *in this slow way* I'm wanting to encourage readers to then go further and consider the details of his "diagnosis". And, *as they do so*, they might also gain an understanding about how his "diagnosis" relates to *our situation* today, half a century later. Before the book was written, Goudzwaard engaged in discussions with students and from 1975 to 1978 he reworked those lecture-notes into his book.

In **Capitalism and Progress**, Bob tests his hypothesis that western society, since the 18th century, has been directed by a distinctive *religious* belief, an idolatrous materialistic commitment to progress, the primary guide shaping social and cultural life. This *religious* belief has not only had an impact upon the way this book and books like it have been *written*, but it has had a decisive impact upon the way in which such books have *been read and understood, as well as being misread and thus misunderstood*. I suggest that this *religious* belief has come to expression in the system of higher education that seems, these days, to make "slow reading" of such texts problematic.

I am not suggesting that a *leisurely* reading alone will help us find its true value. Its diagnosis of our political-economy and our responsibilities as citizens and stewards will require us to *work hard* on what is presented. But the value of this insightful book may be lost for a new generation if we cannot find a way to read it slowly and methodically. I hope that this commentary of this "classic" work will inspire further commentaries and give direction to men and women, scholars of a new generation, to compose up-to-date "diagnoses" of our local, glocal and global stewardship.

The diagnosis set forth by **Capitalism and Progress** prompt us to ask questions about the way public education has been structured, and that also means how we have been subjected to the ideological mix of "capitalism and progress" in our schooling, our own search for qualifications education. Consider the pressure upon students to "keep up". Do not social and cultural forces at work - from family, teachers, peers, social media - make it too easy for such students to suppress suspicions and simply move on to the next task, module, unit or subject? And then of course there are student loans and the costs incurred for the courses undertaken:

... and in this era of university education it is just not possible to sit in the café after the lecture to discuss the content with a friend because there's a job that has to be done if I want to pay my rent, and have enough to eat while I do my course. I'll just have to skip the coffee ... Sorry must go!

I do not know the actual stage reached by any of my readers in their odyssey through the labyrinth of public education. And yet **Capitalism and Progress** may help students gain an overview of how they have been placed in the educational process. But, as I say, it might best be done *slowly*, and I suspect Bob would agree that his work should be read *slowly* because it is clear from his own writings that he also read and then re-read what he had previously written as he went on to further develop his “diagnosis”. This is why in many of Bob writings, over a 60 year period, we find him re-stating what he had written earlier - and so many of his writings have been published and are freely available. One of his final works emerged after a concerted effort to listen slowly and carefully to how his students understood their studies in relation to the issues confronting them. This was the book he jointly authored with Craig Bartholomew in 2017, **Beyond the Modern Age**.²

In all that “text”, Bob’s own awareness of the fragility of his literacy can be discerned. The fragility is certainly on display when his work has been translated from Dutch into English, but I suspect that Bob initially also came to an appraisal of this in his teaching and writing in Dutch for his teachers or later for a Dutch audience and readership. For after all, what we have in Bob’s writings is the result of his own reflection upon his own written-down thoughts, evaluating his notes, carefully considering his reformulations, word by word, sentence by sentence. That many have attested to have been spiritually enlivened by his writings, encourages us from another angle to pause and think about the issues he raises. This attests to the strong possibility that he had already developed critical insight about the fragility of his own compositions.

What we have in Bob Goudzwaard’s many texts, essays, reviews, books and public policy formulations, is language that has already been intensively worked upon. A deep and profound insight may have come to him in an instant. But when it came to writing down the implications of any such earth-shattering notions, it could not appear on the page in an instantaneous magical moment.

*For instance, consider a statement quietly appearing without fanfar on p.65 of **Capitalism and Progress** (1979) where he says “... the industrial revolution failed. It is imperative to grasp what is meant here.”*

This is his hypothesis that had to be written down, and written in such a way that he would be able to carry on logically clarifying what this meant. After all, it was imperative, as he said. And then he would have to ask where this hypothesis was taking him. And so his understanding developed in the light of evidence he had accumulated.

This complex process - listening to lecturers, discussion with colleagues, reading authoritative texts about what has already been written on a topic, in books and journal articles, and “sleeping on it” - is the *modus operandi* for all genuine students of the human condition. It is a process basic to scientific idea-formation, to then seek to convey this to others for critical evaluation; he had no option but to do it *slowly*.

I am not assuming that this booklet with the “exegeses” that I provide, is for every student who picks up **Capitalism and Progress** before they decide to delve further

² With Craig Bartholomew *Beyond the Modern Age: An Archaeology of Contemporary Culture*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press. ISBN 978-0-8308-5151-5 2017.

into it. But my sentence-by-sentence discussion of Bob's Prefaces is for students who, like myself, find keeping track of the thinking that is generated when we read such a text, a taxing and complex task; we might even suggest that its complexity is due to its pre-scientific and pre-theoretical character. My exegesis is aimed at helping those who, appreciative of the frustrations of "reading slowly and methodically", nevertheless are prepared to do so.

There is no intention here to provide an interpretation that will mean the reader will no longer have to maintain an ongoing thoughtful engagement with the Goudzwaard text. To the contrary. What is presented here, it seems to me, may well be of greatest help to those who have already engaged with Bob's work to some extent and are seeking further clarification of his underlying method and philosophical presuppositions. Reading **Capitalism and Progress** can be a trial since so many questions can be raised simultaneously that it is easy to lose one's place.

The material given below is simply seeking to make available an interpretation that will encourage and deepen further *slow* reflection on "capitalism and progress" in the hope that we can update the diagnosis of the trials and tribulations of not only Western society, but find the path for just, sustainable and caring stewardship for ourselves and all our neighbours.

In the exegetical commentaries that follow, Goudzwaard's sentence is given in 15pt TIMES. My exegesis is given in 12pt GARAMOND. The first letter of any paragraph's opening word is enlarged.

Foreword (to first Dutch edition 1976)³

Western society faces a multitude of problems at this point in its existence; and each problem seems to have mobilized its own group of advisors. Well-meaning economists are attempting to propose serious solutions to the current problems of unemployment and ongoing inflation. Concerned biologists and ecologists are proposing measures to safeguard the future of the planet's living environment. In addition, the voices of leading social psychologists are being raised, calling for greater attention to the limits of human psychological capacity, as are polemologists who predict the current arms race will spiral out of control. In this context, we hardly notice that the interconnectedness and coherence between all these problems is almost never addressed. After all, all scientists should remain within their own field. But the unfortunate consequence of this is that the possible common causes of all these ailments and problems are left entirely or largely vague. The reader is often left with a vague reference to "the" Western culture as a deeper background, or left with a broad attack on capitalism as a social system that is, after all, the source of all our ills.

This book was born out of a clear sense of dissatisfaction with this entire situation. What I am trying to draw to our attention is not my personal dissatisfaction with the continued existence of some gap in the "scientific" literature, nor do I believe that this gap should be filled as quickly as possible. My dissatisfaction is rather that I - and perhaps many others with me - can have little confidence in the practical solutions that are put forward in this way from various quarters. If we collectively fail to recognize what connects all these problems in our social order, we also collectively risk, time and again, missing the mark. If we are to find real solutions, we will, in my opinion, have to start delving into the possible social and cultural roots of these problems.

To give just one example: contemporary structural unemployment appears to us at first glance to be a purely economic problem, for which the society of economists - as a group of modern systems engineers - must attempt to find a suitable technical solution. But the fundamental difficulty of this problem is, of course, that its roots run considerably deeper than what can be probed by economics. These roots are in the very structure of our social order, as well as in the (culturally determined) views that Westerners hold about labour and labour techniques as indispensable instruments for the overall progress of our society. Anyone who fails to recognise these roots when studying the

³ This is the English translation of the Dutch *Woord Vooraf* that has been made available from the publisher's site of the 2024 republication edited by Govert Buijs. See <https://buijten.nl/wp-content/uploads/Kapitalisme-en-vooruitgang-Leesfragment.pdf> Translation was undertaken with assistance of Google translation. In its latest fifth 2024 edition, it is published as **Capitalism and Progress** without any subtitle.

contemporary unemployment problem runs the risk of making the problem worse by the solutions they offer. After all, issues that are primarily determined by the culture and structure in which one lives can only be effectively solved from that cultural and structural perspective.

The aim of this book, then, is to highlight some of the most important cultural and structural social backgrounds of our contemporary societies. However, I must immediately note that writing such a book - even one aimed at a broad readership - is, in fact, a bold undertaking.⁴ This is especially so for an economist like myself, with limited philosophical training and without a thorough historical or sociological education. That I've dared to do this is partly because a growing number of problems in our society appear to be playing out precisely on the "economic" front. That's where the cracks in our social fabric are apparently most clearly visible. Moreover, I suspect that many non-economists have similar hesitations as I do - and that they, in turn, don't dare to venture into the realm of economics. That's why this book is now before you (27) - and I would like to apologize in advance to all sociologists, historians, philosophers, and ethicists for the mistakes I've undoubtedly made in "their" fields.

In light of this difficulty, I have attempted to alleviate it by restricting the topic to be addressed. Writing a treatise on "the relationship between culture and social structure in Western society" would be far too pretentious and would hardly help us. The theme of this book has been deliberately chosen more narrowly. It concerns the possible connection between one dominant cultural motive in Western society- the pursuit of and belief in *progress* - and one essential element in the construction of Western social structure - namely, *capitalism*. That is undoubtedly a significant limitation. Our culture - even when it comes to societal structure - has considerably more determining factors than just the desire to progress. And that would certainly be the case if that progress were to be further defined as humanity's advancement in understanding, mastering, and developing the natural world around us. And as for our social structure: it consists of a complex of components that certainly cannot all be simply lumped together under the umbrella of "capitalism". Attempts to portray the Western legal order and democracy as the fruit of, for example, financial return considerations not only seem distorted and artificial but can even be described as downright misleading and dangerous. An investigation of the relationship between Western culture and societal structure through the concept

⁴ Dutch: *Maar daarbij moet ik onmiddellijk opmerken, dat het schrijven van zo'n boek – ook al is het aan het adres van een breed lezerspubliek gericht – in feite een ontstellend waagstuk is.* I take it that the last phrase here suggests Goudzwaard saw initially saw it as a highly risky venture. He proceeds with seeking to explain that. Academic competence in any field, let alone in inter-disciplinary investigations as he is suggesting has been neglected, does not mean that one is competent in identifying the religious roots of a problem that needs investigations. But he is also admitting that his endeavour is "highly risky" even though expertise is not the primary requirement here.

pair “capitalism and progress” therefore has very clear limitations. But that doesn’t make it pointless. If anything, the opposite seems to be the case.

For example, it cannot be a coincidence that the pursuit of progress has been the constant ‘cultural’ companion of our Western society from the moment renovations commenced during the Industrial Revolution. And, in turn, is not capitalism, by its very nature, progressive? And does not Schumpeter aptly describe capitalism as primarily a specific ‘form or method of change’: a form of social organization focused upon growth and change? It is in this specific orientation towards progress, capitalism appears in the structure of our contemporary society as a recognizable and essential element. And finally, it can hardly be a coincidence that so many profound problems in our society today are directly related, in one way or another, to the rapid advancement of the Western economy and technology. These seem to give us good reason to place capitalism, as well as its contemporary problems, against this cultural backdrop. Perhaps it will help us better understand our own times and our own problems.

The purpose of this book is to first attempt to examine historically whether the motive of progress could indeed have played a decisive role in the formation of modern Western society. This is the subject of Part I, which centrally addresses the question of which intellectual barriers had to be successively broken down in Western society after the Middle Ages before capitalism could fully establish itself in Western culture. If my assumption is correct, then we will inevitably see the motive of progress playing a key role in this quest. Part II will then examine the development of modern capitalism from the Industrial Revolution to the present day, while Part III will attempt to more clearly examine some of our most profound contemporary problems against the cultural and social backgrounds thus illuminated. Finally, Part IV will address the difficult question of how we can find the path to actual solutions for most of these problems.

I owe several thanks to people for the creation of this book. I would like to mention two in particular: Drs. G.M. van Driel, a research associate at VU University Amsterdam, who helped me prepare the manuscript, and Ms. Margriet Lambert, who typed it with great care.

Line-by-line Commentary upon the Foreword to the first Dutch edition 1976⁵

Western society faces a multitude of problems at this point in its existence; and each problem seems to have mobilized its own group of advisors.

Imagine yourself picking up this book in 1976. The book's title is **Kapitalisme en vooruitgang: een eigentijdse maatschappijkritiek** (Capitalism and Progress: a contemporary social critique). And here you are (assuming you are a Dutch student), having picked it up to flick through the Foreword to find out something about what the author wanted to write about and here is the initial statement - the first sentence of the first paragraph. What is it telling you? What is Bob Goudzwaard assuming about those who will read his Foreword? Whoever you are, it would seem he has presumed you are serious about investigating the problems we face. There are many of them which, he is assuming, you probably know already.

And having read that you have already added another problem to the mix:

How am I to find a way to respond, with my way of responding, to this situation?

He immediately adds something you might already know but it will begin to clarify his way of dealing with his topic telling you plainly: these are problems which come to our attention with much advice “mobilized” by various professional groups, each addressing a problem according to their peculiar expertise. *From the outset* the author wastes no time - a list follows of something important he has to tell you

But before we get to the list, look again at the sentence. Look at the second part after the semi-colon - it restates and develops the first part. Together it is as if Goudzwaard would have us stand with him high above the field of “western society”, observing a field of problems stretched out below us as if this is a battle field with lots of movement as the problems are “mobilized” ... they each have a momentum and that suggests that there are “commanding officers” attached to each “formation” - there is something “visual” in this sentence, as the author gives himself the task of conveying to us what he has come to see ... our author may not be a poet, still less a landscape painter, but he is using his imagination to try to convey something of his idea to us.

Well-meaning economists are attempting to propose serious solutions to current unemployment and ongoing inflation.

The author has been a student of economics from his under-graduate days (1951-1957). The year is 1976. At this time he is Professor of Economics at the Free University, Amsterdam, a Christian academy committed to educating according to a Christian reformational view of science and scholarship. Goudzwaard is an adherent of the “Philosophy of the Law-Idea” that has been developed at this university by Herman Dooyeweerd (1894-1977) and others.

Evidently, **Capitalism and Progress** is his contribution to reformational scholarship. As a student of economics, over two decades since graduation, he has deepened his appreciation for what his own “group of advisors” have advised on economic problems in the midst of the West’s “multitude of problems” - he cites as an example unemployment and inflation, two issues that interact with each other in what is termed the “business cycle”. His mentor at Rotterdam, the reknowned Jan Tinbergen (1903–1994), a pioneering Dutch economist developed the first comprehensive econometric business cycle models in the 1930s, for which he later won the Nobel Prize. From the outset of this treatise, Goudzwaard draws on his experience as a student of economics, having gained a PhD in this discipline.

⁵ This is a translation of the “Woord Vooraf” of the initial 1976 publication of **Kapitalisme en Vooruitgang** in The Netherlands.

In his work as a public policy research he was advising those making laws about business and commerce and managing employment about what had come to be understood, because of Tinbergen's work, as the "business cycle".⁶ Goudzwaard has been among those he now refers to as "well-meaning economists" proposing solutions to unemployment and inflation. As a political party policy researcher he had written on this phenomenon for members and parliamentarians, filtering the findings of empirical economic research, for the party's voters and anyone else who might be interested. He has been involved in the "mobilizing" situation in which the many problems are each being given intensive "well meaning" attention by scientific advisors. By his mention of his own professional "corner" we sense he has the multitude of problems in view - more than merely those addressed from his economic corner. And this is an assumption on our part that he will confirm.

But this is also the mid 1970s with the challenge of "stagflation" to the "business-cycle"; the rates of unemployment and inflation don't seem to be inversely related to each other as the mainstream of economic advice has previously assumed! Both rates are increasing at the same time!

Concerned biologists and ecologists are proposing measures to safeguard the future of the planet's living environment. In addition, the voices of leading social psychologists are being raised, calling for greater attention to the limits of human psychological capacity, as are polemologists who predict the current arms race will spiral out of control.

We noted our author's indirect inclusion of himself in the situation he describes as he introduces his book. "Advisors" busy with "the multitude of problems", with qualifications and research mandates from scientific and professional groups are busy in their own fields, and are thereby adding to the contributions made by their own discipline.

Goudzwaard had been a *Vrije Universiteit* professor from 1971, having also served as an social policy advisor to the *Anti-Revolutionaire Partij* members of the Dutch Parliament, the *Estaten Generaal*. So we can surmise that he is writing this from having been "on the inside", so to speak, of the qualified advice and attempts to provide serious solutions to this multitude of problems.

But here he confirms that he is not wanting to discuss his own discipline's problems. Climate change is considered by biologists and climatologists, psychologists are concerned for how these problems make a personal impact of well-being and health, and there are those who specialise in studying wars and conflict. We are induced to ask: where is this heading? It seems, having identified a serious problem of concern in his own field, he is wanting to give attention to the entire field of problems - in so doing, the problems of his own corner, will be considered a wider *problematic* context. We read on, as the insight dawns that this is also about a situation in regards to which we too will have to come to some resolution.

In this context, we hardly notice that the interconnectedness and coherence between all these problems is almost never addressed.

The flow of argument of the initial 4 sentences culminates here. This is a key sentence for Goudzwaard. As such, it sits in the middle of the opening paragraph.⁷ If we were listening to this as a lecture, the speaker's tone at this juncture would give us an important cue. Here

⁶ "De economische politiek en het conjunctuur-vraagstuk" *Anti-Revolutionaire Staatskunde* Vol. 29 1959 pp. 264-285. ("Economic Policy and the Business-Cycle")

⁷ In Dutch, the first paragraph "Woord Vooraf" has 200 words and concludes with what we have translated as "the source of all our ills" below. Our English translation is provided in 182 words.

it sits among the opening propositions⁸ of this Foreword in one paragraph of 200 words. Italics might have helped to give it emphasis. It draws attention to a weakness of our scientific culture; the many problems we face now include another problem about our tacit understanding of scientific problem-solving, the inheritance of a view that according to scientific rationality solutions have to be found empirically “one at a time”. It is as if each problem, so considered, can only be resolved if it is taken in isolation from all the other problems. Implicitly Goudzwaard begins by addressing this as a basic philosophical problem that needs to be subjected to critical examination.

This is not to deny the value of his contribution to economics; but we are alerted to the possibility that any solution to economic problems will be weakened as long as the solutions are not connected to solutions of other non-economic problems. The other scientific “advisors” mobilize their problems in the same isolating way. The entire field of interconnection and coherence is too easily lost to sight. So the Vrije Universiteit Professor is affirming the need to encourage students to address what is almost never addressed. It is not addressed in the various efforts of scientists to give advice about their own mobilized “problem” and the problem-solving proposed to meet it, but also in their training.

In a retirement interview in 1998, Goudzwaard provides some helpful insight about the origins of this book. It seems he had begun to think deeply about this “almost never addressed” concern when his hypothesis was given its first “test” - in a series of talks to a group of students:

Actually, it was Hans Rookmaaker who earlier put me on the trail of Capitalism and Progress. This book grew out of conversations with students, who came from all over the world, within l'Abri Nederland, the Dutch branch of the home for reflection and culture founded in Switzerland by Francis Schaeffer, an American missionary. During the time we lived in Schoonhoven, I went to l'Abri in Eck en Wiel once a week or fortnight. Those contributions grew into a series. At one point, Rookmaaker said: there is the potential for a book here, only you have to include certain literature. Among other things, he was referring to Peter Gay's study of the Enlightenment. So this book underwent the test of communicability before it was written.⁹

After all, all scientists should remain within their own field.

This sentence might have been better framed as a rhetorical question addressed to the reader: “Shouldn’t all scientists be content to work and keep to advice in their own specialised fields? What do you think?” or “Can any one science provide us with findings that help us discover the one basic cause for all these problems that are before us without it exceeding its bounds? Again, what do you think?” The answer is in the negative, and after all a scientist is not only a scientist. A person who engages in scientific research has other responsibilities - as family members, citizen, consumer, employee.

But the unfortunate consequence of this is that the possible common causes of all these ailments and problems are left entirely or largely vague. The reader is often left with a vague reference to “the” Western culture as a deeper background, or left with a broad attack on capitalism as a social system that is, after all, the source of all our ills.

To keep track here, we need to keep in mind what we have read in previous sentences of this Foreword. The possibility has been flagged that the inherited view of “one problem at a time” science may be adding to our problems.¹⁰ Goudzwaard has indicated that such a scientific outlook tends to refer to these problems as if they can be understood as separate

⁸ A Dutch doctoral candidate’s defense of a dissertation involves a series of propositions (Stellingen) submitted with the thesis. These are considered in a “viva” before an examining panel, colleagues, family and friends in attendance. The examiners will invite the candidate to expound some of them.

⁹ This translates a comment in “Ik heb bepaald geen saai leven gehad” Herman Noordegraaf en Sander Griffioen (eds) **Bewogen Realisme: Economie, cultuur, oecumene. Bij het afscheid Bob Goudzwaard** Kok, Kampen 1999 pp. 28-43 at p.37. The italics of this quote have been added.

¹⁰ This is reflected in the prominent definition of economic science as formulated by Lionel Robbins **An Essay on the Nature and Significance of Economics Science**, 1952 (reprint of 2nd edition, 1935) “Economics is the Science, which studies human behavior as a relationship between (given) ends and scarce means, which have alternative uses ...” (p.15)

realities apart from their “interconnections and coherences”. Thus, he is saying that this scientific method only deepens the “multitude of problems” to be faced.

Is he not reflecting on his own experience as a student, *as a reader*, having read course texts? Of course there will also be lectures to which a student will listen. His implication here is that what he has heard or read too often seems to suggest that the cause of all these problems is beyond reach for any special scientist. A scientist is somehow bound to the scientist’s own special field, and so any inter-connection is consigned to the background, and as an unknown factor it is then presumed to be inherent in what is said to be the widest historical context: “civilisation”. But Goudzwaard he also identifies another tendency here: the “interconnections and coherences” will be considered “critically”, lumped together as a pervasive negative function of capitalist system.

This book was born out of a clear sense of dissatisfaction with this entire situation.

A few lines back we noted a key proposition in Goudzwaard’s opening paragraph that sat there, innocuous, without italics, despite its profound content. Here, *right at the very beginning* of the second paragraph, we read an explicit *personal* statement of why he has composed this treatise. His involvement in his scientific vocation has been accompanied with deep frustration. He desires to understand what has been ignored, flattened out. This book attempts to address his dissatisfaction.¹¹

Is he about to ditch his economic profession? Will he leave his scientific training behind in what he publishes here? No. Is it time to give up on economics and go into some other satisfying field of service where his dissatisfaction can be overcome? No. We read on.

I am not drawing attention to my personal dissatisfaction with the continued existence of some gap in the “scientific” literature, nor do I believe that this gap should be filled as quickly as possible.

This then qualifies his “dissatisfaction with this entire situation.” Possible misunderstanding is countered with a “don’t get me wrong” qualifier - he does not suggest he is on his own in this frustration with the lack of attention to possible “interconnectedness and coherence”. And it is not simply his own personal itch which could be solved by his own effort to increase his own *scientific* knowledge, and to set about doing so as quickly as possible.

My dissatisfaction is rather that I - and perhaps many others with me - can have little confidence in the practical solutions that are put forward in this way from various quarters.¹²

Here the “clear sense of dissatisfaction” is explained. He does not want us to think that he is alone in perceiving a lack of attention to the interlinking between this “multitude of problems facing us”. And it will not only be economists who share this lack of confidence in the practical solutions proffered from “various quarters” to the various problems.

This sentence prods our further questioning. Note how the “dissatisfaction” coincides with diminished confidence in the “practical solutions” offered from “various quarters”. Which “quarters” are they? And what should we understand by the phrase: “in this way”?

¹¹ “Flattened” (*afgeplat*) is part of Goudzwaard’s explanation of his philosophy of social science. This is the question put to him in the Noordegraaf and Griffioen interview (*op.cit* p. 30): **Is it true that the term ‘flattened’, which often comes to mind, is a translation for what Mekkes and Dooyeweerd called ‘restrictive’?** His answer is this: *Certainly. Something is ‘flattened’ when it does not open up to the other dimensions of reality: politics in a flattened sense is power play, just as sexuality is flattened when the response of love is lacking. Both examples show a failure in opening up to reach their respective destinations. These were things that strongly fascinated me.* By reference to this abstract “flattening” of reality, Goudzwaard explains and justifies his “dissatisfaction”. Another flourishing way must be developed to counter this flattening.

¹² Dutch: *weinig vertrouwen kan hebben in de praktische oplossingen die op deze manier van diverse kanten worden aangedragen*. In the context of what Goudzwaard has written here might it be better to render “weinig vertrouwen” as a diminishing trust or confidence, a faith that is being eroded?

By answering these questions we begin to grasp Goudzwaard's configuration of the *problem* that he (along with others) has about the *problematic* ignoring of the *interlinkages and coherences* between the "multitude of *problems* facing us". This needs to be front and centre of any concern and overcome. There is "little confidence in the practical solutions being offered" from the "one-at-a-time" method. So how do we begin to address this without skipping over what is actually a truly complex problem?

Goudzwaard characterises "the practical solutions being offered" confronting a lack of faith, an absence of confidence in the "way" these are "put forward" "from various quarters." His "dissatisfaction" is one compounded idea: *little-confidence-in-the-way-practical-solutions-are-being-put-forward*. Reading back over what we have already covered, we realise these "various quarters" are the disciplines of the various special scientific advisors. They each deal with a problem existing within the entire field of problems, yet they consider their own problem in a *way* appropriate to their own scientific "sector".¹³ The various problems are each being considered without due reference to the other problems across the "entire field" of "Western society."

If we collectively fail to recognize what connects all these problems in our social order, we also collectively risk missing the mark time and again.

Goudzwaard's language changes from "I" and "my" to "we" and "our". Any genuine step forward must involve "our" *collective and corporate* recognition of what is at stake. This is not merely one scientist's individual "itch"; neither is it merely the concern of one or other science. The identification of "interconnections and coherences" must involve "our" response to be expressed in the results of various research projects. Goudzwaard implies that he is offering **Capitalism and Progress** as a work that aims to aid such a corporate scientific effort, framed and maintained to contribute to "collective recognition" and so aiming to avoid missing the mark.

This cannot avoid being Goudzwaard's *personal* view, but it will give expression to what he has learned from his own scientific corner about the "interconnections and coherences" of these problems as they together contribute to our Western social order. He will draw upon his own study in economics when he offers his *diagnosis*. As a *diagnosis of Western society*, Goudzwaard's book is his rationale for why his hypothesis (i.e. the close interlinkage of the social system of "capitalism" with the faith in "progress") should be investigated in relation to the diverse arenas of social responsibility: but first the *diagnosis* will be concerned with what has happened and how we have arrived at our present (late 20th century) juncture. The further research, therefore, about what needs to be done in order to *begin* to meet and resolve these various problems, first needs diagnosis so that the "interconnections and coherences" between the problems can be understood "without missing the mark".

If we are to find real solutions, we will, in my opinion, have to start delving into the possible social and cultural roots of these problems.

We read here what Goudzwaard felt he needed to say to explain why he had written this book. To read his **Foreword** in this sentence-by-sentence examination, may be somewhat laborious and some readers may have considered this to be unnecessary, and so will have already delved into how the book's *diagnosis* unfolds. Fine. After all, to this point we have only covered the first two of Goudzwaard's 8 paragraphs in his "Woord Vooraf".¹⁴ But right here, at the end of his second introductory paragraph, he locates the point where he is standing. He is at the *beginning* of a path of research that aims to "find real solutions". It will be difficult because it will involve delving into social and cultural roots, *our* social and cultural roots, from which these "manifold problems", *our* problems, have arisen and which

¹³ As his undergraduate B.Econ dissertation, Goudzwaard explored this issue with an examination of the specific causality that is to be appropriate in economic science. "*Economisch Causaliteit*" "**Economic Causality**" *Correspondentiebladen* 1957 21 2, 15-25.

¹⁴ The 8 footnotes (i.e. 4 to 13) to this point have more words (478) than what is contained in the two translated paragraphs. Our commentary amounts to about 2695 words to explain the 318 of these two paragraphs.

require in a collective, corporate enterprise that involves serious self-examination, exposing ourselves to serious cross-examination. “We” have both social and cultural responsibility and hence this delving cannot avoid being “personal”.

To give just one example: contemporary structural unemployment appears to us at first glance to be a purely economic problem, for which the society of economists - as a group of modern systems engineers - must attempt to find a suitable technical solution. But the fundamental difficulty of this problem is, of course, that its roots run considerably deeper than what can be probed by economics.

We noted how the initial sentences presuppose the experience of Goudzwaard the economist. He has published an explanation of the phenomenon of the “business cycle” - how rates of unemployment and inflation seem to change in inverse relation to each other.

He recognised that legislators must be rightly advised about this covariance if laws are to justly regulate economic life. His mentor at Rotterdam School of Economics had led the way with this understanding. Laws governing employment are not only legislated to protect the rights of business owners but to ensure just working conditions for workers too. Regulations for commercial life have to reckon with what is just for all: producers, workers and consumers. The “business cycle” explained how unemployment and the cost of living (as measured by the consumer price index) relate to each other in complex ways, how business confidence as much as household livelihood together relate to inflation.¹⁵ So legislators should not view unemployment as any less a problem because it is only one problem among many. To the contrary. The memory of the Great Depression and the problems households and businesses experience when prices rise at an exponential rate, and when money values decline precipitously, are only too well known.

As well as being a student of the initiator of this important finding from empirical economic research, Bob had also been a political party social policy researcher giving economic advice to legislators. In recent time he had also taken a seat in parliament as one among many responsible for legislation. The problems raised by unemployment and inflation do not go away simply because parliamentarians expertly craft laws that, at least for the short term, manage the difficulties people have to deal with by ensuring they all have enough in their pockets to pay for bread to put on the family’s table. But together with other problems the existence of such enduring economic and commercial problems requiring ongoing government vigilance points to “roots that run considerably deeper.” These roots of economic, social, political and cultural problems are found in the way we take up our responsibilities in our “way of life”. And Goudzwaard is here writing in the mid-1970s when the OPEC oil embargo against nations supportive of Israel saw the emergence of “stagflation”. The Iranian Revolution was but a few months away.

These roots are in the very structure of our social order, as well as in the (culturally determined) view held by Westerners about labour and labour technology as indispensable instruments for the overall progress of our society.

So, our author is not only asking us how we view labour, work and industry. His probing aims to disclose the roots of our view of work and of technological development, to not only understand the many dimensions of our economy, but to see the roots of the problems we confront in our economy in our presumed *way of life*. There are many different tasks for which employers employ employees and these are available in the business and commercial setting in a society as complex and differentiated as ours. And note how Goudzwaard flags issues arising from the development of technology that assist in production. Technology too is part of the development of our society. And here the

¹⁵ We have noted this already in ftn 5.

term *progress* is used for the first time. We will find that it appears regularly in what follows as he outlines the hypothesis he is testing in his book.

Anyone who fails to recognise these roots when studying the contemporary unemployment problem runs the risk of making the problem worse by the solutions they offer.

This is the first half of the proposition that is here being put forward. Bob suggests that the failure already noted, of hardly ever addressing the interconnectedness and coherence between all these problems, arises from an implicit assumption in how we look at things.

After all, issues that are primarily determined by the culture and structure in which one lives can only be effectively solved from that cultural and structural perspective.

Goudzwaard is discussing here how the problems can be alleviated and how they can be exacerbated. If solutions do not see the problems in terms of their roots in social and cultural life, if these social and cultural roots are not given due respect in our understanding of them, and the way we give expression to our responsibilities, then any proposed solutions will only make matters worse. If it is possible to significantly alleviate problems then it seems logical that problems can be significantly exacerbated by a faulty diagnosis. So they have to be viewed by recognising their cultural and structural characteristics. It is as if in the “west” a view prevails that is, in some profound ways, wilfully blind to what has been inherited in social and cultural terms.

The aim of this book, then, is to highlight some of the most important cultural and structural social backgrounds of our contemporary societies.

Goudzwaard has put forward what he considers he needs to have said to give the reader the framework for reading his book with insight. He has obviously been working on it for sometime.

However, I must immediately note that writing such a book - even one aimed at a broad readership - is, in fact, a bold undertaking.

Goudzwaard evidently aimed for a wide readership - wider than his academic speciality and also wider than those who would agree with his reformed Christian outlook. He has suggested that this work presupposes the development of a project of many researchers, much wider and deeper than he can hope to undertake, on his own. The Dutch term for “staggering undertaking” does not only refer to the *size* of the undertaking but also to its *risk*.¹⁶ And by those terms he is emphasizing not how heroic he is - even if some may view his work that way because he tackles a “staggeringly complex reality” - but that he is simply working at a preliminary hypothesis, the credibility of which needs to be confirmed in an ongoing research project that is “staggering” in its scope and meaning *and, hopefully, in its ongoing disclosure*. The book’s subtitle indicates that it is a *diagnosis*.

This is especially so for an economist like myself, with limited philosophical training and without a thorough historical or sociological education.

Goudzwaard is aware of the limits within which he works - aware of the limits of the discipline in which he has been trained, as well as his own lack of proficiency in philosophy, history and sociology. I guess he mentions these disciplines from an awareness that the kind of scenario he paints in his Foreword is what is often also put forward by philosophers, historians and sociologists.

That I’ve dared to do this is partly because a growing number of problems in our society appear to be playing out precisely on the “economic” front.

¹⁶ Dutch: *ontstellend waagstuk* while meaning an “extremely onerous task” can also carry with it the sense of a “startling risk”. Hence our rendering of “bold undertaking”.

Here he concedes that his way of viewing these mutually intersecting problems (unemployment and inflation, climate change and environmental degradation, mass anxiety across all classes, and international tensions and conflicts) will be to a large degree from within the economic frame of reference. Moreover, in 1976 serious changes were emerging on the horizon of economics as already alluded to, namely to the emergence of “stagflation” if not the Western world being warned by “oil shocks” from the oil rich arabian countries, with growing warnings at home and from abroad about the obsessive consumeristic dependence upon the motor car and petrol.

That’s where the cracks in our social fabric are apparently most clearly visible.

Here is an interesting concession. It seems as if it is, from an economic outlook, that the mutual intersection of these endemic problems of western society come easily into view. Goudzwaard concedes this, but the added term “apparently” reminds us that people will generally become alert to how economic realities are impacting daily life by noting prices on supermarket shelves. Still, this “everyday” reality should not distract us from delving deeper into the roots of our social structure and cultural life.

Moreover, I suspect that many non-economists have similar hesitations as I do - and that they, in turn, don’t dare to venture into the realm of economics.

Goudzwaard has written this book to be of service to his fellows - scientists, academics, public servants, parliamentarians, citizens of whatever class or profession. He is offering his perspective on these historical roots, not denying his training in economics but with a hint that those who are averse to his discipline may have good reason to keep clear of its complex internal debates.

That’s why this book is now before you (27) - and I would like to apologize in advance to all sociologists, historians, philosophers, and ethicists for the mistakes I’ve undoubtedly made in “their” fields.

This is somewhat light-hearted, apologising for the “rudeness” of presuming to violate the principle noted earlier by which “every scientist should remain within their own field”. At this point he is reckoning with the instinctive boundary-maintenance that can erupt in scientific circles when one’s field has been crossed by those perceived to come from outside of it to “invade” as it were territory that is not “owned” by them, that is not rightfully “theirs”. There is an element of humour here, an obscure kind, to be sure and it is often found in academic contexts.

In light of this difficulty, I have attempted to alleviate it by restricting the topic to be addressed.

We might say that Goudzwaard is here indulging the academic culture characterised by strictly maintaining the boundaries between disciplines, limiting his investigation.

Writing a treatise on “the relationship between culture and social structure in Western society” would be far too pretentious and would hardly help us.

And so he undercuts the interpretation of his work that would retreat into an approach that he had previously explained had left him so dissatisfied, namely by justifying his study by a vague announcement that he intends to mount a special investigation of the deeper background of Western culture, why “civilisation” is under threat, or contributing to the broad attack on capitalism as a social system.¹⁷

The theme of this book has been deliberately chosen more narrowly.

No, he is not going down that path. When he says it is chosen more narrowly, we will have to take note of how he considers that his concerns can be appropriately “narrowed”, while

¹⁷ Often social scientists will make the self-deprecating comment that they specialise in making generalizations.

continuing to focus upon the “interconnections and coherences” that can be diagnosed as problems or even symptoms of “Western society”.

It concerns the possible connection between one dominant cultural motive in Western society - the pursuit of and belief in *progress* - and one essential element in the construction of Western social structure - namely, *capitalism*.

And so he here begins to formulate the hypothesis that will frame his investigation. It concerns the relationship between the “pursuit of and belief in progress” and the emergence of “capitalism” within Western social structure - hence capitalism and progress. Notice the terminology in use here: the *construction* of social *structure*. There is a recognition of human agency but it is an agency that is directed by the *pursuit* of progress, with a *belief* in progress.

That is undoubtedly a significant limitation.

Indeed he is wanting his book to be evaluated as an *hypothesis* that he will proceed to test. This, he says, will keep the discussion that follows within limits so that the reader can judge whether these limits have been adhered to by assessing whether his hypothesis has been given credibility by his discussion. We begin to sense that Goudzwaard formulates his hypothesis about the “pursuit of and belief in progress” as the *way of life* that is particularly amenable to capitalism.¹⁸

Our culture - even when it comes to societal structure - has considerably more determining factors than just the desire to progress. And that would certainly be the case if that progress were to be further defined as humanity’s advancement in understanding, mastering, and developing the natural world around us.

Here is implicit advice that Goudzwaard is not wanting this book’s hypothesis-testing to be received in a “flattened” or reductionistic sense.¹⁹ This warning against a reductionist method, is evidence of Goudzwaard’s attempt to apply his standards for scientific work to “open up” discussion of this topic and avoid closing it down in dogmatic fashion.

And as for our social structure: it consists of a complex of components that certainly cannot all be simply lumped together under the umbrella of “capitalism”.

This is an indication of a standard that he hopes will be applied in the interpretation and criticism of his work, avoiding the analysis of social and cultural life in a “flattened” way. A “complex of components” is a term using mechanistic metaphors to discuss the diverse *normative* character of human responsibility but that does not mean responsible social action should be described or explained in mechanistic cause and effect terms. We previously noted the phrase “the *construction* of social *structure*”. Social structure is the way humans give shape to their given responsibilities - social structure as Goudzwaard uses the term is dynamic rather than static and he has also emphasized social structure as “structuration”.²⁰

¹⁸ Goudzwaard has also addressed this in his own publications, and thus his analysis intersects scholarship with other or similar hypotheses to be tested that are similarly concerned with the emergence of capitalism within Western society. See: “Calvijn’s ethiek van het sociaal-economische leven” *Anti-revolutionaire Staatskunde* 1930, 30, 137-152.

¹⁹ See fn. 10 above

²⁰ See Bob Goudzwaard *A Christian Political Option* 1972 pp.2-3 in a section headed “An unavoidable gamble” the term structuration is used in a dynamic sense concerning the way social structure arises from human co-operative action: “*Politics is one of the ways in which we as people depend on and relate to each other. Whether we like it or not, we bear co-responsibility for one another's lot and thus for the structuration of our society. Even if we are not concerned with politics, politics is concerned about us. That is why head-in-the-sand politics is still a very real form of politics - and an extremely bad form at that.*”

Attempts to portray the Western legal order and democracy as the fruit of, for example, financial return considerations not only seem distorted and artificial but can even be described as downright misleading and dangerous.

Here we catch a glimpse of Goudzwaard's assessment of socialism, a contemporary political trend, that is involved in an attempted theoretical flattening of social and economic reality in order to advance its ideological goals blaming "capitalism" for the accumulated problems, cultural and legal.²¹

An investigation of the relationship between Western culture and societal structure through the concept pair "capitalism and progress" therefore has very clear limitations. But that doesn't make it pointless. If anything, the opposite seems to be the case.

Further advice is given concerning the purpose of this treatise. And so the reader is alerted to watch for the positive benefit that can result from such a limited analysis, such a *diagnosis*.

For example, it cannot be a coincidence that the pursuit of progress has been the constant 'cultural' companion of our Western society from the moment renovations commenced²² during the Industrial Revolution.

There are questions here that Goudzwaard needs to answer in his foreshadowed analysis. He is justifying his limitation of the discussion to an examination of the emergent social and cultural relationship between capitalism and progress. He suggests that by working scientifically within the limits of this hypothesis we may deepen our appreciation of the culture in which we live and have been nurtured.

But what is to be understood by the "commencement" of structural renovation? Why indeed was Western society in need of "renovation"? What has occurred to require such *re-structuration* from what it was prior to the "industrial revolution"? Could this imply that the West experienced "deconstruction" from the French Revolution and the Napoleonic aftermath?²³ Or is the statement looking forward to when, as currently, "capitalism" and (the ideology of) "progress" are manifest in our daily lives as mutually dependent upon each other in defining our times?

Part One of **Capitalism and Progress** is titled: The Razing of the Barriers to Progress. This suggests that the *diagnosis* involves tracing the arrival of a "new era" characterised by "progress" as its defining *belief*, the culmination of what the Dutch historian Johan Huizinga (1872-1945) referred to as **The Waning of the Middle Ages**.²⁴ Progress as a defining feature of "modern" society suggests that dynamic development replaces static order. Goudzwaard suggests we live within an historical process after the final decline of a static

²¹ "Socialistisch Idealisme en Opportunisme" *Anti-revolutionaire Staatskunde* 1961 31, 115-125.

²² Dutch: *opnieuw in de steigers werd gezet* -

²³ Anna Bezanson "The Early Use of the Term Industrial Revolution" *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 36:2, Feb., 1922, pp. 343-349

²⁴ This book is noted on p.11 in the 2nd paragraph of "The Barrier of Church and Heaven."

and fixed social order that began in the 14th and 15th centuries but was only effectively completed with the “industrial revolution”.²⁵

And, in turn, is not capitalism, by its very nature, progressive?

Goudzwaard continues to put questions that will be logically asked as we work with the “capitalism and progress” hypothesis.

And does not²⁶ Schumpeter aptly describe capitalism as primarily a specific ‘form or method of change’: a form of social organization focused upon growth and change?

Goudzwaard quotes Schumpeter’s view which is actually of capitalism’s “creative destruction”.²⁷ So we might say that here is a brief indication of the line of analysis he will develop in Part One investigating how the barriers to progress that prevailed in former times have been erased. But if capitalism is progressive how is it that “change” is now a normative constraint upon social structure? The answer is that capitalism is not only a constraint upon social structure but is embedded *within* social structure. Capitalism is not only an *order for* change it is an *ordering of* social life that requires change.

It is in this specific orientation to progress, that capitalism appears in the architecture of our contemporary society as a recognizable and essential element.

This then, by reference to Schumpeter, appears ironically to suggest that capitalism’s “progressive” contribution is also destructive. It not only builds the social and cultural architecture; it is the source of the demolition of social and cultural architecture to thereby replace these with new “modern” structures and processes.

And finally, it can hardly be a coincidence that so many profound problems in our society today are directly related, in one way or another, to the rapid advancement of the Western economy and technology.

Does not the bringing together of capitalism and progress in one hypothesis begin to provide a framework for serious empirically-oriented investigative questions about (as with the first sentence of this Preface) “the multitude of problems” in order that their “interconnections and coherences” be disclosed?

These seem to give us good reason to place capitalism, as well as its contemporary problems, against this cultural backdrop. Perhaps by doing so we will help ourselves to better understand our own times and our own problems.

Goudzwaard elaborates upon his hypothesis by focusing upon the undoubted prominence of capitalism especially since the Industrial Revolution but also upon its inherent ambiguity with respect to social and cultural order. Capitalism stays within the social architecture via technological innovations. The “placing” of capitalism is to put it into context, to refuse to assume that it is a self-generating reality, an autonomous “system” of its own self-creation. The *diagnosis* aims to uncover the roots of these many interrelated problems.

²⁵ A comment from the 1998 Noordegraaf and Griffioen interview, Goudzwaard notes how Hans Rookmaaker urged him to read Peter Gay’s influential two volume work **The Enlightenment: an Interpretation** 1966, 1969. Having traced “the waning of the Middle Ages” from Huizinga, the suggestion is to reckon with the “static” world-view of scholasticism with the dynamic view of human autonomy. Hence the ongoing transformations of the “industrial revolution”. This then presupposes the view that human society is either static or dynamic (Adam Smith)

²⁶ Dutch: *Naar de rake kenschets*

²⁷ Joseph A Schumpeter “Capitalism ... is by nature a form or method of economic change and not only never is but never can be stationary,” **Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy** 1942 p.31

The purpose of this book is to first attempt to examine historically whether the motive of progress could indeed have played a decisive role in the formation of modern Western society.

And so a series of questions help us discern the structure of Goudzwaard's narrative. The first is: Has the motive of progress played a key role in forming Western society?

This is the subject of Part I, which centrally addresses the question of which intellectual barriers had to be successively broken down in Western society after the Middle Ages before capitalism could fully establish itself in Western culture. If my assumption is correct, then we will inevitably see the motive of progress playing a key role in this quest.

We are hereby invited to wait to read how Goudzwaard achieves his purpose to demonstrate how the outlook of Western people was adjusted to overcome views *that not only prevented "progress" but prevented people from viewing "progress" as the self-evident modern way to live.*

Part II will then examine the development of modern capitalism from the Industrial Revolution to the present day, while Part III will attempt to more clearly examine some of our most profound contemporary problems against the cultural and social backgrounds thus illuminated.

Having presented his answer to whether "progress" can be viewed as a motive for social life in the West, the task will be to give an account of how "progress" was rolled out as a corollary of the development of modern capitalism. Then the ground has been prepared to examine the "multitude of problems" and to begin to show the interlinkages and coherences of problems from diverse social spheres. There is implied here a "long" agenda for ongoing research. It may also be worthwhile to keep in mind whether Goudzwaard's readers have adequately taken note of the hypothesis-testing as first step in a "long agenda." It might easily be assumed that his book is simply an idiosyncratic affirmation of literature already holding its place in socio-economic historical research since e.g. Max Weber.²⁸

Finally, Part IV will address the difficult question of how we can find the path to actual solutions for most of these problems.

And the work will conclude with a discussion of how life is to be lived within the context of the social and cultural consequences of how capitalism and progress are part of the "architecture of our contemporary society."

I owe several thanks to people for the creation of this book. I would like to mention two in particular: Drs. G.M. van Driel, a research associate at VU University Amsterdam, who helped me prepare the manuscript, and Ms. Margriet Lambert, who typed it with great care.

²⁸ But see his article "Calvin's ethiek van het sociaal-economische leven", *Anti-Revolutionaire Staatskunde* 1960, 30, 137-152. The predominant trend in academic social science has not actually incorporated the scholarly insights of Calvin's studies into the discipline's teaching curriculum. See Christopher Adair-Toteff "Weber's 'use and abuse' of Calvin's Doctrine of Predestination. *Journal of Religious and Political Practice*, 4(3), 336-353.

Foreword to the Second Dutch Edition (1978)

The first edition of this book has generated a series of interesting reviews and reflections. I am pleased with this: the main goal of this intellectual product²⁹ – the stimulation of a more in-depth discussion about the background of our contemporary social problems – has already been partly achieved. At the same time, however, many sections of this book have been often subjected to what is very justified criticism. This led me to make quite significant changes to the text. For example, the fourth part of the book, which concerns finding concrete solutions, has been completely revised,³⁰ and the content of the first three parts has been expanded to include, among other things, a more in-depth reflection on the relationship between culture and structure, the role of Calvinism in the rise of capitalism, and the relationship of the West to the Third World.

This helps us deepen our understanding of Goudzwaard's own view of what he was seeking to do with this his major publication. **Capitalism and Progress** functioned as a benchmark for his ongoing contribution over the next 46 years. His aim to stimulate “a more in-depth discussion about the background of our contemporary social problems” tells us his motivation, and it is what was repeated explicitly in many of his writings. This “diagnosis” involves an hypothesis that then requires ongoing testing, refinement and extension when separate problems are investigated and new situations faced. This is further elaborated in the 1979 English translation, confirmed in that book's “Epilogue”, to be considered below.

I would especially like to thank Prof. J.M.M. de Valk and Prof. W.A.A.M. de Roos of Erasmus University Rotterdam, Prof. H. van den Doel and Prof. L.R. Zielhuis of the Municipal University of Amsterdam, as well as (former) Minister R. Lubbers³¹ and Dr. J. Zijlstra³² for their valuable, targeted suggestions and comments. The resulting changes in this second edition are, of course, entirely my responsibility.

Foreword to the Fourth Dutch Edition

This edition is largely identical in text to the previous one. However, due to its relevance, an appendix on “future models” has been added, focusing primarily on the important OECD report **Facing the Future** (Paris, 1979).³³

B.G.

²⁹ Dutch: geestesproduct

³⁰ The English translation of 1979 of the 2nd Dutch Edition Part Four is headed: “Toward the Disclosure of Society.” In Govert Buijs “Ten Geleide” to the 5th edition of **Kapitalisme en Vooruitgang** it is stated that the changes for the 1982 edition also included additional critical comment on the OECD 1978 report **Interfutures. Facing the Future: Mastering the Probable and Managing the Unpredictable** *oecd observer* 1979:5.

³¹ R F M Lubbers “Kapitalime en Vooruitgang” *AntiRevolutionaire Staatskunde* 1977 47, pp.3-16

³² J Zijlstra RO. *Maandblad Reunisten Organisatie Societas Studiosorum Reformatorum*. 1977, 2 Mei pp. 1-16.

³³ Note to the reader. The references in this book consist of numbers in parentheses (). The first number refers to the list of publications at the back of this book, and the second to the page I cited.

BCW Note: The report is found at https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/oecd-observer/volume-1979/issue-5_observer-v1979-5-en.html

Bob Goudzwaard
Capitalism and Progress: a Diagnosis of Western Society³⁴

translated and edited by Josina van Nuis Zylstra
© AACS Toronto, Wedge Eerdmans 1979
(translation of *Kapitalisme en Vooruitgang* 2nd revd. Van Gorcum 1978)

Preface to the First English Language Edition (xiii-xvii)

Approximately half a century ago Oswald Spengler's famous book **Decline of the West**³⁵ appeared in Germany. In two extensive volumes Spengler expounded the well-known thesis that the law of birth, maturity, and death applies not only to plants and animals but holds equally for civilizations. He was convinced that within the foreseeable future the culture of the West would disappear in the twilight of world history as had the Roman Empire. As evidence for this assertion he pointed to the disintegration of authority, the exaggerated attention paid to youth, and the craving for power and luxury as ends in themselves. He interpreted these phenomena as signs of cultural deterioration, comparable to that which accompanied the fall of the Roman Empire.

Goudzwaard identifies a scholarly "line" in which he expects his work will be understood: the study of "the foreseeable future [of] the culture of the West". Though he is not expounding Spengler's organicist view, the first volume of which appeared in 1918, as the First World War was grinding to its November conclusion, he is clearly signalling his awareness that he is writing in a situation in which the standing of the West is still a matter of grave concern. Moreover, he is aware of the development of "futures studies."

Meanwhile more than fifty years have passed. Admittedly, with reference to the life of civilizations, one must think in terms of centuries rather than decades. Nevertheless, enough time has passed to judge whether the course of events has confirmed Spengler's prediction. It has not. Western society still exists and often strikes us more by its zest for life than by its death wish. Civilizations simply are not plants which emerge, flower, and die according to a set rhythm

³⁴ **BCW Note:** This is a translation of the 1978 2nd revised edition. It's first edition was 1976. Goudzwaard has noted that the book's hypothesis was initially discussed with students at the Dutch L'Abri. Goudzwaard's 1998 statement that the work resulted from encouragement of Hans Rookmaaker (see fn. 8 above) takes on even greater significance for us now in 2026 because 1976 was also when the book of Francis Schaeffer **How should we then live?** was published. It was a culminating statement of Schaeffer's own contribution to Christianity in general and to American Evangelicalism in particular. It is an important part of the background to latterday American evangelical "Christian nationalism." That 1976 publication became the film that helped make Schaeffer, in the words of his son Frank, "the intellectual architect of the religious right." Schaeffer is mentioned indirectly in the closing pages of this 1979 translation where Goudzwaard is discussing the "substantial healing" that could result from concerted Christian action in the public square. The term comes from Schaeffer's 1972 book **True Spirituality**. There is also a comment early on in that English translation's 1979 Preface p.xvii that is relevant to the way in which Hans Rookmaaker's "L'Abri connection" connects Bob's work to American politics at the very time that the "Moral Majority", was gaining momentum from Schaeffer's work and film. Goudzwaard's comments are relevant: *I would like to make an additional comment here especially for the benefit of American readers. European studies about the problems of our time usually have a stronger tendency to look back to the past than the more practically oriented American studies. In this respect this book is European. In my opinion an in-depth reflection on current issues cannot really take place without due attention to roots. When we encounter problems in our personal lives, we search for their roots in the past. By understanding the past, insight into the present becomes more profound. This deepened insight must concern all of us in the critical situation of today.* (p.xvii) Here, in his quiet way, Goudzwaard suggests US evangelicals need to be better informed about how they are embedded within the history of West, particularly since the Enlightenment and Industrial Revolution.

³⁵ Oswald Spengler **The Decline of the West**. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1918, 1922; New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2 vols., 1945.

of life. We feel more at home with Arnold Toynbee who claims that the destiny of civilizations is primarily shaped by man himself, particularly by the manner in which he responds to challenges in his cultural development.

If Goudzwaard has a time-frame for the kind of analysis he promotes in his book it is not simply one involving a prediction of what may occur in his own lifetime. Spengler's hypothesis of the imminent disappearance of Western culture has not been confirmed and despite a second cataclysmic war, with all that that entails, the West seems to be able to incorporate such disasters into its ongoing story. And so we confront a further question that deepens our search: how is it that the West is characterized by its "zest for life" after such disasters? How and why is the West now characterised by an apparent ability to incorporate such disasters into its ongoing story? Goudzwaard identifies his work as an analysis of the social and cultural response to the challenges facing the West and hence his work should be understood as contributing to an explanation of this Western "resilience".

Whatever the case may be, the present condition of western culture definitely gives cause for deep concern. This is due not only to the fact that distinct signs of deterioration can be (xiv) detected; it is perhaps of far greater significance that the West is gradually being faced with several interdependent problems of such an incisive character that together they could become a decisive challenge to the whole of western culture.

The focus of his study is specified by describing the decisive challenge facing the West in a significantly reconfigured way. The "canvas" on which Goudzwaard is proposing to work is large and complex and relates to the "inter-dependent problems" that are his ongoing concern. There may be signs of deterioration but the problems that can be identified are inter-dependent. A resolution of addressing the problems "one at a time" is not able to face up to the challenge with the wisdom needed. Such a *status quo* approach, derived from how scientific investigation is presumed to proceed, may actually serve to exacerbate the problems.

CUMULATION AND FRUSTRATION

This rather forceful language does not seem inappropriate in light of the following considerations. To begin with, it is important to note that the many issues which face the West are particularly striking³⁶, not because of their novelty, but because of the unusual manner of their accumulation.

Environmental problems, for instance, are not new, nor is chronic unemployment. The former were encountered in the English industrial cities during the middle of the eighteenth century while the latter marked the economic crisis of the 1930s. Moreover, periods of increasing uncertainty and even of impending doom have also existed previously. The chronicles record that on New Year's Eve of the year 999 the pope and the emperor knelt together on one of the towers of the City of Rome to prayerfully await the end of the world. Similar feelings of gloom were common at the end of the Middle Ages. Again, shortages of raw materials are not new: around 1870 the English economist Stanley Jevons was highly concerned about the near depletion of the coal mines in England.

³⁶ The original text reads: "stiking".

Goudzwaard is a sensitive *teacher*. These paragraphs written decades after he finished his under-graduate studies, tell us that he hasn't forgotten how "rather forceful language" comes across to students from a Professor seeking to make his point. Here a personal rhetorical style is revealed as if he is asking himself: "Am I putting this too forcefully?" Evidently, his answer is: "No. I don't think so!" But he is aware of the forceful impression. What he is discussing is a very serious problem about the viability of the West, let alone the entire globe troubled by the problems of its highly developed and technologically sophisticated economies. But these problems are not new. We should not assume that the peoples of the world have only now, at this stage of human history, developed chronic anxieties and uncertainty. This is not the first generation to ask whether the end is nigh! These problems are very much interwoven with technological development, and there is a question of the depletion of resources.

Indeed, none of these problems is new in the history of the West. We have experienced them before - one at a time. But today the situation is strikingly different. Not only are we confronted with all of these problems at the same time, but they are interdependent and mutually reinforce one another. Unemployment and inflation now occur together; a shortage of energy aggravates environmental problems and coincides with predictions of serious food crises. Moreover, while differences abroad increase, especially between rich and poor countries, at home tensions rise, especially between labour and capital, young and old, black and white.³⁷ Economists raise warning voices. So do scholars of international relations who regard the growth and proliferation of nuclear arms - now at the stage of "overkill capacity" - with fear and trembling. And so do biologists, because of their deep concern for the world's ecosystem. Psychologists, who see their waiting rooms crowded with people no longer able to cope with the pace of modern society and (xv) ready to bury their loneliness with pills and drugs, similarly express their concern. The combination of all these problems, which mutually reinforce one another, must certainly be considered unusual.

Here Goudzwaard's hypothesis is formulated in one paragraph. His concern is the "unusual" mutual reinforcement of the problems with each other. What is the source of this mutual inter-dependence in a situation growing more grave as time passes? These problems are coming together with great intensity. It is difficult enough to focus upon and define any one of these mutually-interlocking problems. But how is that to be done while also appreciating their combined impact?

This is the Preface to the English translation of the 2nd edition, and it is not just the 4th section on the disclosure of society that has been re-written after receipt of criticism, with further OECD developments in view.³⁸ This is also a reformulated Preface. His initial statement that the work had arisen from his own personal dissatisfaction and frustration, listed the emergent problems while noting:

In this context, we hardly notice that the interconnectedness and coherence between all these problems is almost never addressed.

³⁷ We might add to these tensions between nationalists and immigrants.

³⁸ Govert Buijs tells us that the 4th edition of *Capitalism and Progress* included added critical comment on the OECD 1978 report 1978 report **Interfutures. Facing the Future: Mastering the Probable and Managing the Unpredictable**. See ftn. 29 above.

Though not now denied, what we find here is a new formulation. We might even say that the earlier statement was an attempt to explain that he had discovered a question so obvious, so self-evident, that he was bemused that it had not been front and centre in his training in economics. He had further written:

If we collectively fail to recognize what connects all these problems in our social order, we also collectively risk missing the mark time and again.

But there is still more which strikes us as unusual: solutions to these problems are hard to come by. With regard to the economic issues it is noteworthy that the “familiar” methods of combating inflation and unemployment are no longer successful. Prominent economists tell us that up to a certain point we will simply have to learn to live with inflation. Unemployment increasingly displays “hard” cores which can no longer be fought with “classic” measures, such as tax reductions or public works policies. And we are already being told that the food crises predicted for the 1980s cannot be prevented and can hardly be combated.

The problems have deepened such that we might have to conclude that they may now be beyond human capacity to find a resolution. The previous confidence of being able to address economic problems, when the ruling scientific habit was that they had to be competently addressed one-by-one, seems to have evaporated in the light of further developments which show they are connected to still other issues that arise from within the full gamut of human life and experience.

Similarly, no effective solutions seem available for problems of a noneconomic nature. What are the real answers to the emotional tensions so common today, such as the loneliness of many persons in our large cities? What can actually be undertaken against the brutal force of armed terrorists who can attack nearly every facet of our complex society?

And problems are not only “economic” - they are personal as much as they are international, about how we live in large cities as much as with coping with the threats posed by terrorists. And Goudzwaard reflects upon the significant weight of professional opinion that may even suggest that some of these problems are beyond resolution, even if, as he noted, taking the side of Toynbee earlier on, that civilisation has not simply “emerged” but has developed from the responses of people in their communities to the challenges that they have faced.

Finally, we also experience the shortcomings of many political solutions. Effective control over the manufacture and distribution of nuclear weapons has become practically hopeless. The rich western countries are growing politically impotent because of an increasing dependence on the indispensable import of energy and raw materials. As a result of this dependence, these countries are hardly in a position to support truly impartial solutions to problems in Africa, South America, and the Middle East. A sense of powerlessness is present in the West; and this, of course, adds to the temptation to employ recklessly the remaining means of power.

As well as being a student, social policy researcher, and industrial union educator, and since 1972 a university professor of economics, Goudzwaard has also been a parliamentarian. He writes as one who has had experience in legislation and knows about the level of public confidence in public governance. This is the late 1970s and the cold war was at its height,

with another ten years to run. For our reading of this now, in 2026, we also note that Bob was at this time involved in the writing the electoral programme of the newly formed merged Christian Democratic Appeal party, *Niet bij brood alleen*. In 1981 he published *Genoedzaakt goed te wezen: christelijke hoop in een bezeten wereld* (later published in English as **Idols of our Time**) that indirectly explained why he had left the CDA in the fraught context of cold-war discussion about “mutually assured destruction” (MAD). He would later explain his view in these terms:

*Relying on offensive weapons of mass destruction for the defence of civilian populations, that, I was convinced, was something a Christian party could not affirm.*³⁹

The non-western world is also not without problems; the impact of the confrontation between capitalism and communism is not only evident in the political-economy of the overdeveloped west.⁴⁰

Western culture is indeed challenged today. It is challenged in the accumulation of problems, but also in the ineffectiveness of the classical solutions. Will we be able to find the correct answers in time? That is the unavoidable question confronting us. Because the continued existence of western society is at stake, the search for solutions has become a matter of life and death, especially since impotence can readily nourish despair.

Goudzwaard emphasizes there is cause for deep concern. The problems are not going away. He writes with an awareness that his contribution can only be a beginning. He writes with an awareness that this contribution might help him decide his own “starting point” and maybe there are others who, seeing the value of his analysis, join him and make their contributions accordingly. He is obviously continuing to refine this analysis. We presume that there have been English-speaking readers of his Dutch work who have decided it would be of timely value for his “diagnosis” to appear in English. It is here presented with its own English language **Preface**. This section of the Preface, we recall, has been headed: “Cumulation and Frustration.” Goudzwaard sets forth his hypothesis for ongoing socio-cultural investigation against the background of *the cumulating problems of deleterious global consequences*, as well as a deep sentiment of frustration arising from the culture of confusion in which many are wondering whether anything can be done to meet the challenge.

xvi **NEED FOR REFLECTION**

Fortunately, the public gradually realizes that the situation in which the West finds itself is cause for deep concern. This, however, increases the risk of a wrong reaction. The danger exists in particular that in a panic we will try to find a separate answer to each of the problems confronting us, in the manner to which we are accustomed. This reaction is especially dangerous because it can prevent the necessary in-depth reflection on the causes of the present predicament - and such reflection is indispensable for finding truly effective solutions. An analogy will make this clear. When someone breaks an arm, the solution is simple - the arm has to be set. However, when a patient displays several negative symptoms simultaneously, ranging from listlessness to physical pain, an effective treatment is often possible only after a search for a single cause of those symptoms. At any rate, one shouldn't exclude the possibility that these symptoms indicate a single, deeper cause. Thus it is with the predicament

³⁹ see fn.8 above. Noordegraaf and Griffioen interview *op.cit* p. 38.

⁴⁰ Bob Goudzwaard **Aid for the Over-Developed West**, Wedge, Toronto, 1975

of western society - by treating merely the symptoms we might well overlook the true cause. As a matter of fact, the typically western manner of solving problems might aggravate the underlying causes. For example, a patient's condition worsens when he or she is given stimulants to counteract the lethargy resulting from pain relievers. In the West we run a similar risk of being satisfied with superficial remedies which only aggravate the disease. Perhaps we are afraid of a genuine reflection into the causes because that would inevitably lead to a confrontation with ourselves. Does western culture dare to behold itself in a mirror? Nevertheless, an in-depth reflection and diagnosis must take place, if only for the sake of that which is still dear to us in western civilization.

Again, Goudzwaard reminds his readers that this situation is not absolutely new, and neither is he saying something that hasn't also been said by others, his contemporary professional peers. There is need for a combined effort to find ways to "push back" against these cumulative impact of these problems. His training in economics had introduced him to the development of "welfare economics"⁴¹ and so his professional training meant he had become aware, and perhaps immersed, in the intellectual and public policy resistance to orthodox economics that had gained momentum since the early years of the 20th century. More recently, critical concern with dogmatic allegiance to "progress" cast serious doubt upon the notion that human welfare is a function of the growth in GNP.⁴² Addressing the problems by trying to fix them in the wrong way - recall his emphasis upon accumulation and inter-dependence - may actually make the situation worse. This is the predicament that Goudzwaard is wanting to address by making this contribution. He asks: *How should I **begin** to address the problems and thus work toward offering solutions?* He will attempt an in-depth analysis and diagnosis. Diagnosis seeks underlying causes that can help us understand ramifying tensions. This is a scholarly work that is fired by a desire to encourage serious, radical self-examination from the reader.

This book is a personal contribution to such reflection on the causes of our ills and our failures. The word personal is appropriate in this context, for I would not want to argue that my diagnosis is the only correct one or the only possible one. Moreover, in my analysis I am handicapped since I do not have the qualifications of a philosopher, historian, or a cultural sociologist. Rather, I am an economist by training and profession. This limitation is a drawback in a study which will also have to deal with several sociocultural and philosophical aspects of western society during the past and present. At the same time I think there is merit in having an economist tackle this subject (xvii) instead of a philosopher or a sociologist, for at the frontier of western culture we are constantly being challenged primarily by economic issues.

Note that he describes his contribution as "personal". In that sense it seems to transcend a specific contribution to economic science. It is an elaborate formulation of the presuppositions that should lie behind any responsible tackling of these mutually-inter-dependent global issues, not excluding engagement in any of the special sciences. It is certainly oriented to consider what should be presupposed by an analysis of the economic dimension of human responsibility. This further delimits the way he wishes *this treatise* to be understood. His personal contribution is limited, not only because it presupposes what

⁴¹ A. C. Pigou **The Economics of Welfare** 1920 (4th. edition 1932) <http://pombo.free.fr/pigou1920.pdf>

⁴² E. J. Mishan **The Costs of Economic Growth** Staples Press 1966

he has been made aware of by his own study of economics, but he is not wanting to presume to make philosophical, historical or cultural & sociological pronouncements. It is specifically identified as his attempt, from his own investigations in economics, to identify the roots of these diverse problems of the West that face us. And by emphasizing that, he is aware of insight that he has gained as a trained student of economics and so sees this as his response to the economic/ housekeeping issues we confront, wanting to share his understanding of “capitalism” and “progress” as the two nodal points of contemporary Western tensions and forebodings. It is framed as: *“I have my reservations about the way this should be understood, but here goes, let me give you, the reader, my efforts.”* Further, it is as if he writes with the well-known comment made by John Maynard Keynes ringing in his ears: *Economists are the trustees, not of civilisation, but of the possibility of civilisation.*

I would like to make an additional comment here especially for the benefit of American readers. European studies about the problems of our time usually have a stronger tendency to look back to the past than the more practically oriented American studies. In this respect this book is European. In my opinion an in-depth reflection on current issues cannot really take place without due attention to roots. When we encounter problems in our personal lives, we search for their roots in the past. By understanding the past, insight into the present becomes more profound. This deepened insight must concern all of us in the critical situation of today.

This additional statement deserves comment. Goudzwaard, the Dutch economist concludes his Preface by speaking, as it were, on the west coast of The Netherlands, on the shore of the North Sea, and sends out his diagnosis in a “Westerly” direction, specifically addressing his North American readers. There’s subtle irony here. He began this Preface by recalling the early 20th century work of Joseph Spengler **The Decline of the West**. Here, in conclusion, to his account of how he understands his literary project he specifically addresses those living over the Atlantic horizon in the West. To use the same image, Spengler made his westward call at dusk. Goudzwaard however sends out his message for “as long as the sun still shines”. The comment “especially for the benefit of my American readers”, frames not only this book but also much of his subsequent contribution to Christian reflection in the Anglo-Sphere of the West. Europeans may “do scholarship” with a sense of historical roots; Americans by contrast, he suggests, gain traction for their scholarship by trying to capture the meaning of their scholarship by looking to how it will shape the future.

And we also note that having pointed out his understanding of how the conventional “American/European” contrast is understood, he immediately proceeds in the third person plural “we”. The West, across the North Atlantic, peopled so persistently by European migrants to join indigenous North Americans, and in recent times of migrants from the south and Middle East, has seen the development of a society in which a view prevails that “progress” is an invitation to contribute on the “frontier” of civilisation. Goudzwaard suggests Americans typically understand themselves in terms of the formulation and resolution of problems encountered in the present in order to shape future livelihoods. Hence the “American experiment”⁴³ from 1776. And so, by contrast, he suggests that those “back” behind the North Atlantic’s eastern coasts tend to focus more upon the past in order to identify the “roots” of the social and cultural constraints under which they live.

This comment, framing his treatise, might well benefit from further critical examination. And as we note Goudzwaard’s third person plural “we”, and we might wonder whether this work, formulated initially from within its Euro-Dutch environment, is not so much “practically oriented” as a preparation of the ground for future public policy that can be

⁴³

See the book of Goudzwaard’s American colleague James W Skillen **Recharging the American Experiment: Principled Pluralism for Genuine Civic Community** CPJ Washington DC 1994

effective in its practical efforts to address the West's problems, whether across in the Americas (North, Central and South) or "back" in Europe or elsewhere in Africa or even in Asia and the South Pacific. This "additional comment" may well have within it the seed of the future contribution of such an outlook to a global society.⁴⁴

In conclusion, a few technical and personal comments are in order. The English edition of this book was initially prepared on the basis of the first Dutch edition published in the fall of 1976. A second Dutch edition was required within a relatively short time. Instead of merely republishing the book, I decided to rewrite those parts that had been subjected to constructive critique in the Dutch press, with the result that Part Four has been almost entirely revised and considerably expanded. Changes of lesser significance were made in the other parts. Nearly all of these alterations have been incorporated into the English text.

Again, we are told about how the work has evolved. It is as if we, the readers, are part of an ongoing project in formulating a contribution to a necessary project of what, he suggests, is a "bold undertaking", a daring wager. We are being asked to understand that the meaning of this work is to be found in it being an invitation to an ongoing project, to participate in an ongoing discussion, and to *join or begin* to get to work in practical, everyday ways to address these interlocking problems. In the 2nd 1978 Dutch edition from which this English translation was made, Goudzwaard had written: *"the main goal of this intellectual product – to stimulate a more in-depth discussion about the background of our contemporary social problems – has already been partly achieved. At the same time, however, many sections of this book have been subjected to often very justified criticism."* We can see with such discussion that we are right to view this English translation as a further development of the same project and an invitation to extend its application by maintaining the discussion.

I owe a debt to many persons who have helped make this book what it is. I cannot mention them all by name, but I would like to single out two individuals who have made a truly indispensable contribution to this edition: Josina Zylstra, who translated and edited this book with great dedication and accuracy, and Bernard Zylstra⁴⁵, who made numerous valuable suggestions which improved the text. I thank both of them wholeheartedly for what they have accomplished.

Writing and publishing a book is difficult enough. For a book initially written in one language to be written and published in another language already requires a high level of assistance and consultation. But the reliance is even greater when the translation is envisaged, as this work is, to be a contribution to an ongoing project that requires collaboration from other scholars and policy-makers around the world.

⁴⁴ Bob Goudzwaard **Globalization and the Kingdom of God** Centre for Public Justice (CPJ), Baker Books 2001. This was the 1999 "Kuyper lecture" sponsored by CPJ Edited, Foreword and conclusion by James W Skillen with responses by Brian Fikkert, Larry Reed and Adolfo Garcia de la Sienra.

⁴⁵ Bernard Zylstra "Modernity and the American Empire" <https://tukampendatastore.blob.core.windows.net/neocalvinism/alloflifedeemed/ZylstraB/BZModernityAmEmp.pdf> <https://tukampendatastore.blob.core.windows.net/neocalvinism/alloflifedeemed/ZylstraB/BZPlaceOfChristianity.pdf>

Introduction / Prologue: A Statement of the Problem⁴⁶

TWO DEPTH LEVELS

(xix) **W**hen we try to discover the causes of the accumulation of present-day problems in western society and attempt to establish how these problems are mutually interdependent, we soon notice that in large measure they are related to societal structurations. Often they are entirely intertwined with the structure or architecture of western society as a whole. The problems of inflation and unemployment readily illustrate this. These problems, of course, are also present in nonwestern societies, but their specific character in our context is definitely tied up with the economic *system* in which we live, that is, with the manner in which we have organized our socioeconomic life.

Goudzwaard emphasizes that what we are dealing with are also very much *our* problems. The two times the word “our” appears in these opening lines gives emphasis to this - this conveys the personal dimension Goudzwaard emphasizes whether on his side as author, or on *our* side as readers.

Such an interdependence is also present - although less pronounced - between the economic system and the current problems with the supply of mineral resources and with environmental control. Finally, many emotional and sociocultural problems cannot be divorced from the specific way in which we organize relations of production, employment and consumption. Here we encounter a *depth level* which underlies the problems occupying us so intensely today.

“Less pronounced” suggests that the real problems with mineral resource supply and control of the environment do not have the *immediate impact* upon ensuring “bread is on the table” as is the case with publishing inflation and unemployment indices, even if the long-term *structural* impact is profound and with immediate effect. As a former Parliamentarian, he will have known how such issues can be raised without raising public anxiety in contrast with the political capital that can be generated when the numbers indicating increases in inflation or unemployment are published. And by noting how such vexing problems are “close to home” we become aware of how legislation makes its many sided contribution to the organisation of the industrial system within the “architecture of western society as a whole.” Goudzwaard here tells us he is aware of problems he is not addressing, confirming the need for investigation at greater depth.

There is nothing new about relating a multiplicity of problems to a common, underlying structure. In fact, this relationship has led to the widely held conception that the real cause of these problems lies in the wrong structure of our society, and that therefore the majority of these ills would quickly be eliminated if we only had the courage to replace the present structure of society with a better one.

⁴⁶ We note the discrepancy in the pagination for the 1979 “Introduction” which in the 1997 edition is here referred to as “Prologue”. Here the insertion of page numbers in the text follows the 1979 edition. 1979 pp: xix-xxvii (Introduction: A Statement of the Problem); 1997 pp.xx-xxviii (Prologue: A Statement of the Problem.)

Goudzwaard's irony highlights the superficiality we can often adopt to these issues. An examination of his writings, for example his contributions to his political party's journal *Anti-Revolutionaire Staatskunde*, when he was serving as a research officer for the Dr Abraham Kuyper Foundation, discloses his view of his task *within* the Anti-Revolutionary Party and thus within Dutch Parliamentary democracy as a reformational and anti-revolutionary contribution in this sense.⁴⁷ His articles were written, presumably with his own fellow party members and parliamentary representatives in view, to explain why a "Christian political option" is not adopting this populist and superficial "out with the old and in with our new" strategy.⁴⁸ Here, drawing upon that experience, he is casting his analysis wider.

(xx) We have become so accustomed to this type of argument that generally we do not notice the weakness inherent in its logic. In the first place, it apparently is assumed that the structure of society has not only come into existence outside ourselves, but even continues to exist outside ourselves as an objective entity. Is that really true? Isn't the structure of society, at least in part, an expression of our deepest intents - an expression of a culture which we helped shape? The obvious relationship between our problems and an apparently distorted social system does not warrant the conclusion that this system itself is the deepest cause of the ills. Such an argument only holds in a kind of "scapegoat theory" in which we first separate the economic system from our own lives as an independent factor; next we impute the guilt for the difficulties around us to this factor; and finally we delude ourselves into the belief that we go scotfree by sending this "scapegoat" into the desert!

This 1979 statement "Introduction: a Statement of the Problem" (pp.xix-xxvii) may also help us appreciate Bob's way of dealing with and developing philosophical insights. His comment about the assumption that the structure of society exists as an external object as well as his reference to "scapegoat theory" take on a 1979 meaning when they were penned. But when his Introduction was republished unchanged in 1997 (n.b. as "Prologue: a Statement of the Problem pp. xx-xxviii) these are present in the volume with a measure of critical awareness of the impact of post-structural reflection.⁴⁹

It is imperative to point out the serious flaws in our economic system, but it is dangerous, and wrong, to conclude that the system itself is at fault while we - the human agents operative in the system - are without blame.

Developing political strategies that implicitly place ourselves over against the "system" is dangerous as well as wrong. It is dangerous because it perpetuates a misunderstanding of human responsibility that is implicit in and carried forward into socio-economic life.

⁴⁷ see Bob Goudzwaard **Reforming Political Reformation: The challenges of Christian Political Responsibility** The Anti-Revolutionaire Staatskunde Articles of Bob Goudzwaard from 1959-1979. Collected, translated and with footnoted critical commentary Bruce C Wearne July 2026.

⁴⁸ Note how the critics of **Capitalism and Progress** construe this self-limitation as a kind of ivory-tower obscurantism and hence dismissable. See ftns. 101, 102 and 107 below for the efforts of critics, Gilbreath, Novak and North that misconstrue Goudzwaard's formulation.

⁴⁹ In 1979 Jean-François Lyotard **La Condition Postmoderne - Rapport sur le savoir** Les Éditions Minuit Paris was published. In 1984 an English translation appeared **The Postmodern Condition - a report on knowledge** (trans Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, Foreword Fredric Jameson) University of Minnesota Press 1984. Goudzwaard's comment here about an "unhinged" objectivity will be taken up explicitly in his 1997 "Preface to a New Edition" when he comments upon Jean Baudrillard's view in **Fatal Strategies** (1983) on the dominance of "things", cancelling concern for human subjectivity, "*which sounds as interesting as it sounds alarming, but is also superficial.*" (1997 p.xviii) His "scapegoating" comment prefigures his later writings drawing attention to the work of René Girard (1923-2015) whose work **Le bouc émissaire** 1982 was translated as **The Scapegoat** 1989.

Singling out the structure of western society as the real culprit is a mistake for other reasons as well. It is noteworthy that the accumulation of problems we have discussed is also present in the social structure of countries behind the iron curtain. In connection with the rapid increase in production in the communist economic systems, problems emerge with respect to ecology and the supply of energy and raw materials; we also find similar emotional tensions as a result of loneliness and alienation. In other words, in discovering a parallel set of problems in societies with distinctly different structures, we should be quick to realize that, no matter how intertwined these problems are with social structures, the latter cannot be the only and decisive factor in their emergence.⁵⁰

Re-reading this a couple of times may help clarify Goudzwaard's criticism of that social criticism that seeks to shift the blame to allegedly "objective" social structure. He is here referring to "democratic socialist" views that continue to allege that the root cause of wars, inequalities, deprivation, poverty and pollution is the capitalist system itself. Here he shows his adept analysis as one who has developed his own comparative theory of economic systems. He will tell us this explicitly in a few pages but, at this point, the argument suffices to explain why "social structure" should not be given either mechanistic or even organic "causal" status in our understanding, theoretical or otherwise, of human responsibility. He points out that the attempt to make "social structure" the "scapegoat" for our problems confirms a deep blindness to our personal social responsibility. By slowly reading this we begin to catch the author's intention: he is aware that his "diagnosis" involves an appeal to our sense of personal responsibility.

The conclusion is self-evident: in our reflection we will have to penetrate to a second, more fundamental depth level underlying the structures of societies - a depth level which codetermines and shapes these structures. This *second depth level* can consist only in the central, religious motives which fundamentally direct a culture and its society. These motives can be described as *religious* because they embrace hope for the future, faith in God or man, and love for self or others. From this depth level we have always received, and still receive today, the (xxi) impulse to think, to live, to work, and thus to contribute to the ongoing construction and reconstruction of that gigantic coral reef which is called western society.

Goudzwaard expounds his view that also appears in the conclusion to the "Preface to the New Edition" of 1997. There he writes that *meaning* as either "self-made", hence requiring ideological framing for its ongoing viability, or it is given by Revelation and to be received by faith. This confirms this investigation's importance. How does a renewed profession of faith decline to become party to an idolatrous ideology?

THE ROLE OF FAITH IN PROGRESS

By establishing a relationship between the central, religious motives of western culture on the one hand and the western social order on the other hand, we have touched upon a theme which has caused so many problems in the past that it is nearly impossible to discuss it meaningfully once again. The relationship

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Goudzwaard has discussed economic planning in comparative terms contrasting capitalist and communist régimes in "Planning Economic Systems and the Future of our Society" *International Reformed Bulletin* 73, 1978, 18-23

between religion and the social order is one of the most difficult problems in the sociology of culture, particularly since 1904-1905, when Max Weber published his famous essay about the connection between Calvinism and capitalism.⁵¹

Subsequent discussions have shown how dangerous it is to generalize with respect to the relationship between religion and social structures. This is particularly so since this issue has incessantly been the target of vehement attacks on the part of Marxist and neoMarxist historians and sociologists who absolutely reject the idea that religious impulses could codetermine the nature and constellation of social structures. In Marxism the socio-economic substructure determines the cultural and religious superstructure - not vice versa.

Goudzwaard's own examination of Calvin's social-ethical thought raises serious questions about Weber's construal of the contribution of the Genevan reformer.⁵² His formulation here concerning the Marxist critique of religion, reads like a critical inversion of Feuerbach's statement "God did not, as the Bible says, make man in His image; on the contrary, as I have shown in **The Essence of Christianity**, it was man who made God in his image." The critical question of the Marxist construal of the contribution of religion to our life should be directed at what we are to understand by the distinction between the substructure (of alienation) and the superstructure (of oppression).⁵³

Nevertheless, we must not let ourselves be discouraged by this. As a matter of fact, it remains to be seen whether it is truly necessary to reconsider this debate. It may well be that in western countries today we are confronted with problems which in essence result from cultural and religious impulses - assuming that these impulses exist - other than those which can still be ascribed to the "Calvinistic Puritan ethics" of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

This was published as "Introduction: Statement of the Problem" as how things stood in 1975-1978, a decade before the collapse of the Communist Soviet Union régime. The comment is also indication that because an ethical system is never static, the valid academic questions as to whether the historical account of Calvinism by Max Weber, or for that matter of the account of how Geneva's reformation related to English Puritanism by R H Tawney (1880-1962), should not be allowed to confuse the questions of which "religious ethics" (i.e. also of humanistic utilitarianism) are driving contemporary Western society in the second-half of the twentieth century.

With this sketchy background, I acknowledge that in this book a conscious though slightly hazardous choice has been made. Instead of undertaking the impossible search for exact influences which each of the main spiritual currents

⁵¹ Max Weber, "Die protestantische Ethik and der Geist des Kapitalismus," *Archly für Sozialwissenschaft and Sozialpolitik*, vols. 20, 21 (1904-5). English translation by Talcott Parsons, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1930). https://ia902809.us.archive.org/4/items/protestantethics00webe/protestantethics00webe_bw.pdf

⁵² Bob Goudzwaard "Calvijn's ethiek van het sociaal-economische leven" *AntiRevolutionaire Staatskunde* 1960, 30 pp.137-152. See Christopher Adair-Toteff, "Weber's 'use and abuse' of Calvin's Doctrine of Predestination" *Journal of Religious and Political Practice* 2018 4:3 pp.336-353.

⁵³ See Bruce C Wearne "Marx's Theses on Feuerbach: a Humanistic Catechism for Sociology". <https://tukampendatastore.blob.core.windows.net/neocalvinism/allofliferedeemed/Wearne/BCW-Feuerbach.pdf>

- humanism, Catholicism, and the Reformation - has in various ways exerted on the structure of western society, in this study one (xxii) distinct current or motif is brought to the fore.

It is as if Bob Goudzwaard is suggesting: "Given the limitations of my expertise, I am going to reduce this study in order to make my case about the interdependence of our contemporary problems."

This motif provides perhaps the most plausible basis for explaining the rise and development of modern capitalism to the present, including today's problems to which capitalism gave rise. That motif is the idea of *human progress*. Quite late in the history of western culture - namely, in the eighteenth century - this idea first fully unfolded as a *faith* in progress. Before this, however, it had gone through a long period of incubation or preparation - from the time of a lingering scholasticism and the beginning of the Renaissance until far into the period of the Enlightenment. During this period of preparation every spiritual movement in western culture, but notably humanism, influenced the idea of human progress. Therefore, we must be able to detect in this motif of human progress the rivalry between all of the spiritual impulses which have made an impact on western culture.

This book is Goudzwaard's contribution to examine how *capitalism* relates not only to the idea of *progress* but to how it relates to *progress* when the idea has been disclosed as a *faith in progress*. And with his assertion that "*meaning is either self-made, which leads to ideology, or meaning has its source in Revelation*" we note that he is stating that this *humanistic* faith in progress has the characteristics of an ideology. As pointed out previously this is his brief, cryptic Christian confession, his update of the Augustinian doctrine of the "two ways".⁵⁴

The following grounds can be advanced to justify this choice. In the first place, it cannot be denied that the theme of human progress has never been completely absent in western culture, and that it flourished particularly during the Enlightenment, just prior to the time of the industrial revolution. It is not at all unlikely that precisely the impulses from the era of the Enlightenment have had a distinct shaping effect on the pattern of modern western society.

Goudzwaard justifies his focus upon *faith* in progress as "one distinct current or motif". And that would also suggest that other *faiths* had conceptions of progress that differed from the prevailing humanistic and utilitarian *faith*.

In the second place, it is intriguing to note that this motif of progress has indeed presented itself frequently as a *faith*, and that as a result it has often been described in terms of the inspiring dynamics of an authentic *faith*.⁵⁵ The word *faith* in this context does not, of course, refer to the formal adherence to a distinct religio-ecclesiastical confession. Rather, it refers to the propelling, all-

⁵⁴ see Bob Goudzwaard 'Wat is Normaal in het Sociaal-Economische leven?' (What is normal in social-economic life?) in H. Algra et.al. **Wat is Normaal?** Baarn 1974 pp.20-33. Goudzwaard's "Augustinianism" is decidedly emphatic with respect to the importance of evaluating human responsibility in *normative terms*, and not merely reducing normativity to its ethical aspect as is found in neo-Augustinian scholasticism.

⁵⁵ **BG Ftn 2** Cf. the titles of the well-known studies by Christopher Dawson, **Progress and Religion: An Historical Inquiry** London: Sheed & Ward, 1929 and John Baillie, **The Belief in Progress** London: Oxford University Press, 1950.

embracing visions which direct persons in everything they feel, think, and do. Insofar as an opinion or conviction becomes a matter of faith in this sense, its influence will inescapably be noticeable in the architecture of society.

When the word “faith” is used here in contrast with its usage in relation to “religio-ecclesiastical confession” it is part of Goudzwaard’s explanation that faith is present with *“propelling, all-embracing visions which direct persons in everything they feel, think, and do”*. Here Goudzwaard might also be read as preparing the ground for social-cultural research for Western societies, like Australia, that are seeking to come to terms with an *ascendency* of “faith in progress” which has its empirical corollary in an investigation of the decline from, for instance, the late 19th century Protestant ascendancy.

In the third place, it is striking that the mutually intertwined problems of which we spoke earlier are also, in one way or another, related to the technically and economically oriented progress of the West. This is true not only for environmental and resource problems but also for the peculiar character of (xxiii) inflation and unemployment. Moreover, alienation and loneliness are also closely connected with technical and economic progress. The same is undoubtedly true of what Alvin Toffler describes as “future shock”⁵⁶ - the emotional inability to keep up with rapid change in the modern world. Furthermore, the theme of progress has been a welcome occasion for several interpreters of our culture to entertain notions of fatalism and feelings of profound impotence.⁵⁷

What can be said here? The mutually intertwined problems, in so far as they emerge within the West’s economies of advanced technology, also become part of the cultural life experienced by Westerners. These problems are not only explored and investigated in the media, but they become the focus of literature and books, of songs and entertainment, and there will be struggles as to how they are treated within school curriculum. Goudzwaard notices the “down side”, the problems of health and welfare, of loneliness and anxiety.

In the fourth place, it is no accident that the word progress has served a number of writers in their description of the essence of capitalism. The briefest delineation of capitalism has perhaps been provided by Joseph Schumpeter, who defined it as “a form or method of economic change.”⁵⁸ The change he had in mind is primarily one of economic and technological progress. According to Schumpeter, capitalism would come to ruin not because it failed but because of its technical and economic success.

Goudzwaard is referring to Schumpeter’s view of capitalism’s “creative destruction” which is an adaptation of Marx’s favourite aphorism from Mephistopheles “Everything that exists deserves to perish.”

⁵⁶ **BG Ftn 3** Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock* New York: Random House, 1970

⁵⁷ **BG Ftn 4** Cf. for instance Karl Löwith’s expression, the fate of progress.” Karl Löwith, *Nature, History, and Existentialism and Other Essays in the Philosophy of History* Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1966, chap 9: “Fate of Progress”, 145-161.

⁵⁸ **BG Ftn 5** Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* New York London: Harper and Brothers, 1942, p. 82. <https://periferiaactiva.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/joseph-schumpeter-capitalism-socialism-and-democracy-2006.pdf>

In reviewing all of this, we can certainly conclude that it will be rewarding to investigate the following questions: a) whether the western social order has indeed undergone distinct influences from western faith in progress; and b) whether such influences continue to exert themselves in the emergence of contemporary challenges to western society.

Goudzwaard the scientist specifies the questions to be addressed.

In our reflection on these questions, the reader should keep in mind that this book is not intended as a treatment of the entire relationship between culture and the societal structuration of western civilization. This would be far too ambitious an undertaking and would hardly be of any avail. The theme of this book was consciously made more specific. It concerns the possible connection between *one* dominant cultural motif in western society - the pursuit of, and faith in, *progress* - and *one* crucial component of the societal structure of western society - capitalism. This is undoubtedly a considerable limitation. In the first place it should be acknowledged that there are many more determinative factors in our culture, also those affecting the (xxiv) structure of society, than the will to progress alone. This is certainly true if progress is further specified as the advancement of humanity in comprehending, dominating, and developing the surrounding nature. In the second place, the structure of our society consists in a constellation of components which certainly cannot all be simply brought together under the heading “capitalism”. For instance, attempts to explain the western legal order and democracy as products of the profit motive do not only make a forced and artificial impression but are absolutely misleading and dangerous. An investigation, therefore, into the relationship between western culture and societal structure in terms of the two concepts *capitalism* and *progress* is one with very clear limitations. But that does not make it meaningless; if anything, the opposite is true. This is clearly evident, for example, from the fact that the pursuit of progress has been the constant “cultural companion” of western society ever since the latter was submitted to a program of radical reconstruction from the time of the industrial revolution. And is not capitalism itself by nature progress-oriented? Capitalism is a form of societal organization that is specifically directed toward growth and change. In this specific orientation toward progress, capitalism appears to this day to be a recognizable and essential element of our societal structuration.

This is an important clarification of the Introduction/Prologue of the 1979/1997 English version which repeats what was set out in the “Woord Vooraf” of the first 1976 edition. Goudzwaard’s careful assessment of contemporary political socialism, focusing upon the PvdA in the Dutch Parliament, identifies its “opportunism” that mitigates any strict ideological adherence to the “flattening” goals of classic socialism in order to participate in Parliamentary governance.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Bob Goudzwaard “Socialistisch Idealisme en Opportunisme” *Anti-revolutionaire Staatskunde* 1961 31, 115-125.

THE INTENT OF THIS BOOK

If it is true that the progress motif has played a decisive role in the unfolding of modern capitalist society, then we must be able to trace that in the history of the West. This is what I intend to do in Part One. I will begin by posing the question as to which successive barriers had to be broken before modern capitalism could indeed establish itself within western culture. If my assumptions are correct, then we will discover that in this breakdown of barriers the motif of progress emerged as a decisive factor.

But what are we to make of this concept of “barrier”? Goudzwaard’s concept of a “breakdown of barriers” is an important part of his method to “diagnose” Western society. His sketch is of the arrival of a “new era” characterised by “progress” as its defining belief; before the new modern humanity could appear in all its dominance, all kinds of barriers - spiritual, cultural, mental - had to be overcome.⁶⁰ Goudzwaard’s account is of our contemporary social life after the industrial revolution gave further momentum to the decline of belief in a fixed social order that arose from the 14th and 15th centuries. It is, as Goudzwaard tells it, a complex argument. We would say it needs to be read slowly and studied intensely.

In Part Two I will deal with the internal development of modern capitalism from the time of the industrial revolution until the present. Here again we shall try to establish a relationship between this development and the progress motif.

In Part Three I will attempt to show that the analyses in the first two parts can clarify our understanding of the origin of the problems which are accumulating in our own time. This (xxv) should place the present challenge of western culture in a proper light. Here I will also discuss the question of to what extent the idea of progress itself is involved in the present crisis of our culture and, further, whether this very involvement is perhaps a cause of the current accumulation of problems.

Finally, in Part Four our attention will first be focused on various diverging solutions to the emerging crisis in our society. After that I will sketch the skeleton of my own alternative. This will be introduced under the theme of *the disclosure of society*.

The structure of the subsequent narrative is outlined: Goudzwaard describes his discussion as an attempt to see how faith in progress relates to and overcomes the barriers to the “modern project”. This is an account of how modern capitalism has developed in relation to the technological consequences of the industrial revolution; how does the faith in progress combine with technologically-dependent capitalism in ways that the mutually inter-dependence of the problems that confront the West and global society should be understood; what solutions are on offer and what alternative is Goudzwaard suggesting?

⁶⁰ Goudzwaard concedes his reliance upon Johan Huizinga *The Waning of the Middle Ages* 1924. Govert Buijs puts it this way: *the idea of progress and growth has taken root first in our minds and then in our institutions. Before this was possible, all sorts of spiritual, cultural and mental barriers had to be removed. In short, we had to become different people, with a different understanding of the meaning of our lives and society – and that’s what we have become: we are now what we like to call “modern people”, who have a different approach to life than people in the Middle Ages.* “Ten geleide” (Introduction) to *Kapitalisme en Vooruitgang* 5th edition 2024 p.19

A NOTE TO SPECIALISTS

This book is not addressed specifically to economists or experts in related fields. Nevertheless, at the end of this Introduction I would like to address them briefly, in particular concerning an important matter in economic theory. In the discussion up to this point I have implicitly taken a position with respect to the subdiscipline in economics called *theory of economic systems*. Moreover, my position diverges in certain respects from commonly accepted approaches.

Goudzwaard's theory of economic systems involves a comparative method.⁶¹

Roughly speaking one can distinguish two main directions in the theory of economic systems. The first direction, influenced especially by Marxism, is *deterministic* in outlook. It views the economic system as an object of determined evolution in time, whose main contours are therefore subject to prediction. In this evolution the development of the technique of production puts a decisive stamp on the economic systems as the patterns of society; and at a given moment this development causes the transition from an earlier system - for example, the capitalistic - by way of a qualitative leap to a new economic system - for example, the socialistic.

Partly in reaction to this deterministic conception, a more voluntaristic theory was developed which emphasizes the free choice, in principle, of an economic system as the organizational and administrative system of society. The contrast, for instance, between a planned economy and a market economy derives from this voluntaristic theory. For example, if the behavior patterns of economic subjects in a national economy have to be coordinated, then the system of coordination has to be either the market, or the plan, or a mixture of both. In this conception the economic system is viewed first of all as a voluntarily chosen system in which a national economy is administered or (xxvi) organised. Most textbooks in the area of economic systems represent slightly different positions within the voluntaristic framework.⁶²

Goudzwaard is effectively addressing students of economics who, he suspects, will discover that they are confronted with this choice between *determinism* and *voluntarism*. He evidently knew about this "choice" as a student of economics and had experience of both outlooks in parliamentary debate and trade union negotiations.

By putting this here in this way, he emphasizes what he has previously said about his search of our social and cultural roots in order to encourage personal responsibility in the face of these mutually intersecting problems.

⁶¹ see fn 45 above.

⁶² **BG Ftn 6.** Cf. for instance Gregory Grossman, *Economic Systems* Englewood Cliffs, NJ.: Prentice-Hall, 1967; George N. Hahn, *Economic Systems: A Comparative Analysis* New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960; William N Loucks, *Comparative Economic Systems* New York: Harper & Row, 1965; and Jan S. Prybyla, *Comparative Economic Systems* New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1969. Perhaps these titles reflect a lack of originality.

Both of these conceptions of economic systems display distinct shortcomings. The deterministic approach asserts too much since it interprets an economic system as a blind, impersonal force which goes its own, absolutely sovereign way through history. The voluntaristic interpretation, on the other hand, asserts too little since it tends toward a too static and timeless approach to the entire problem by reducing an economic system to a mere technical system of organization.

Here in easy-to-understand terms he explains why his approach is neither one nor the other. He then goes on to give a brief sketch of how the problem of society and culture should be understood in relation to economic systems. It is not an extensive theory but gives the serious student something to go on.⁶³

In response to these two interpretations I am attracted to a third alternative, where economic systems and their development are approached especially from the entire societal culture within which they originate and of which they are at least partially an expression. An example can illustrate what I have in mind. The deterministic approach interprets the Japanese economy as capitalistic, while the voluntaristic approach interprets it as a market economy. But does either interpretation touch the essence of the Japanese economic system? Not really! The Japanese economy displays many traits, varying from lifetime employment to the practice of dumping, which can only be explained in terms of the unique Japanese culture which puts its stamp on nearly all economic relationships and institutions in that country.

Another example illustrates the same point. In theory both the Chinese economy and the Soviet economy belong to socialistic or planned economies, but in reality they differ radically. In these differences one can clearly detect varying cultural influences. So the question can properly be asked whether the commune economy of China is not at least in part a direct reflection of Chinese culture itself. For this reason it simply does not fit the category that describes the Russian system.

In this light it is meaningful to approach the origin and development of the western economic system against the background of western culture and its central driving forces. I readily (xxvii) acknowledge that my dissatisfaction with the present a-cultural approaches within the theory of economic systems has motivated me to write this book.

It would seem that by narrowing his focus to *capitalism* and *progress* Goudzwaard is seeking to extend his comparative theory of economic systems by identifying the leading characteristics of the economies of the West.⁶⁴

⁶³ Bob Goudzwaard "Towards Reformation of Economics" <https://tukampendatastore.blob.core.windows.net/neocalvinism/alloffiferedeemed/Goudzwaard/BG35.pdf> © Copyright 2008. The initial version, was distributed by the Institute for Christian Studies, 229 College Street, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5T 1R4.

⁶⁴ see Bob Goudzwaard "Centrally planned economies: strengths, weaknesses and the future" *Transformation* 4 (3-4) (1987): 54-59, with replies from Washington Okumu and Miroslav Volf.

One final comment, intended again primarily for specialists, is still in order. It concerns my use of the word *capitalism*. I employ it to describe the main features of the structure of western society. I could have chosen another word to describe that structure, but since every key descriptive term is loaded with unintended meanings, a measure of arbitrariness in choice can hardly be avoided. The reader should keep in mind, however, that I do not employ the term *capitalism* in its classical Marxist sense with its concomitant concepts of proletariat, exploitation, classes, class struggle, and so forth. Moreover, by using this term I do not want to give the impression that the *entire* structure of western society can be fully described by a single word, as if that structure is a holistic system which no longer permits personal freedom or institutional redirection in any sense. This also implies that my interpretation of capitalism and communism as dialectical counterparts in the progression of humanism should not be viewed as a leveling of important qualitative differences in communist and non-communist societies. But these qualifications should in no way detract us from a thorough diagnosis of the crisis within our *western* world. This book is intended as a small contribution to that end.

Again, here is a further attempt to confirm the limits of his investigation and to avoid any impression that his aim is to provide a total explanation of social and cultural life. His effort is to explore the roots, the spiritual roots, of Western society and its problems.

Epilogue⁶⁵

Bob Goudzwaard **Capitalism and Progress: Western Society and the Faith it Professes** Wedge, Toronto and Eerdmans, Grand Rapids 1979; Paternoster: The Classics Library, Carlisle: 1997. (both editions) pp. 247-249.

(247) The brief sketch in this book of a possible process of disclosure of western society, and of the preconditions necessary for it, is undoubtedly incomplete.⁶⁶ We have left all kinds of complications out of consideration which would certainly muddy the waters considerably. The question therefore arises whether it was meaningful to bring forward all that we did.

Goudzwaard begins his Epilogue by indicating that it is not so much an assessment of a large scale project as it is but a “brief sketch” that can give indications of how positive disclosure might be possible. It is clearly about the discovery of “disclosure” as part of “a way of life”. He adds that he has “left all kinds of complications out of consideration” in order to conclude his discussion with brief intimations of possibilities for living faithfully. So, as much as Chapter 20 “Intermezzo: Possibilities and Limits of Disclosure” and Chapter 21 “Church and Heaven Revisited” may seem to be the “brief sketch” of a possible “disclosure” path, it would seem that he is suggesting that the book’s exposition has sought to provide guidance as to how “disclosure” may “happen”, in the context where a faith in progress still provides backing for a technologically enhanced capitalism to continue careering down its many-sided problematic, destructive and resource-depleting path. The question of how a path may be taken that will, in time, bring “substantial healing” is still before us. But a first step is made by addressing the many mutually interdependent problems whose interconnections and coherences can be addressed if the path is taken to rediscover the normativity of human responsibility.

I personally believe it was. The purpose of this study has not for a moment been the spelling out of a precise program, or the drawing up of blueprints for a “completely disclosed society” - whatever that may be. Rather, the purpose was to make two things clear. In the first place, nearly all of our societal problems are a reflection of ourselves - of what we are in our lifestyles, our culture, our outlook, our vision of life. Societal problems are not merely “structural.” They are also “cultural” in the sense that they are the fruit of western civilization and the style of life it affords. In the second place, because of this background we are not entitled to look upon our predicament as a *fate* that is overcoming us. References to fate, to an inescapable destiny of western civilization, are avenues of escaping our responsibility in history. Such escape attempts, in effect, accept the autonomy of the powers of science, technology, and economics. This book

⁶⁵ pp.247-249 in both 1979 and 1997 editions.

⁶⁶ Goudzwaard is referring to Chapters 20 and 21 in which he gives brief outlines of a “way of life” and the social and cultural consequences that may flow from such Christian discipleship attentive to creation’s norms. Chapter 20 “Intermezzo: Possibilities and Limits of Disclosure” discusses ‘Vulnerability of the disclosure process’, ‘A Small Beginning’, ‘Influence at Large’ and ‘Toward an open Society.’ Chapter 21 “Church and Heaven Revisited” covers “The Renaissance View of Life”, “The Break with Utilitarianism” and “Available Openings.” The two chapters consist of 22 out of the book’s 249 pages.

has been written on the basis of the belief that this autonomy is pretended, never real. An acceptance of fate leads to a decline in responsibility.

These societal problems are not just “structural” but also “cultural”. We inherit them *personally*, and so we live our lives in relation to them. To ascribe autonomy to science, technology and economics - Goudzwaard refers to them as “powers” - is to attempt to avoid responsibility about the *way* we live, since these creational potentials are ascribed with such autonomy *by people*. Goudzwaard explains that he has written this book to challenge the fatalism, the decline in the sense of personal responsibility that he discerns has emerged within the West. **Capitalism and Progress** is a diagnosis of a situation in which a capitulation to a mythic fate can simply be a deepened avoidance of the cultural and societal issues we must deal with. He wrote this book to explain why we cannot afford to ignore the problems that are part of the culture we are called to form “in our lifestyles, our culture, our outlook, our vision of life.”

Over against such a decline, we have posited the theme of the disclosure of society. By this we do not mean a politically manipulable program but, first of all, an appeal to our own conscience. It is an appeal to acknowledge the real roots of our (248) problems, an appeal to listen anew to long-neglected norms for human existence, including the norms that hold for the supposedly a-normative domains of science, technology, and industry. It is an appeal directed to all of us, Christians and nonchristians, no matter what our political party or persuasion may be. Collectively, we are all guilty of the disarray in our social order, and all of us share the responsibility for a fundamental reorientation of our social order and the lifestyle that undergirds it.

Goudzwaard concludes *personally and addresses readers as those who already have, or will have, full adult responsibility*. This is a matter of conscience. This is a question of how we will respond. Indeed it is about how we will continue to live out our days. The call to listen anew to long-neglected norms is to embrace the meaning of our responsibility that is given to us by our Creator-Redeemer. Goudzwaard appeals to his readers from out of a Scriptural understanding of the human condition. Our social order, as much as our lifestyle, share in the call to us to participate in “a fundamental reorientation of our social order”.

It is about this reorientation, both cultural and structural, that I have been concerned in this book, in the hope that seemingly insurmountable problems can be brought back to proportions we can cope with as human beings, small as we are. I have intended to say only “This might be a way to go”; not “This is *the way to go*.” My concern is not a perfect society, for that is not the work of men’s hands. But there has indeed been a burning conviction behind what I have written - the conviction that human societies can experience ever anew a liberating and healing power if men take norms seriously. For taking norms seriously is the essence of every genuine process of disclosure.

A defining characteristic of Goudzwaard’s scholarly contribution has been the importance of taking norms seriously. He emphasizes a way of live that adheres to the normative guidelines given to us by our Creator-Redeemer. This contrasts with “Christian idealism” that has been evident in the USA and the West with the work of Francis Schaeffer as we pointed out previously - pp.13, 24 ftn.31). Criticism of **Capitalism and Progress** that focuses upon Goudzwaard’s lack of a concrete plan of action ignores this dimension of his discussion. See the criticism of Gary North see p.76 ftn.108.

However, do we really *want* a disclosure of our society? That is the question which still begs an answer at the end of this book. In all honesty, I am not sure that the answer to that question will be positive. After all, the conditions for disclosure listed in the foregoing are anything but easy. The last condition, especially the one under “church and heaven revisited,” is of such proportions that its fulfillment is hardly a matter of course. That condition of a shift in mentality, of a conversion in outlook, transcends the categories of extra effort or trying harder. The central meaning of life and society is at stake here, and that is not lightly changed in a civilization. At this point we touch upon the *religious* roots of human life.

He continues, attempting to maintain an utterly honest summation of the prospects for disclosure, while also assuming the role of evangelist! And in asking this in the 3rd person plural he is consciously standing with all his fellow citizens, all his neighbours, and expresses deep concern that “disclosure” is not going to be an easy thing.

I am keenly aware that I must tread very carefully here, because one can be so easily misunderstood. Yet I cannot refrain from pointing out, at the conclusion of this book, that the theme of progress has penetrated western society so profoundly because it was able to present itself as a *faith* in progress, as a religion of progress. That is also why the present-day crisis of the idea of progress has the depth of a crisis of *faith*. There is more at stake than a somewhat reduced confidence in “progress” on the part of western man. His whole life perspective has undergone a shock. The unfulfilled promises of progress have brought about an emptiness, a vacuum, with respect to the (249) *meaning* of life and society. Many among us even experience the demise of the idea of progress as a kind of divine betrayal. The very thing in which we had placed all our trust is turning against us to devour us. And what does one have left when one’s gods betray him?

Goudzwaard is also confronted by the decline in the *faith* in progress, the inner collapse of that religion. He admits he is participant in a situation in which so many have come to find life meaningless. When commitment to a self-made *meaning* disintegrates, ideology is exposed for its false hopes but even in that context he, as a Christian, is still trying to reckon with his responsibility for *all* his neighbours, and so his appeal is to *all* his readers.

Here is Goudzwaard’s assessment of what he experiences immediately in his own life, whether in the university, his political context, Dutch society or in the world at large. He is not pretending to conclude with an “up beat” answer just because he has been able to get his book translated and published in English. The year is 1979. In two years time his small book **Genoodzaakt goed te wezen** would appear, to then be published in an English translation as **Idols of Our Time** in 1984.⁶⁷ It is a sober update framed by his understanding of the idolatrous character of ideology. An ideology arises when idolatry takes root in the pursuit of a legitimate end. He will then discuss four idols of our time, linking them to ideologies of revolution, nation, material prosperity and guaranteed security. He is also very much aware that these gods eventually betray their worshippers.

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Bob Goudzwaard **Idols of our Time** Downers Grove, Ill. : IVP 1984. Trans Mark Vander Vennen of **Genoodzaakt goed te wezen** Kok, Kampen 1982.

If this observation is correct, then we find ourselves at a very critical juncture in the development of western civilization. No society or civilization can continue to exist without having found an answer to the question of meaning. The emptiness created by the death of the god of progress must be filled with something else. But what will that be? It seems that we have two choices: either the vacuum will be filled by a new, awe-inspiring myth, possibly built around the leaders of a central and large-scale world authority, who are authorized by their populations to direct all available technical, economic, and scientific means to new objectives with which to assault both heaven and earth; or else there will take place a turnaround of Christians and nonchristians together, a turnaround which directs itself to the Torah or normativity which the Creator of heaven and earth has given to this world as its meaning from the beginning, and which points forward to a new earth, coming with the return of the crucified One. Without such a turnaround I can hardly imagine a real and permanent disclosure of our western civilization.

This is serious, the author concludes. His contribution may only be a part of what he hopes will be a much broader project but is nevertheless profoundly important in its own right. He has contributed by seeking to point toward “positive disclosure”. As he has said, he has been suggesting, “This *may* be a way to go.” But he is also convinced that a turnaround in this life that is looking forward to the sure coming of the Kingdom of God is the only way for disclosure to come. It may arise in our social responsibilities, our economic stewardship or our search as citizens for public justice as we care for all our neighbours. However small, that will be meaningful and will last the distance because it affirms the normativity by which we are called to live and which God promises to bless as we walk in His ways.

Therefore our deepest choice appears to lie between an enslaving autonomy and a liberating heteronomy, or, to put it another way, between restricting utopias and the inspiring openness of the biblical *eschaton*.

Goudzwaard concludes with a formulation of the doctrine of the two ways, oriented to viewing ourselves and our vocational demands with patience as we live out our days, anticipating the future as the coming of the Kingdom of God.

Preface to the New Edition

Bob Goudzwaard **Capitalism and Progress: Western Society and the Faith it Professes** Paternoster: The Classics Library, Carlisle: 1997. pp. xvii-xix.⁶⁸

The main text of this book was written between 1975 and 1978, a time which was in many respects very different to our present time. At that time there was no indication that Communism would collapse suddenly within the span of a few years or that a Gulf War was imminent.⁶⁹ The rise of the newly industrialized countries of the Far East was still of a modest nature and the cultural phenomena of post-modernism⁷⁰ and New Ageism had not yet registered widely. There had been little reference to the possibility of accelerated global climate changes or the electronic highway and virtual reality. So what possible use can it be to reprint a book about modern society which was written at that time - except for its present historic interest?

Here is the 1997 Preface. As we read it, we will not only see how Goudzwaard's construal of his purposes in writing the book have developed. We are also made aware of his view of the global and international situation that had significantly changed in this 20-year period. In his previous Prefaces, Goudzwaard demonstrated his ability as an insightful teacher, to ask rhetorical questions in order to self-critically clarify his purpose. It is as if he asks: *Since this treatise was initially written over 21 years ago, isn't it already 'out of date'?*⁷¹

From the vantage point of 1997, Goudzwaard looks back to note the developments that are very pertinent to the hypothesis he had begun to test with **Capitalism and Progress**. They may not have been front and centre of his late 1970s horizon, even if there were questions about the supply of oil from Arab lands that were making an impact upon Western economies. Moreover there was the slow but steady reappraisal among Muslim people of their religion since the collapse of the Caliphate at the close of the First World War. In four more years the globe would be dealing with Al Qaeda's "war" with the West.

But when the first English edition of **Capitalism and Progress** was published in 1979, Goudzwaard had been part of the discussions that led to the rearrangement of Dutch Christian political parties - Goudzwaard had written the party manifesto, *"Not by bread alone"* for the Christian Democratic Appeal party that had come together after a period of parliamentary co-operation. In its early Dutch editions **C&P** was part of public discussion about the direction of Dutch society. But by the early 1980s, the book's author had resigned from the party as a consequence of the party's implicit accommodation to the doctrine of "Mutually Assured Destruction". Goudzwaard's departure from the CDA has

⁶⁸ **BCW Note:** This is a reprint with the earlier *Introduction* recast as *Prologue*. Strangely, the Translator's Acknowledgments are one page earlier (pp x-xi instead of pp. xi-xii) and the original Preface (now Preface to the First Edition) is pp.xii-xvi instead of pp. xiii-xvii. These strange page discrepancies in the "front matter" of the book do not anticipate the kind of discussion of Foreword and Preface in this booklet. The bibliographical data page has some spelling and typographical errors and there are a few infelicities in the *Preface to New Edition* which is now on pp. xvii-xix. It was written for the 1997 edition. This subtitle was retained by Paternoster Press but with distribution contracted to 'Send the Light' the subtitle became: "Western Society and the Faith it Professes." It was No. 11 of the Paternoster Biblical & Theological Classics Library.

⁶⁹ **BCW Note:** The reference is to the end of the "cold war", the collapse of the Berlin Wall 4 November 1989 and 13 months later with the resignation of Mikhail Gorbachev the dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) 25 December 1991. The first Gulf War, was 2 August 1990, in which Iraq led by Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait.

⁷⁰ David Harvey **The Condition of Post-Modernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change** 1989

⁷¹ And 29 years later we can ask the same question and, by what we have written here, affirm that we are willing to suggest a similar answer to that question. No it is not "out of date" to try understand the time in which we live.

been explained by another publication 1981 **Genoodzaakt goed te wezen**. This would be translated and published in 1984 to become a well-known English language publication, **Idols of our Time**.⁷²

Here Goudzwaard discusses how in retrospect of 1975-1978 after 20 years, it is clear it was a period with different issues, even as he was dealing with them at the time in his different capacities as a former parliamentarian and political party member as well as from his professorial role within the University. Here we read of his awareness that his book reflected his social involvement in the life of the university and in political life as a former Parliamentarian. So was he going to write a completely new book for a new situation? Evidently, he did not think that was necessary. It is of note that he hasn't referred here in this Preface to his publication with its Appendix with his critique of the OECD's "Facing the Future" (1979) (see below pp.54-59).

The core of my answer to the question is that to some extent the book appeared prematurely. In 1978 we were still caught in the climate of the Cold War with its ideological controversy between communism and capitalism. Clearly each of these systems of society was based on its own cultural and religious presuppositions. But within a few years after the fall of the Berlin Wall the debate turned to the new situation with which the world was now confronted. Could this new situation be described as a world without ideology (Daniel Bell⁷³), or as the end of the history of all ideologies (Francis Fukuyama⁷⁴)? It seemed as if the so-called 'mixed' or 'social market' economy in combination with a democratic parliamentary political structure had become the only remaining, effective and broadly accepted structure of modern society - with no alternatives in sight. And so views like those of Jean-Francois Lyotard⁷⁵ which teach that all the great stories - *les grands récits* - of Western civilization had now ended (p. xviii) for good and turned their promises of self-made paradise into factual bankruptcy. It seemed as if a new kind of neutrality had been born.

The initial sentence of this paragraph suggesting that the book's initial publication was perhaps "premature" should be read as Goudzwaard's recognition that he had then seen it as part of his academic contribution at the time. If it were relevant then, the implication goes, it is moreso now. He proceeds to briefly outline the major changes that had taken place with the end of the Cold War, the collapse of Soviet Union and the onset of a new managerial neo-liberalism presenting itself as the inheritor of a new era.

But what is to be made of the phrase "a new kind of neutrality"? Presumably he is suggesting that with the "incredulity to all meta-narratives", a new basis has been assumed for public discourse, presumably a new "tolerance". All views are considered on all sides to be just that, opinions that have to be negotiated without preference to any one view or ideology. Goudzwaard is referring to the historic development of public tolerance. The irony is that this story of universal incredulity is itself a meta-narrative!

⁷² Bob Goudzwaard **Idols of our Time** (trans Mark VanderVennen) Downers Grove, Ill. : Inter-Varsity Press 1984. A translation of **Genoodzaakt goed te wezen: christelijke hoop in een bezeten wereld**. Kok 1981. (Translated as **Forced to be good: Christian hope in a possessed world**.)

⁷³ Daniel Bell **The End of Ideology: on the Exhaustion of the Political Ideas of the 1950s** Harvard University Press 1962.

⁷⁴ Francis Fukuyama **The End of History and the Last Man?** Free Press, NY, 1992

⁷⁵ Jean-Francois Lyotard **The Postmodern Condition: a Report on Knowledge** 1979. "Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity towards metanarratives."

However, problems did not end. To the contrary, they increased in number and in complexity, sometimes paradoxically - the increase of poverty in the midst of plenty; the erosion of care for mankind and nature while more money was available than ever before; the increase in unemployment at the same time as a rapid increase in the human labour force; and scarcity at the very place and time we expected abundance. These problems were not solved or appeased by the simple declaration that old ideologies had ended. Instead, these problems grew and increased with an inner resistance which defied the standard remedies applied to cure them - like insects that have become immune to the insecticides used against them. It became clear that there was more to it, that most of these problems spring from roots deep inside the structure and culture of our (post)modern society. That is why in our time there is a full-fledged return to debate whether the roots of our modern Western society have been the breeding ground for our present insurmountable social and economic problems. It is no longer possible to argue that these problems are only related to wrong politics and that a change in the organization of society will bring a solution.

This paragraph is also a summary of the contribution to a fully-worked out “economy of care” that Bob wrote with Harry de Lange **Beyond Poverty and Affluence: toward an economy of care with a twelve-step program for economic recovery** ⁷⁶(1995). It was a translation of a Dutch work that had been published in 1986 with its 3rd edition 1991. And what this confirms is what has been commented upon earlier: namely Goudzwaard was not engaged in economics in order to produce publications, but rather was working with a long-range view in which publications would contribute to a multi-dimensional project that presupposed the hypothesis that had been elaborated in **Capitalism and Progress**.

And in this paragraph we see the reassertion of the same observation that we can find in the initial Prefaces of his book’s various editions. But at this point, 1997, it is made not only to discuss the intensity of the mutual interaction of the endemic problems of Western society, but to point out how with taking the situation seriously, it is simply no longer feasible for some powerful politicians to assume that political solutions are going to bring about the much-needed resolution of the problems - there is something deeper about the Western way of life and its ideologies that needs to be probed. And so he effectively continues to warn against any celebration of the “post-modern moment”. The reassertion of nihilistic perspectives will not disclose lasting solutions.

It is remarkable that some post-modern philosophers agree largely with this conclusion, yet decline to find any element of hope that there is a possible way out of the predicament. A post-modern thinker like Jean Baudrillard, for instance, explains the present problems solely in terms of the world of objects having itself taken the lead in contemporary development. He writes in the first sentence of his book, **Fatal Strategies**, *The things have succeeded in extracting themselves from the influence of the human subjective meanings and opinions which annoyed them, and now are stretching themselves out to infiniteness, to a*

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Bob Goudzwaard and Harry de Lange **Beyond Poverty and Affluence: toward an economy of care with a twelve-step program for economic recovery** Eerdmans and WCC 1995, a translation of a Dutch work that had been published in 1986 with its 3rd edition 1991. A Canadian edition was also published - **Beyond Poverty and Affluence: toward a Canadian economy of care** University of Toronto Press, May 1995.

*future known by no one.*⁷⁷ It is a thesis which sounds as interesting as it sounds alarming, but is also superficial. For if it is true, how did the world of objects (technological, scientific, economic) come to take such a dominant place in our society? Was that place not given to them by our Western culture? And if so, is this way of post-modern thinking then not an expression of a premature abandonment of responsibility, a deliberate withdrawal by the subjects themselves?

There is something unusually combative here with Goudzwaard's comments about the superficial hopelessness that aspires to be recognised as philosophy in an era proclaimed as post-modern. Goudzwaard characterises the new intellectual *status quo*: "*It is a thesis which sounds as interesting as it sounds alarming, but is also superficial.*" With this sharp observation he is taking the post-structuralist Jean Baudrillard to task for his superficial endorsement of an "abandonment of responsibility." It is speech about the world of objects becoming dominant without any willingness to concede that such purported intellectual conversation is already engaged in the very same objectifying process, denying, or at least not facing up to, the subjective involvement that is busy composing words for a new "narrative." But it is a brief feint, noting that it is nothing else than subjects *who* are putting this view forward as a fate beyond any resolution.

The main interest of this book is the many and diverse (p. xix) cultural and structural dimensions behind our present societal problems. It contends that neither the structure nor the culture of society can stand independently, but have religious roots. Both are always, in one way or another, the expression of a particular understanding of meaning. And meaning is either self-made, which leads to ideology, or meaning has its source in Revelation. Therefore, in my opinion, it is even dangerous to exclude simultaneously and systematically the elements of both faith and ideology as effective depth components from our present society.

In brief terms, reminiscent of his educative nurturing from Johan Mekkes (1898-1987),⁷⁸ Goudzwaard insists that the cultural and structural dimensions *behind and propelling* our current social problems share religious roots. They are manifest within the human task and experience within the creation and thus they are bound up with the human understanding of *meaning*. Does *meaning* come about because of human construction or is *meaning's* source to be found in Divine Revelation? This question is a basic one for Goudzwaard whose philosophical mentor, Dooyeweerd (1894-1977), launched his critical philosophical account of theoretical thought with a discussion of meaning. "*Meaning is the being of all that has been created and the nature even of our selfhood. It has a religious root and a divine origin.*"⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Jean Baudrillard **Fatal Strategies**. English Translation: <https://openlibrary.org/books/OL25352151M/> Introduction Dominic Pettman, translation Philippe Beitchman and W G J Niesluchowski. The version as given reads: "*Things have found a way of avoiding a dialectics of meaning that was beginning to bore them: by proliferating indefinitely, increasing their potential, outbidding themselves in an ascension to the limit, an obscenity that henceforth becomes their immanent finality and senseless reason*". Originally published as **Les Stratégies fatales** by Editions Grasset et Fasquelle, Paris. 1983. p.7. *L'extase et l'inertie: Les choses ont trouvé un moyen d'échapper à la dialectique du sens, qui les ennuyait: c'est de proliférer à l'infini, de se potentialiser, de surenchérir sur leur essence, dans une montée aux extrêmes, dans une obscénité qui leur tient lieu désormais de finalité immanente, et de raison insensée.* Critical comment is developed further in Goudzwaard, Vander Vennen and van Heemst **Hope in Troubled Times** Baker 2007 pp.31-32.

⁷⁸ Johan Mekkes **Creation Revelation and Philosophy** trans. Chris van Haeften, Dordt College Press, 2010. This is a translation from the Dutch **Scheppingsopenbaring en Wijsbegeerte** 1961.

⁷⁹ Herman Dooyeweerd **A New Critique of Theoretical Thought Vol.1 The Necessary Presuppositions of Theoretical Thought** Presbyterian and Reformed 1955 p.4

And that is where the quest of this book starts, and that is why this book continues to be relevant.⁸⁰ It is no more, but also no less, than the continuation of a search for the revealed and hidden faith dimensions of Western society. It is further based, throughout, on the assertion that every society is more than a body, an organizational framework. It also has a soul, a spirit which permeates the whole and which is capable of leading the body to the abyss or to ways of healing.

Here Goudzwaard makes explicit what he evidently considered as implicit in his vocation. His scholarly analyses are motivated by his Christian faith. He explains why this exercise is meaningful. We might want to ask him why he hasn't more rigorously defined some of these dimensions that remain hidden. He sees his own work as participation in the disclosure of the religious roots of the ways of life expressed around the world with western influence.

Our current cultural and societal problems are of such intensity that they not only require us to inquire about their origins, and to work out how the problems can be addressed, but also to search for true spiritual awareness on the path, the "way" of obedience to the Creator- Redeemer. But when he says that this is a "search for the revealed and hidden faith dimensions" he is also implying that there are not only faith dimensions that have been revealed, but there are also *faith dimensions* that have been and are being ideologically hidden, that require disclosure. Goudzwaard is here reiterating what he had written in the paragraph immediately prior to this: *"it is even dangerous to exclude simultaneously and systematically the elements of both faith and ideology."*

So, there are other problems: religious roots need to be "opened up". This indicates he is inviting readers to not only affirm his analysis but to become engaged in the ongoing process of "disclosure". Further social structural and cultural analysis will be needed of other vexing problems and issues. There are other problems with their hidden ideological origins that require to be included in the ongoing research agenda.

Let us consider one of these problems that is very close to the heart of Goudzwaard's analysis. He has framed his "diagnosis", from early on, by acknowledging the powerful impact of the "Weber thesis" that has sought to identify the crucial Calvinist contribution to the nurturing of a "capitalistic spirit." And so in that sense Goudzwaard is alert to how Christianity has not only contributed to "Western progress", but reckons with the fact that those identifying as Christians are also implicated in generating the problems that have arisen on account of this social and cultural development, and thus of "locking up" instead of "opening up" the meaning of human cultural engagement.

In the preceding paragraph he had set down his view that *"meaning is either self-made, which leads to ideology, or meaning has its source in Revelation."* This is his brief, cryptic Christian confession, his update of the Augustinian doctrine of the "two ways". But what of the Christian affirmation of meaning that is "self-made"? What of the attempt to live openly by a Christian profession which is in truth an ideology, an attempt to maintain one's place in society and culture by rooting itself in an emphasis upon purported *Christian* "self-actualisation"? What of the Christianity that has become an ideology?

Goudzwaard's discussion of the Christian life as a way of ongoing "disclosure", brings him to agree with the 1972 view of Francis Schaeffer. Life open to God and neighbour carries with it the possibility of "substantial healing". Goudzwaard's diagnosis of **Capitalism and Progress** had found its initial oral formulation in a context of students raising critical questions about the path to be walked.

There is an issue here that must be examined and it is this: how is it that the Evangelical and Christian way that had been advocated as a way of “substantial healing” could in time find itself caught up in a movement today that refers to itself as “Christian nationalist”?

I cannot develop the explanation in all of its details here, but it is necessary for those Christians working with Goudzwaard’s economic scholarship to address this question as we seek to walk on a path of “substantial healing”. This also is one of “our” problems as we address the globe’s challenging problems, as they together mutually reinforce each other via their interconnections and coherences.⁸¹

It is also notable that having discussed the cultural and social developments that had taken place across the globe since 1975-8 and 1997, Goudzwaard did not in these Prefaces refer to the way the L’Abri movement had become implicated in American fundamentalist political agitation of the Moral Majority. This is no attempt to make a “cheap shot”. It is to face up to the fact that a work of Francis Schaeffer appears in the footnotes of the concluding pages of **Capitalism and Progress**,⁸² and rightly so. But the subsequent questions that followed from Schaeffer’s involvement in Jerry Falwell’s “Moral Majority” movement must raise the question as to whether this was but an early phase of an ideological transformation of what was a significant evangelical attempt to appeal to the Bible to restore “true spirituality”.

So, there are issues here that will have to be addressed by those who propose to develop research in line with Goudzwaard’s hypothesis as outlined in **Capitalism and Progress**. It must also come to a clear understanding of how the Christian faith has been ideologised. How would this “diagnosis of western society” be developed to further disclose not only the problems in Western society to do with personal ethics, morality, family life in their “interconnectedness and coherence” with all the “major problems” that continue to be featured in our increasingly globalised mass media? But further, how is Christian discipleship as walking on the way of “substantial healing”, to be understood *and lived* in a context in which it would seem that large sectors of the Christian church have been caught up in a Christian ideology?

Let me conclude by encouraging especially Christians who live today to be continuously aware of spiritual dimension of our (post-)-modern society. Firstly because without such an awareness there is a big danger that we might succumb too easily to a kind of faith or spirituality which is alien to and in opposition to the spirituality of the living Word of God. Secondly because without this insight and knowledge we may easily fail to find and advocate real hope for a staggering world.

Christians have a responsibility to convey hope in the coming Kingdom of God and so Goudzwaard concludes with advising ongoing spiritual vigilance. And it might also seem that Goudzwaard is propelled by the alarming prospect of such a defection from Christian discipleship by those claiming to be Christian.

⁸¹ Bob Goudzwaard **Capitalism and Progress: a Diagnosis of Western Society** 1978.1997 p.245. See also Goudzwaard’s 1998 interview as “professor emeritus”: “Ik heb bepaald geen saai leven gehad” Herman Noordegraaf en Sander Griffioen (eds) **Bewogen Realisme: Economie, cultuur, oecumene. Bij het afscheid Bob Goudzwaard** Kok, Kampen 1999 pp. 28-43 at p.37.

Actually, it was Hans Rookmaaker who earlier put me on the trail of Capitalism and Progress. This book grew out of conversations with students, who came from all over the world, within l’Abri Nederland, the Dutch branch of the home for reflection and culture founded in Switzerland by Francis Schaeffer, an American missionary. During the time we lived in Schoonhoven, I went to l’Abri in Eck en Wiel once a week or fortnight. Those contributions grew into a series. At one point, Rookmaaker said: there is the potential for a book here, only you have to include certain literature. Among other things, he was referring to Peter Gay’s study of the Enlightenment. So this book underwent the test of communicability before it was written.

⁸² Francis Schaeffer **True Spirituality** London InterVarsity Press 1972. Bob Goudzwaard **Capitalism and Progress**: p.245.

Appendix

Future Models and the OECD Report “Facing the Future” (1979)

Capitalism and Progress 1982 pp. 301-314

[301]

After the first scientific global-scale model of the future, “The Limits to Growth” presented to the Club of Rome in 1972, the world has been inundated with a series of other model-based predictions. Famous examples include:

- the second report to the Club of Rome, “Humanity at a Crossroads” by Mesarovič and Pestel (1974);
- the RIO report by Tinbergen et al., “Towards a Just International Order” (1976);
- the Bariloche report⁸³ by Amilcar Herrera et al. (1978), written from the perspective of the developing world;
- the recent impressive report of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), “Facing the Future” (1979).

But this is only a limited selection. Alongside these, a whole generation of more problem-specific predictions has emerged, such as Garbutt and Linneman’s study on the world food problem (“Counting People”, 1976). All these global models have been and also continue to be extensively built upon in national frameworks and reports; cf. for example the Dutch report of the Scientific Council for Government Policy, “The Next 25 Years” (1977). Finally, [302] international advisory groups and bodies are also increasingly working on the basis of such scientific predictions. The most important, and recent example is the report of the Brandt Commission, “North-South: A Programme for Survival” (1980).

The importance and influence of all these scientific futures studies⁸⁴ can hardly be overstated. Over the past decade, they have become increasingly refined, based on more accurate information and on “models” - scientific simulations of the real-world relationships in systems of mathematical equations - that are gradually overcoming their teething problems.

But that’s not all: these futures studies have also become increasingly policy-oriented, resulting in more or less concrete recommendations on what policy bodies, both national and international, should do. Their influence on concrete policy is therefore growing. With some exaggeration, one could say that hardly any advisory body dares to advise governments on medium- and long-term policy anymore if that advice is not at least partially - as they say - “substantiated by models”. Policy and futures studies are becoming increasingly intertwined.

The major advantage of these model-based studies of futures is, of course, that they can reveal why, where, and how certain current developments could go wrong in the future. They can also provide insight into how certain catastrophic developments might still be prevented. The question therefore arises whether this entire rise of scientific future thinking can provide us with the perspective for solving the major societal problems of our time. Perhaps, after all, with the help of such studies most problems could be resolved?

This question strikes us even more acutely when we consider [303] the recent, significant OECD futures study, “Facing the Future”. It juxtaposes various scenarios regarding the future of the world, each with its own predictions. Therefore, depending on what one assumes in any scenario, one can, as it were, choose from various possible futures. Moreover, this study differs from many previous ones in that it discusses not only economics and technology; when looking to the future various social and cultural factors are also considered.

There is therefore every reason, especially against the background of the main content of this book,⁸⁵ to take a closer look at this future study.

⁸³ Herrera A O et al. **Catastrophe or New Society?** A Latin American World Model. Canada: DRC, 1976

⁸⁴ Dutch: *toekomststudies*. The term is regularly referred to as “futures studies”. See <https://jfsdigital.org/>. See the journal *Futures: for the interdisciplinary study of futures, visioning, anticipation and foresight*. [https:// www.sciencedirect.com/ journal/futures](https://www.sciencedirect.com/journal/futures)

⁸⁵ Goudzwaard is referring to his book **Capitalism and Progress** in this its 1984 edition.

Design and content of the OECD study

In “Facing the Future” there are four main scenarios, four scripts of the possible future of the world, each of which results in a series of concrete predictions.

Scenario A is the scenario, which assumes that both rich and poor countries strive for strong economic growth, coupled with further expansion of free trade. Moreover, the problems faced by the rich countries are tackled jointly through mutual agreement.

In *Scenario B*, the latter is still the case. But now, we also have the interesting assumption that rich countries are no longer striving for high economic growth with all their might. They are surrendering to the idea of slowing economic growth. This is accompanied by a socio-cultural change. The populations of rich countries themselves attach less importance to earning money and increasing income, and opt primarily for what the report [304] calls “post-materialist values”: thus, nature conservation, maintaining personal contacts, increasing participation in housing and employment, and so on. At the same time, relations between rich and poor countries remain characterized by free trade.

Scenario C and *Scenario D* are configurations⁸⁶ in which international contention, rather than harmony, takes center stage. *Scenario C*, for instance, posits an escalating confrontation between rich and poor nations, with developing countries increasingly insulating themselves from the influence of wealthy states (a process of “de-linking”). *Scenario D* also depicts a similar fractured situation, but now the rift is assumed to extend right through the developing world. The developing world is being, as it were, “balkanized”, or pulled apart, by the three Western powers: the USA, the EEC, and Japan. These are the three poles of a new protectionism, with the USA relying primarily on its influence in South America, the EEC focusing primarily on Africa, and Japan on the Far East.

The authors of this study certainly cannot be denied a “realistic” view of reality! Even the specter of a future according to *Scenario D* is presented as a fully-fledged possibility. Moreover, the difference between *Scenario A* and *Scenario B* is particularly interesting - it seems to have everything to do with what has been discussed in this book so far. For with the development of Western society, as we have seen, a non-materialistic mindset is essential.

What are the outcomes of the predictions for the future in these different scenarios? The assumptions vary widely, so the outcomes will also vary quite significantly. However, anyone who examines these outcomes - they are a whole range, primarily related to income, employment, population composition, etc. - will notice that the outcomes do not diverge as much as one might expect. [305] For example, per capita income rose from 1975 to 2000 in the OECD countries (the wealthy Western countries plus Japan) as follows (in rounded figures):

- in *Scenario A* from over \$3,000 per capita to \$8,000 per capita;
- in *Scenario B* from over \$3,000 per capita to \$6,500 per capita;
- in *Scenario C* from over \$3,000 per capita to \$4,700 per capita;
- in *Scenario D* from over \$3,000 per capita to \$5,100 per capita.

So, even in *Scenario B* per capita income still more than doubles. And in *Scenario C*, the Scenario for the North-South confrontation, per capita income in rich countries still rises by more than 50%.

The predictions for developing countries vary even less. Per capita income there rises from \$290 per year in the various Scenarios, currently, to 2000:

- \$860 in scenario A
- \$790 in scenario B
- \$660 in scenario C
- \$750 in scenario D

In all Scenarios, there is at least a doubling.

The implication of these results is quite clear. Although *Scenario A*, the scenario of strong growth plus free trade, most strongly maintains the relative prosperity gap between rich and poor countries, it yields the highest level of prosperity not only for rich countries in 2000, but also for developing countries (\$860). The report makes it clear that in this scenario, they will even control 30% of global production in the year 2000. Not without significant differences, however: Southeast Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, in particular, will lag significantly behind in development [306] (a kind of proletariat on a global scale). The process of economic growth is also accompanied by strong

⁸⁶ Dutch: *draaiboeken*, scripts. The metaphor is of a play in which various roles are set out.

urbanization in Third World countries. If we are to believe this study, Mexico City will have 32 million inhabitants in the year 2000, São Paulo 26 million, and cities like Jakarta and Cairo 17 million.

The stability of the scenarios

The authors of this report are scientists (economists, mathematicians, sociologists, physicists, etc.). Therefore, as they say, they do not choose between these different scenarios: it is up to the politicians to choose. They have only been striving for a “values-free” analysis. However, they do make a series of observations about the internal stability, credibility, and feasibility of these four scenarios.

In this context, it is striking that *Scenario A* (that of strong economic growth in wealthy countries) not only emerges stronger in many respects than *Scenario C* and *Scenario D* - as expected - but that this scenario also clearly outperforms *Scenario B* - the script in which “post-materialism” plays a role - in terms of internal stability and credibility! This is a conclusion that differs considerably from what has been advocated in this book, and therefore raises the question of how the compilers arrived at it.

The answer is twofold.

First of all, the report makes no secret of the fact that numerous problems will also arise in *Scenario A*, particularly in the areas of raw material and energy supply. But it assumes that these problems can be solved individually through good planning and cooperation. And after all is not that kind of good cooperation assumed in *Scenario A*? As long as the right conservation and exploitation methods are developed and used, and sufficient opportunities are given to [307] alternative energy sources, such as nuclear energy, the problem of physical limits will not be a permanent obstacle. For example, the report states on page 15: “*Energy sources should be sufficient to meet, in the long term and based on a regular supply, a world consumption demand 10 to 15 times higher than in 1975*”. The authors apparently consider that level to be achievable. The problem of erosion or the destruction of the earth, which causes 3% of the world's land surface to be lost to agricultural production every 10 years, should also be able to be solved through good cooperation.

Secondly, the report lists a series of disadvantages to *Scenario B*. Generally speaking, it is said that it contains the seeds of a dual instability: the seeds of growing discontent at the national level, and the seeds of a push towards protectionism - economic self-preservation (p. 304). More specifically, regarding *Scenario B*, it is noted that:

- Unemployment in Western countries will rise, possibly to a quarter of the working population;
- conflicts will arise over whether, for example, nature conservation or solving the food problem should prevail (the report anticipates the necessity of increasing pesticide use by 3 to 5 times its current level; p. 22);
- the debt burden of Third World countries will rise even further due to diminished export opportunities to wealthy countries;
- governments in wealthy countries will face budgetary difficulties, resulting in a decline in development aid.

Therefore, in the opinion of the compilers, *Scenario B* as an alternative to *Scenario A* is very unstable; it could easily disintegrate and, for example, change into *Scenario C*, with even worse results.

[308] An assessment of the study

What are we to make of a report like this? Is it as value-free as it claims to be? And how, in particular, can the difference in assessment and outcomes of *Scenario A* versus *Scenario B* be explained?

Regarding this last question, upon closer inspection of the report several things immediately stand out. Firstly - though this may be coincidental - it is striking that the entire issue of the limits to growth is addressed before any scenario is even discussed. The problem of the physical limits to economic expansion is outlined and declared solvable in principle before *Scenario A* presents its high growth target.

Scenario B is even more remarkable. It is a scenario that has not been elaborated in terms of what other technological developments could positively result from it. Therefore, the unemployment estimate is also high. But even more important is the one-sided nature of the

assumptions in this scenario. It assumes a mentality that most closely resembles what is described in this book under the heading “*counterculture*” (section 4.1.2).⁸⁷

The essence of the post-materialist mentality is seen in the fact that people are guided by the desire “to be liberated and to put down new roots”. Within this desire, minority groups arise who demand that “individuals be freed from moral taboos, hierarchical limitations, or norms” (p. 107). It is therefore no wonder that, in line with this, the report anticipates a strengthening of the countercultural current in society, possibly leading to increasing tensions, particularly around the distribution of national income. By choosing these assumptions, the report is not only far removed from what is intended in this book, for example, by an [309] opening up⁸⁸ of society, but also from, for example, the thinking within the World Council of Churches regarding a post-materialist society, which, for wealthy countries, is characterized by the pursuit of an “economy of sufficiency”. For example, one of the essential motivations for achieving this is to be actually capable of providing more effective support to the Third World and to alleviate the unbearable debt burdens there.

Perhaps the report’s weakest point, however, lies in its thinking through the consequences - political, social, and economic - of *Scenario A*, should it actually be chosen by the wealthy countries. The social pressure placed on people and the environment by a near-tripling of current consumption levels by 2000 is barely, if at all, addressed. On the production side, micro-processors and the bio-industry are introduced almost seamlessly as necessities. And what about the internal stability of societies, where energy demand is expected to increase tenfold or fifteenfold in the long term (and that on a global scale)? And why, in particular, would breeder reactors and nuclear fusion power plants be required on a large scale (p. 29)?

Scenario B is considered internally unstable, even internationally. But what about *Scenario A*? Should not one be asking, precisely with that scenario, whether the strong emphasis on further economic growth in the rich countries will sooner or later lead to further “balkanization” of the Third World? The question is needed because the more one prioritizes the need for economic growth for one’s own Western country, the more easily will that country resort to do everything in its power to attempt to safeguard and maintain its economic interests in the Third World. The EEC, the USA, and Japan are already fully engaged in securing their energy and raw material supplies for the future from the Third World [310], because they know that without that supply, their economic growth will be threatened. *Scenario A*, in particular, is therefore inconsistent and internally unstable. It tends to automatically transition into *Scenario D* - the scenario by which the world is Balkanized.

This conclusion becomes even more plausible when these prospects also include the armaments issue and the increasing arms trade. The report itself contains a series of alarming facts on this subject. Total global armaments expenditures already exceed the Gross National Product of the poorest half of the world’s population. Of the total amount spent on research and development, 40% is spent on military purposes. The export of weapons to developing countries is rising rapidly (according to 1980 SIPRI⁸⁹ data, even by 25% over the past five years); developing countries already spend \$30 billion annually on armaments. Eight percent of total US exports consist of arms exports (pp. 376-378).

But exports are simultaneously one of the most important drivers of economic growth. Therefore, the greater the emphasis on economic growth, the more arms exports can be expected. But the more arms exports, the more the developing world could fragment into power blocs, and dependence on the countries supplying the most advanced weapons would increase. Military purposes already account for 6 to 10% of scarce raw materials and energy. (For copper and bauxite, this was already 14% in 1970, for iron 7.5%, and for oil 5% - this is from official UN data). Surely *Scenario A* must lead to an even further increase in these absurd wasteful percentages?

These connections are, however, barely described in the report. Yet, on page 193 of the report, the first “guideline” for the world’s policymakers [311] reads: “to restore economic growth, and to

⁸⁷ see **Capitalism and Progress** 1979 pp.167-173 for equivalent English language section.

⁸⁸ Dutch *ontsluiting*

⁸⁹ Stockholm International Peace Research Institute <https://www.sipri.org/yearbook>

*openly acknowledge that its continuation constitutes a legitimate objective of government policy in developed countries”.*⁹⁰

Anyone reading such statements will inevitably question the impartiality of the authors of this report. Aren't they coming out of their shell after all? Leafing back through the report, we almost automatically arrive at page 2, where the official objective of the OECD as commissioning body is stated - an objective that I will again reproduce here:⁹¹

The OECD will promote policies designed to:

- promote the highest sustainable economic growth, employment, and rising living standards in member countries, while maintaining financial stability;
- contribute to economic expansion in both member and non-member countries;
- contribute to the expansion of world trade on a multilateral, non-discriminatory basis.

Expansion, a rising standard of living - this is the objective of the OECD itself, one of the most important international organizations to which almost all the rich countries of the world belong.

Limits and dangers of future models

The OECD report is one of the most brilliant foresight reports ever written. It demonstrates the enormous potential of what scientists can achieve when they try to predict the future based on current data. But at the same time, this report also serves as a model for the dangers associated with this and [312] the limits that must be observed.

At first glance, reports like these seem modest; a few scenarios are developed, and scientists leave politicians free to choose between them. But almost unnoticed, a deliberate direction is steered and, accordingly, advice is given. This creates the impression that it is primarily scientists to whom we should listen and who can provide solutions to today's global problems - if only politicians are willing to listen. And then the scientist retreats into his invulnerability; he doesn't predict, he leaves that to his model.⁹²

That this entails significant dangers is also evident when we consider the subtitle of this study: *“Mastering the probable, and managing the unpredictable.”* In plain English, this means that what is probable must be mastered, brought under our control, and that what remains unpredictable must, at the very least, be managed and governed. The authors of this report apparently also worked in this spirit. The future must be shaped and mastered with the help of science, and particularly scientific foresight. Would this be a perspective that is detached from the Western belief in progress - the belief in the effective guidance of science, technology, and economics in an uncertain future? To pose the question is to answer it. Here, science threatens to become an instrument of control for a society that, through its scientific governance, could become even more of a tunnel society than it has already become. Here, the science of the future threatens to take the place once held by the magicians at princely courts - unveiling the future and revealing the right paths; of course, even then with the necessary reservations.⁹³

[313] The comparison seems unfair. Indeed, scientific foresight can offer far more serious help than magical oracles. But a critical threshold is reached and crossed when scientists themselves, through their models, become all-encompassing advisors, and - more importantly - when their advice, especially when hired by policymakers, is considered by policymakers and the public as authoritative guidelines, a kind of revelation of the path we must follow in the future.

For the science that predicts life and the future also distorts it. By its very nature, any scientific approach is an aspect-based approach, incapable of any comprehensive judgment or advice. But

⁹⁰ This is the English translation of Goudzwaard's Dutch translation of the guideline. It reads in Dutch: *“de economische groei te herstellen, en openlijk te erkennen dat de voortgang daarvan een legitiem doel uitmaakt van het overheidsbeleid van de ontwikkelde landen.”*

⁹¹ *“De OESO zal vormen van politiek bevorderen die ontwo{pen zijn om:*
- de hoogst realiseerbare economische groei (the highest sustainable economic growth) en werkgelegenheid, en een stijgende levensstandaard in de lidstaten te bevorderen, onder handhaving van financiële stabiliteit;
- bij te dragen tot de economische expansie in zowel lidstaten als niet-lidstaten;
- bij te dragen tot de expansie van de wereldhandel op multilaterale, niet-discriminerende basis...”

⁹² Dutch: *En daarbij trekt dan de wetenschapper zich terug in zijn onkwetsbaarheid: hij voorspelt niet, maar zijn-model.*

⁹³ Dutch: *uiteraard ook toen met de nodige slagen om de arm.*

these limits of the scientific approach become even more apparent when reality is simulated in a model, in a system, as a basis for prediction and advice. For in every model, a part of reality dies. Connections most essential to life may be lost. A scientific model also has a tendency towards the quantitative; the qualitative can hardly be a basis for firm predictions. A scientific model also struggles to rely on standards, as paths that - despite all the uncertainties - can still be safely followed. These standards are too “soft” to be used for calculations. Goals and targets, rather than standards, unknowingly take center stage and determine the content of the recommendations. Scientists can hardly help this; the structure of their scientific, mathematical models simply requires it. They also cannot jump further than the length of their model’s pole⁹⁴ and the primarily quantitative parameters incorporated within it. They look into the future, but have only limited and pre-formed data from the past and present at their disposal. Therefore, [314] they cannot be reliable all-around guides for the future.

The OECD study “Facing the Future” will certainly not be the last - many similar future studies will undoubtedly follow. And it is certainly not inconceivable that, in the increasing chaos of our times, they will increasingly be regarded as the most reliable compasses to the future; those who disagree should try to find a better model. But that would allow Western society to cling even more rigidly to the Western belief in progress than is already the case.

Future models can help - certainly. But those who rely completely on them and surrender to them will not save themselves from the abyss toward which Western society itself now seems to be heading with great stubbornness.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ The metaphor is of pole vaulting used for “ditch jumping”.

⁹⁵ For more information, see: B. Goudzwaard, **Genoodzaakt goed te wezen**, Kok, Kampen 1982. (Translated by Mark Vander Vennen as **Idols of our Time** IVP 1984 and this outlook was then later developed in Bob Goudzwaard, Mark Vander Vennen and David van Heemst **Hope in Troubled Times: a new vision for confronting global crises**. Baker 2007. The final paragraph reads in Dutch: *Toekomstmodellen kunnen helpen - zeker. Maar wie er volkomen op steunt en er zich aan overlevert, redt zich niet van de afgrond waarop de westerse samenleving zelf nu met grote hardnekkigheid lijkt af te stevenen.*

Some selected passages for further close reading:

Bob Goudzwaard **Capitalism and Progress** 1979 pp. 33-35

4. EVALUATIVE INTERMEZZO

At this point there is merit, after everything that has been introduced, in drawing up a kind of balance sheet.

Goudzwaard reckons with the historical complexity of what he has just attempted to spell out. He proceeds as a teacher; he gives his readers a summarized view of what he has tried to do to this point, in preparation for his developed discussion of the roots of the societal inter-dependence of technology, democracy and capitalism in the modern age - how capitalism emerged in what is experienced as Western civilization. It is only page 33 so, we might say, he is going to provide a rough outline of his sketch of historical development from medieval society through to the Renaissance and then to the industrial revolution up until our time.

We began with a short description of medieval society. This society was characterized primarily by a vertical direction and a strictly hierarchical order in which technology was kept under control.

How is the historical past to be presented so that it can figure in our discussion? We can expect such a “short description” to rely upon metaphors of space as with “this society was characterized primarily by a vertical direction” as part of an attempt to capture the essence of social life. But it is the second half of the sentence where we read “a strictly hierarchical order” that the use of spatial metaphors is clarified. Then it becomes part of Goudzwaard’s brief explanation of how technology was restrained by a *Medieval* respect for nature. Presumably a key notion is that life on earth “below” is dependent upon what is given “from above.” And Goudzwaard in line with historiography sees this illustrated in public view via architectural forms that can still be seen across Europe.

These (Gothic) cathedrals which were built all over western Europe ... can be regarded as a mirror image of the society which gave birth to them. Like the Gothic cathedral, medieval society was structured vertically. Everything in it was ordered and related in such a manner as to ascend from the realm of nature to that which alone can ultimately provide meaning to earthly existence - the realm of grace. (p.4)

It was a society based on the profound awareness that earthly life is indeed ruled by the will and providence of God, and that, as soon as one pursued this earthly life as an end in itself, it would betray him.

Here Goudzwaard refers to the dominant attitude, that he will later on explain as the outworking of the inheritance bequeathed to Christendom from Augustine (354 - 430) (pp.16-20). Meanwhile the earthly manifestation of the Christian church was strictly hierarchical.

This “betrayal of earthly life”, the result of pursuing life as an end in itself, relies upon his reference to the Gothic Cathedrals to disclose to us the contrasting meaning of the pursuit of earthly life in that period before utilitarianism. Consider this statement:

The medieval cathedral, in its very architecture, proclaims that man’s natural life is not holy and perfect in itself but is constantly in need of sacramental mediation offered by the holy mother church which can raise natural man before the throne of the living God in heaven. (p.5)

In other words any attempt to live as if “natural life” is holy and perfect *in itself* will sooner or later be shown to be a futile existence.

In contrast to this outlook we saw that the Renaissance declared the earth and natural life to be the real domain of human existence. Through the domination

of nature, Renaissance man desired to prove his own dignity and grandeur as a rational being.

The Renaissance refers to a cultural revival in which human identity is not only enhanced by a life that controls nature but by a way of life in which human purpose is redefined in terms of honouring the dignity and grandeur of the human person. God's Providence and Judgement of human life in its entirety may be maintained in a formal (church) doctrinal sense, and the Renaissance may be interpreted as subject to the spiritual direction of a "Christian humanism" but as Goudzwaard says:

However, in due time an inevitable choice had to be made between two divergent convictions: between the belief that in the final analysis God directs the destiny of human life and the belief that man himself determines that destiny. (p.16)

But Goudzwaard adds that with the barrier of divine providence as taught and confessed by the Christian church of the Middle Ages,

(m)uch more was involved in this belief than a general realization that God rules the world. It clearly implied a condemnation of the pursuit of happiness and prosperity on the basis of man's own strength and potentials.

A choice has to be made. By whom? This is a *spiritual* choice of persons but those Medieval persons are not abstract individuals. This book seeks to give an account of the historical evolution by which it could come to be believed that the human person can, with time, be faithfully represented as the abstract individual of rational choice, *homo economicus*, that is when the spiritual, cultural and mental barriers have been removed.

Finally, we have traced how, under the influence of deism, the barrier of God's providence was razed and the notion of providence was reinterpreted to suit nearly opposite purposes.

The "balance sheet" is an historical *sketch* of the major transitions that are presupposed by Western society as we experience it in the late 20th century. The line goes like this: Christendom > Medieval society > Renaissance > Enlightenment > Industrial Revolution. The change in outlook had become evident in the transition departing from the Roman Catholic and scholastic view of divine providence.

Goudzwaard acknowledges the historical work of Johan Huizinga's **The Waning of the Middle Ages** (1924/1954).⁹⁶ The focus is upon the clearing away of that which stood in the way of the developments in economics and technology that are basic to his hypothesis that capitalism's "spark" can to be found in the faith in progress.

... it remains true that the cultural and social climate of the Middle Ages was marked by a clear allegiance to ecclesiastic rules and an orientation to the hereafter. As long as these dominated, they of course constituted a real barrier to the free unfolding of the forces of the economy and technology.

It is a *faith* that can justify the removal of what had stood in the way.

The order of nature was geared by divine providence to promote the interest of all those who wanted to make sure of their maximum earthly happiness - judged in terms of utility - by means of the free, natural operation of the market mechanism.

Instead of a *faith* in which earthly life attains its *meaning* on a lower level as means in a vertical process ascending to the realm of grace as *ends*, Renaissance human life on this planet is reconfigured horizontally, so that the fulfillment of earthly happiness is what is provided for when economic activity is inspired by its *freedom* within the natural order.

In this way, so it was argued, we can be certain not only that every man has a chance to determine his own destiny but also that social harmony and equilibrium are

achieved. In all this it is clear that the classical tradition of natural law was adjusted to serve the promotion of earthly bliss.

So it was *then* argued that it was important not only for economic life to develop freely but that the management of human labour, and the subsequent buying and selling, be structured to allow people to discover their own identity and self-sufficiency. Human life came to be redefined and re-structured according to an outlook that was *humanist*.

The entire discussion so far has focused on the razing of two barriers. But is this sufficient to explain the rise of capitalism? That is, have we dealt with every cultural obstacle to this development of western culture?

Goudzwaard's brevity at this point may tempt us to underestimate the importance of his explanation of a second barrier that had to be overcome to his entire argument. This second barrier was discussed in Chapter 3, "The Barrier of Fate and Providence". This "Evaluative Intermezzo" is then necessary to make the transition to the third barrier: Chapter 5 "The Barrier of the Lost Paradise" that brings us to "The Enlightenment, Reason and Progress". In other words this is a crucial step in Goudzwaard's account of how we have arrived at "modernity", as we have now experienced it.

So he doesn't summarise the second barrier in the simple, almost formulaic way, he had described Medieval society in terms of the Gothic Cathedral metaphor. He assumes that the comparison of the former *vertical* society is sufficient to emphasize the humanistic *horizontal* ordering of the latter Renaissance view.

But nevertheless we should, at this point, try to give a summary of the contribution of the razing of this second barrier. Life lived within a "Church and Heaven" frame of reference is reconfigured; to live within Western society means reckoning with "Church and Heaven" as but one way in which human strength and potential have hitherto built moral and political meaning. We live within the historical *consequences* of the ongoing historical *overturning* of the Medieval condemnation of the pursuit of happiness and prosperity on the basis of man's horizontal life being kept in place by its relation to the vertical.

Goudzwaard suggests that the change, the *overturning*, involves the affirmation of the *horizontal* in human affairs, in order for the *vertical* to retain its meaning. This *overturning* then had become so much a part of the inheritance of early-modern society.

This "Evaluative Intermezzo" comes immediately after his discussion of the "Barrier of Fate and Providence" (pp.16-32) as a crucial chapter of the entire volume. We read of the persistence of the magisterial contribution of Augustine (354-430) who took the Stoic idea of providence and re-cast it in Christian terms of the rule of the personal, living God's rule from day to day, a rule that pertains to both God's own city and the city of this world.

Goudzwaard gives an extensive exposition of Augustine's commentary on Psalm 137 on the rivers of Babylon and how they flow under God's preserving providence.⁹⁷ It is Augustine's view, that had become embedded in the Medieval and Christian outlook, that: "as soon as one pursued this earthly life as an end in itself, it would betray him."

In these streams man lets himself be swept along of his own free will to the shipwreck which awaits him at the end.... Insofar as faith in divine providence entails the preparation of this world for its own destruction, it clearly constitutes an enormous barrier to every pursuit of happiness by economic and technological means. If taking destiny in your own hands is equal to calling forth your own fate, then any development toward an expansive capitalist society is doomed. (p.19)

Thus such a view of human industry stands in the way of capitalist society. And the problem Goudzwaard addresses concerns the change in the nature and character of "natural law" that requires the removal of

... the barrier of the divine shaping of history's destiny, which is part and parcel of the spiritual legacy of medieval society... (p.20)

⁹⁷ This exposition is summarised in an earlier essay "Wat is Normaal in het Sociaal-Economische Leven?" in H. Algra ed. **Wat is Normaal?** 1974, 20-33. (What is normal in social-economic life?)

This, Goudzwaard affirms, was a massive undertaking and is the path taken by an intellectual outlook concerning “natural law” that is basic to the dominance of capitalism
... *which replaces God and executes the role of providence in the world.* (p.21)

And consequently Deism, while maintaining the term providence, fills it with religiously neutral content in which

God becomes a working hypothesis who can, in fact, easily be eliminated at a later stage. (p. 21)

And from there Goudzwaard proceeds to outline the economics of Adam Smith (1723-1790), the development of the science of economics, and the father of utilitarianism, Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832). This then gives a brief sketch of ground covered so that Goudzwaard can now outline his understanding of capitalism.

There is an important *unspoken* dimension of his analysis. When he refers to “Church and Heaven” and “Fate and Providence” he is the *self-critical* engagement of his readers. How, for example, is one to understand one’s relationship to “church”?; how does one pray “Our Father in Heaven ...”?; how is one viewing one’s life within God’s creation and Christ’s redemption? This *historical* discussion is deeply personal without telling the readers how they should answer these questions. These may be unspoken and left implicit, but they are presumed to be part of the *personal* process of considering the “modern story”.

(34) Let us briefly review the most essential elements of modern capitalism as described above. Modern capitalism is that societal structure (1) in which the legal order, the prevailing public morality, as well as the organization of socioeconomic life grant unobstructed admission to the forces of economic growth and technological development; and (2) in which those forces subsequently manifest themselves by way of a process of “natural selection” as it is given shape by a continual competition in the market between independent production units organized on the basis of returns on capital.

Notice Goudzwaard’s sociological view that capitalism is to be considered as a *structure*, a societal structuration, an arrangement of social elements that presupposes a view of law, morality and its own view of historical development. As a structure it is also a consequence of a certain way of arranging economic life in terms of production, marketing, buying and selling as well as consumption.

With this in mind, we can answer the above questions affirmatively in several respects, for even before the beginning of the nineteenth century a spiritual climate was established which displayed these characteristics:

What are the “above questions”? Can the razing of the two barriers provide a sufficient explanation for the rise of capitalism? Has every cultural obstacle to this development of western culture been dealt with? What then follows now is a list.

1. The urge for economic and technological renewal is considered essential to man’s self-realization, which is attained through interaction with nature (Renaissance).
2. The urge for economic and technological renewal is made possible by the notion that free competition belongs to the providential plan as embodied in the natural order in which the equilibrium of the market leads to social harmony (deism).
3. The urge for economic and technological renewal is justified from the outset by the legal norms of the revived natural law conception which regards every price as just if it is a result of free competition, and which

further views the task of the government as limited primarily to the protection of the already existing rights of property and contract.

4. And, finally, the urge for economic and technological renewal is also justified from the outset on the basis of the moral norms of a utilitarian ethic - developed in particular after 1750 - which evaluates human activities only in terms of utility effects and which considers the increasing acquisition of goods for humankind as the most important source of utility.

These four characteristics constitute the spiritual blue-print of capitalism.

Notice Goudzwaard is saying that this is a spiritual blue-print for a distinct way of life.

Once they have been accepted, the way is cleared for the process of free competition, including the reorganization of socioeconomic relationships if required for the optimum success of free competition.

Notice also that the term “free competition” does not necessarily limit the kinds of “products” that might be produced to compete in the marketplace.

Law and morality function as a justification for competition. Finally, the legal task of the [35] government in the realization of competition consists in keeping out of it.

The Puritan Pilgrim viewed the task of finding the path *out of this world*, to be the providential purpose for living in this world. Is it in a somewhat similar way that the purpose of government in economic affairs is to stay out, to allow free market competition to run its course. Economic life is *reality sui generis*. It is a prime task of Government to ensure that this is so.

Nevertheless, with this summary we have not as yet dealt with every condition that must be met if a capitalistic society is to be established. We are looking at a kind of blueprint,⁹⁸ but this blueprint has to be given shape; it has to be brought to life. The spiritual spark is still missing.

As he has formulated the above, we might read that list as a check list and confirm that it corresponds to what we experience of the Capitalist economy in our lives. But this is not just descriptive - the book's sub-title is “A Diagnosis of Western Society” and we recall how the book began with discussion of the importance of finding the common root of the diverse global problems that confront us. The question becomes: How does Capitalism relate to the various intersecting and so difficult to resolve problems we experience?

Could it be that, in effect, the *western faith in progress* is this life-giving element? Could it be that in this faith we recognize the *decisive spark*, at first touching a small elite but gradually also reaching the masses?

Here then is Goudzwaard's hypothesis to be tested in what is to follow!

This is a highly interesting and important question which deserves a careful answer. In our search for an answer we may well discover the third and possibly the most crucial barrier to the rise of capitalism.

⁹⁸ Notice what he says here about “blueprints” as it contrasts with what he has outlined here (“No Ready Blueprint” pp.71-75)

Goudzwaard introduces the question of the modern, indeed capitalist view of the future. Where is our economic life headed?

This is the barrier of paradise lost. In the medieval age, earthly paradise was indeed considered lost. This consciousness limited its temporal aspirations. But can the modern age accept such limits?

We hear an echo of the Faustian motive of total dominance.

Isn't the modern age characterized by the effort to overcome these limits in its quest to regain paradise on earth? These questions need our careful attention.

The reader is hereby introduced to what follows in this book. The sense of a lost paradise in the past has to be replaced by a Utopia, a Golden Era *in the future*. Capitalism is fired by a faith that those who will occupy this future bliss will look back upon us and see that it was our faith in progress that has enabled them to experience their Golden Age.

THE VICTORY OF UTILITARIANISM

This complex of nearly unmanageable inflation and chronic unemployment can be traced back to the dominant place in our society given to technologically founded economic progress, measured in terms of maximum production of consumption goods.

Goudzwaard's argument focuses upon the relationship between inflation and unemployment. His initial study in 1959 as a Kuyper Foundation Researcher for the *Antirevolutionaire Staatskunde* sought to explain the rationale for industrial legislation as the effort to justly regulate the inflation-unemployment relationship.⁹⁹ Here, two decades later, Bob seems to be suggesting that the possibility of legislative control of the relationship between inflation and unemployment has been lost as long as belief is maintained in a "technologically founded economic progress, measured in terms of maximum production of consumption goods". And would this not further imply a widespread, even global, commitment to a way of life that has as its goal happiness from an ever-increasing level of consumption?

Inflation is a natural by-product of a societal system which is so strongly oriented to *economic* progress that it is in permanent need of additional monetary injections. At the same time structural unemployment is a spontaneous by-product of the sovereign penetration of *technological* progress, which continually augments the productivity of labor. The connection between these two social ills and our cultural progress also can be illustrated by the relationship between these ills and the profound influence of utilitarianism on the entire western style of life.¹⁰⁰

The opening line of the paragraph concerning chronic unemployment and unmanageable inflation suggests he has deepened his understanding from when he composed his 1959 publication. We might even wonder whether the discovery of this state of affairs has been an added spur to publish this book. Here is a "problem" that has been considered by economists to this day.

The subsequent discussion of this final section Chapter 13 titled "The Vulnerability of the System" (pp.139-141) comprises Goudzwaard's critical statement of the utilitarian profession of faith, its ethics and its implied "horizon of happiness". We include it here without comment.

We have already discussed utilitarianism in Part One of this book.¹⁰¹

Utilitarianism is a type of ethics which neglects the motives underlying human action and pays attention exclusively to the effects of such action in terms of increased or decreased utility. Actions resulting in increased utility for the individual as well as society are considered morally good. We have observed

⁹⁹ "De economische politiek en het conjunctuur-vraagstuk" *Antirevolutionaire Staatskunde* 1959, 29 pp. 264-285 ("Economic policy and the business-cycle")

¹⁰⁰ **BG ftn 22.** To my knowledge, Dr. A. B. Cramp of Cambridge University is the first economist who pointed out this relationship. Cf. his publication **Notes towards a Christian Critique of Secular Economic Theory** (Toronto: Institute for Christian Studies, 1975), Provisional Paper. See also: Anthony B Cramp "Is there an expert in the house?" *The Guide* November 1974 pp.10-11,

¹⁰¹ **BG ftn 23.** See section "Utility and Morality," pp. 29ff.

how utilitarianism provided strong moral support for the initial start of the industrial revolution. It was an ethics *placed in the service of economic expansion*. If the most important form of utility or happiness is the availability of consumption goods, and the most important disutility the “pain of labor” performed to obtain these goods, then of course every effort to provide society with the prospects of more products and more leisure time becomes useful and is declared ethically good.

[140] **P**ersons and groups engaged in economic activities always have a certain *horizon of happiness* in view. By this I mean the level of aspiration or the range and intensity of well-being which persons and groups pursue by means of their actions. The horizon of happiness constitutes the frame of reference for the search of meaning and joy in life.

It cannot be denied that our horizon of happiness, particularly since the industrial revolution, has clearly been reduced to a typical utilitarian one. Western man was led to believe that he was capable of obtaining well-being for himself by means of the greatest possible surplus of “utilities” over “disutilities”. This constitutes the framework of action of the labor organizations in their battle for higher wages and better working conditions. It also forms the pattern for industrial operations, and it shapes the activities of modern governments which can establish a welfare state only on the basis of “utilities” or consumption possibilities which they provide for their citizens from the cradle to the grave.

A consistently maintained utilitarianism, constituting the horizon of happiness for all people and groups, produces a particular kind of society. It is a society oriented to progress in utilitarian terms, that is, the greatest possible surplus in “utilities” compared with sacrificed “disutilities”. That, according to the rules of utilitarianism, is the only progress ethically justifiable. This means concretely that society has to be structured in such a way that its members are enabled to acquire the most in goods (utilities) for the least in labor (disutilities).

Against this background we can better understand basic trends in our society. In the first place, the continual growth in productivity of labor in western economies becomes more comprehensible. Increased productivity guarantees that with a given labor effort (disutility) more goods (utilities) can be produced. In this way true happiness for all, in the utilitarian sense of the word, is promoted and secured. In the second place, from this vantage point it is efficient, useful, and therefore good to make industrial decisions in terms of only one criterion: the productivity of labor. The application of this criterion will not prevent the mind-numbing repetition of piecework nor the utter

monotony of the assembly line, since the net result of such practices may still be most useful in terms of income obtained (utility) and labor saved (disutility). Thirdly, in this light the problem of growing inflation and increasing unemployment can be [141] understood afresh. Inflation is, of course, directly related to the general pursuit of more buying power necessary to acquire “utilities” for the individual or for the group to which he belongs. But increasing technological unemployment also is clearly a natural result of the utilitarian horizon of happiness. This limited horizon teaches individuals - and therefore society - to regard labor in every circumstance as a disutility to be avoided as much as possible.

In this light today’s increasing structural unemployment is exactly what we should expect. It is direct evidence of the enormous “progress”, in utilitarian terms, which enabled us to produce large quantities of goods with a minimal “sacrifice” of labor as a whole. In this technological unemployment we are therefore, however painfully, directly confronted with the consequences of our *own* horizon of happiness. It is a mark of the victory of a culture which is utilitarian both in thought and life, a culture which we obviously continue to promote daily with our economic activities.

DISCLOSURE OF SOCIETY

In view of this we must conclude that our most essential problems can be solved only when the place of progress itself in society is openly discussed.

Disclosure takes place within human responsibility, and so within ongoing discussion. That is what Goudzwaard has been doing in this book. The book's aim is to promote informed discussion, and also informed economic discussion. Informed economic discussion may lead to positive developments, to opening up, disclosure, of new opportunities for service.

Only in open confrontation with that light at the end of the tunnel,¹⁰² that beckoning but forever receding and hence imprisoning goal, can we find real solutions. In order to contribute to this discussion I would like to introduce a new concept, namely, that of the *disclosure of society* or, to use a commonly accepted term, the striving for an *open society*.¹⁰³

We are not only dealing with an "open confrontation" with "unmanageable inflation and chronic unemployment" in relation to any Government's commercial, industrial and fiscal legislative agenda; the exercise must also involve confrontation with the economic theory of John Maynard Keynes. There is more to the confrontation than merely "thinking along" with Keynes and why his theory has remained unable to indicate a way to prevent the persistent tunnel vision. The confrontation is the struggle with forming a way of life that would turn away from living ideologically in terms of an idolatrous *horizon of happiness*. That would mean refusing to find meaning by maintaining an orientation that seeks to be guided by the light at the end of the tunnel. It would mean a way of life that no longer travels down this imprisoning path with its imprisoning goal.

What is meant by disclosure?

Indeed the question must be asked. And a way must be found to discuss human responsibility that *discloses* its true character.

This term is intended to express a direction of human life quite distinct from that of a tunnel society. Disclosure implies the recovery of the meaning and value of human life outside of its subjection and service to progress.

Goudzwaard is not holding back from insisting that the utilitarian outlook, with its modified Keynesian "tunnel" vision, needs to be displaced by another way of viewing our human responsibility.

In the context of our entire discussion it means life's liberation from the closed horizon of a deadly servility to the narrow goals which we established for ourselves by accepting progress as the essence of western culture.

¹⁰² This is a reference to Keynes. "*Avarice and usury and precaution must be our gods for a little longer still. For only they can lead us out of the tunnel of economic necessity into daylight. For after all, the road to the shining end will no longer be long, it may even be reached in the time of our grandchildren: I see us free, therefore to return to some of the most sure and certain principles of religion and traditional virtue - that avarice is a vice... and the love of money is detestable... We shall once more value ends above means and prefer the good to the useful.*" **Essays in Persuasion**, New York 1936 p 372. The review of **Capitalism and Progress** by W J S Gilbreath "The Political Economy of the Disclosed Society: a Response to Bob Goudzwaard" *Crux* 21, 1, March 1985 pp. 22-24 misses Goudzwaard's reference to Keynes's "tunnel" concept.

¹⁰³ **BG Ftn. 51** A discussion of the philosophical parallel of the concept of disclosure can be found in the writings of Herman Dooyeweerd and some of his associates. For Dooyeweerd, see his **A New Critique of Theoretical Thought**, 4 vols. (Amsterdam: Paris; Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1953-58), vol. 2, pp. 181-330; and **Roots of Western Culture: Pagan, Secular, and Christian Options** (Toronto: Wedge, 1979), chapters 3 and 4. See also L Kalsbeek, **Contours of a Christian Philosophy: An Introduction to Herman Dooyeweerd's Thought** (Toronto: Wedge, 1975), pp. 126-141.

Disclosure, as Goudzwaard uses the term, refers to a view of life subject to the Divine law-order, the conditions, or more exactly preconditions, for the responsible formation of human stewardship, the unlocking of possibilities, newly discovered, one step at a time that when taken means considering next possible steps.

Disclosure, therefore, is first of all a process in which the *norms* for human life - like justice, trust, and truth - regain their original validity for our decisions and acts, also with respect to that broad range of decisions and acts where at present the criteria of progress are of overwhelming importance.

What does “original validity” mean here? Is Goudzwaard wanting to *re-establish* the intellectual outlook of former times, promoting some kind of intellectual irredentist reaction? I do not think so. The phrase affirms that normative principles of human life have always held for human life *from the get go, whenever and wherever human life is to be lived*. Having used the word “original validity” Goudzwaard appeals to his Christian creational beliefs. To be human is to be creaturely, subject to God’s *normative standards*. These standards are not subject to change even as human responsibility develops, as cultural life is *disclosed*. Disclosure, as Goudzwaard insists, is *not first and foremost* about attaining goals.

Secondly, in a process of disclosure, cultural *institutions* and societal forms - like governments, trade unions, and economic enterprises - regain opportunities to develop themselves according to their own distinct responsibilities.

Here again is a word that needs to be emphasised: *disclosure* is a process by which developmental opportunities are *regained*. Why regained? These developmental opportunities have been flattened, if not entirely lost, by life constrained by the ongoing effort to progress on to reach the light, the goal at the end of the utilitarian “tunnel”.

Finally, a process of disclosure removes the unbridled pressure on the individual *person* to adjust his or her habits and behavior to external demands.

Disclosure brings forth a hopeful context in which human responsibility is able to re-emerge in its fullest scope.

In an opened society the individual is no longer forced to exist as an anonymous object, a receptacle or plaything of economic, technical and scientific progress.

Here, in particular, Goudzwaard is comparing the disclosure of human potential with the flattening of human experience conceived as the end-less negotiation of means to ends in order to find happiness in material wealth or the rewards of goal-attainment.

Disclosure implies that every day life is intended to have its own meaning; that today’s significance is not exhausted in what it may contribute to tomorrow’s needs and wants.

The here and now has its own creational and redeemed *meaning*; the experiences of today are not to be glossed over or neglected in an incessant striving to move on, to get to the next task. See here especially Goudzwaard’s challenging paragraphs in the section titled *The Vulnerability of Western Man* (142-150) and especially the section *Scarcity of time* (148-149).¹⁰⁴ The irony of this statement is that it confronts the reader with the searching question as to whether this statement is going to be given due respect by us taking the *time* to adequately consider its consequences!

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“Nearly everyone in western society suffers from a frightful shortage of time. A new saying has it that in the past people perished from lack of food but today they perish from lack of time. This lack of time is apparent not only from the quick tempo of our lives and from our crowded schedules, but also from the manner in which the modern family spends its time.” (*Capitalism and Progress* p.148)

If we are to find a point of departure for the solution of [187] society's problems which have so intently occupied our attention in this book, we will have to search for it in the context of the *disclosure of society* itself.

We read *this* sentence to not only affirm our aim to search for further disclosure "*in the context of the disclosure of society itself*" in other words what has previously been disclosed through historical formation. But in doing so "we" are urged to become part of an ongoing corporate task that is intensely personal. Here, in his discussion, Goudzwaard's personal contribution is already disclosed as intertwined with corporate responses he seeks to promote.

NO READY BLUEPRINT

Having arrived at this point, however, I am in danger of being fundamentally misunderstood, especially by those who - spurred on by the brief sketch of a society in disclosure - now look forward to a manageable and concrete program of action.

In a review of this book (see ftn. 101 above and ftn.104 below) a reviewer chides Goudzwaard for writing his book. W J S Gilbreath has read **Capitalism and Progress** problematically and views him as simply identifying the pile of problems that prevent, as he sees it, the ideal society from coming into view.¹⁰⁵

I will be the last to deny that disclosure can be a matter of concrete action; that will become evident in subsequent pages.

Perhaps the statement could have been phrased positively - but how can it be said without appearing to give oneself a gold medal for being able to reckon with the fact that disclosure presupposes concrete action? The character of disclosure - as Goudzwaard articulates it - relates to human subjectivity to the norms that are given with our creaturely responsibility, inherent in our human walk *coram Deo*.

But the impression that it is merely a matter of the expert design and execution of a clear blueprint for a better society must immediately be dispelled. Three weighty considerations withhold me from such a misconception.

At this point, Goudzwaard is also dispelling the presumption that he should view himself as one of the expert elite - whether that be via his status as a PhD in economics, a public policy researcher, an advisor to Parliamentarians, a Parliamentarian himself or even as a university professor. Whatever experts can do, whether university professors, wise law-making Parliamentarians or as writers of such a tome as this, all such endeavour being significant and necessary, needing to be affirmed - disclosure is not a design or blueprint,

¹⁰⁵

And so Gilbreath concludes: "In view of all these problems, it is not surprising that Goudzwaard is short on specifics. Indeed, he forthrightly acknowledges this: *The purpose of this study has not for a moment been the spelling out of a precise program.* It is common for social critics to speak in terms of highminded ideals and avoid discussing the detailed particulars of their progress. As Michael Novak has observed, this confers upon the critics a false moral superiority over realists who delve into the messy facts of everyday life. "It is far easier to organize words on paper than to organize workable programs in reality" (Michael Novak **The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism** 1982 p.200)" The reviewer hardly addresses the issue Bob was discussing at that point because he has simply taken half of the sentence and drawn his conclusion in the Novak style. The statement is found in the Epilogue of **Capitalism and Progress**. "*The purpose of this study has not for a moment been the spelling out of a precise program, or the drawing up of blueprints for a "completely disclosed society" - whatever that may be. Rather, the purpose was to make two things clear. In the first place, nearly all of our societal problems are a reflection of ourselves - of what we are in our lifestyles, our culture, our outlook, our vision of life. Societal problems are not merely "structural." They are also "cultural" in the sense that they are the fruit of western civilization and the style of life it affords. In the second place, because of this background we are not entitled to look upon our predicament as a fate that is overcoming us. References to fate, to an inescapable destiny of western civilization, are avenues of escaping our responsibility in history. Such escape attempts, in effect, to accept the autonomy of the powers of science, technology, and economics. This book has been written on the basis of the belief that this autonomy is pretended, never real. An acceptance of fate leads to a decline in responsibility.*" (p.247) Nevertheless the misquoting gives a perspective of the reviewer that needs to be considered in detail in order to reveal its fatalistic presuppositions. Goudzwaard has actually written a response to Novak's economics. <https://www.marketsandmorality.com/index.php/mandm/article/view/718>

but a process arising from maintaining cultural development according to norms of justice, trust, truth. Goudzwaard is aware his motives for writing this work can be misunderstood.¹⁰⁶

In the first place, the design and execution of a new blueprint for society might well lead us toward, rather than away from, a closed society.

Goudzwaard is here suggesting that any human formulation, perhaps also his own book, even if it were to be from his standpoint a misunderstanding, can be given a weight heavier than it deserves.

Before we would realize it, such a blueprint could take the place of a new societal goal which, because of its overriding importance, could lay claim to everything and everyone.

And so here is the persistent critical theme of his contribution to Christian social and economic thinking:

Thinking from the perspective of norms creates the greatest certainty concerning the steps which ought to be made at the beginning: the thinking from the perspective of future goals renders uncertain precisely those first steps which ought to be taken. However, in thinking and acting from a norm perspective, means that the final future remains considerably more vague than it does from concerted planning in terms of realizing proposed goals.¹⁰⁷

It is perhaps appropriate to point that Goudzwaard is aware of the subtle process by which Christianity can be transformed into an ideology.

Disclosure is not to be equated with the goal of attaining a disclosed society.

This may be another way of saying what he has set forth on p.65 of **Capitalism and Progress** in relation to T.P. van der Kooy's astute observation. "...economic life can unfold its own meaning and significance only when a *simultaneous realization* of norms takes place."

It is not a goal; rather, it is a process. It is the opening up and unshackling of a society which has become entangled in the toils of obedience to the autonomous forces of progress.

Here is further articulation of the term's meaning. It would also seem to be a process that historians will need to search for as they seek to construct their historiographical narratives.

The disclosure of a society may therefore follow paths on which not every step of the way can be foreseen. It will occur spontaneously in totally unexpected places and along avenues which have not been mapped out. It is not a prefabricated package.

Human responsibility within the normative conditions of life means steps have to be taken - one step at a time. With each step, new possibilities may open up ...

Secondly, every program for an ideal society should be greeted with a healthy measure of skepticism. The great illusion of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment that liberty, equality, and fraternity would blossom forth spontaneously with a new direction in society was quickly followed by disillusionment. Gandhi once said that no structure of society can be so good that it can overcome the evil in man.

¹⁰⁶ As with the egregious misrepresentation of Gary North - see below ftn.108.

¹⁰⁷ Bob Goudzwaard & John van Baars "Norms for the International Economic Order" **Justice in the International Economic Order**, Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference of Reformed Institutions for Christian Higher Education, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, 13-19 August 1978 pp. 223-253. at p.247.

It is not only the present “system” of “social structure” that requires critical evaluation. All efforts to change and improve social and cultural life, along with the programmes, will need to be viewed with critical discernment.

Putting all your eggs in the basket of necessary change in the structure of society, while being silent about man as the permanent source of evil, is a dangerous ideology. Even a successful process of disclosure cannot bring us to an ideal society. That kind of society is not a product of our hands.

What does the phrase “That kind of society” refer to? It is not so much an appeal to “an ideal society” - Goudzwaard is no idealist; in fact he has written often enough that in social-cultural terms he would want his work to be understood as bathed in a healthy (normative sense of) realism, facing social life as it is presented to us rather than construing social relations in terms of what we would like them to be. This is an important issue that broaches the “classic” sociological question of the relationship between empirical reality (facts) and the worldview from which social-cultural life is analysed (values).

A sense of relativity is therefore indispensable [188] when we speak and think about the disclosure of society. Disclosure cannot be a question of the total and complete healing of society.

Going through these qualifications one by one we recognize that Goudzwaard is reaching for ways to convey a leading-idea that he has grasped about the character of human experience and creaturely reality. Dooyeweerd’s philosophy refers to the “subject/object” relation that is inherent in our experience of creaturely reality under the God maintained law-order. Humans are structured in self-insufficiency according to Dooyeweerd:

... Our ego express[ing] itself as a totality in the coherence of all its functions within all the modal aspects of cosmic reality. And man, whose ego expresses itself in the coherence of all its temporal modal functions, was himself created by God as the expression of His image.

This universal character of referring and expressing, which is proper to our entire created cosmos, stamps created reality as meaning, in accordance with its dependent non-self-sufficient nature. Meaning is the being of all that has been created and the nature even of our selfhood. It has a religious root and a divine origin.¹⁰⁸

We do have good grounds for expecting certain traces or elements of healing to become visible in a process of disclosure, but only to the extent that people themselves are prepared to accept responsibility for it.

Goudzwaard is also writing with confidence that humanity is charged with a mandate to cultivate the earth and bring it to fruition. In other places, Goudzwaard will refer by contrast to the growth and *disclosure* of the tree when he is contrasting disclosure’s *organic* characteristics with the flattening mechanistic characteristics of a “tunnel society.”¹⁰⁹

The third objection is directly connected with the last point. A program of action drawn up to carry out a blueprint evokes the impression of a short-term realization of objectives. But disclosure is greater than this, in both scope and penetration.

It is important to develop humble projects. Short-term efforts to realize objectives cannot be avoided, but disclosure will not be organized.

It touches society in its totality, for it involves not only a change in the entire societal perspective and idea of meaning (the religious dimension), but also in

¹⁰⁸ Herman Dooyeweerd **A New Critique of Theoretical Thought** Vol.1 p.4

¹⁰⁹ Bob Goudzwaard “We need a fruit tree, not a tunnel” *Dossier* Vol.14#5 Laidlaw Foundation Canada.

lifestyle and social values (the cultural dimension), as well as in the distribution of tasks and responsibilities in society (the structural dimension). It is nothing short of the moving of mountains.

When disclosure happens, it touches society in a comprehensive way.

For those who have followed the overall argument of this book so far, the last statement cannot come as a surprise.

Goudzwaard is trying to point out that readers need to ensure that they have recognized the immensity of the problems that he has been describing and analyzing and hence find a way to encourage cultural development in the context of such hegemonic utilitarianism.

Social structures are more than methods of societal organization or management systems. They are rooted in a culture and in a belief about the meaning of human life.

Again the emphasis has been upon *belief, faith*. As pointed out above with respect to “The Victory of Utilitarianism”, one cannot properly appraise this system if one does not reckon with how it grounds people in a way of life, with taken-for-granted self-evident beliefs. He had concluded that section in these words:

In this light today's increasing structural unemployment is exactly what we should expect. It is direct evidence of the enormous “progress”, in utilitarian terms, which enabled us to produce large quantities of goods with a minimal “sacrifice” of labor as a whole. In this technological unemployment we are therefore, however painfully, directly confronted with the consequences of our own horizon of happiness. It is a mark of the victory of a culture which is utilitarian both in thought and life, a culture which we obviously continue to promote daily with our economic activities. (p.141)

This is the insight concerning the “success”, the “victory” of utilitarianism that Tony Cramp of Cambridge University acknowledged in the way unemployment and inflation had been successfully linked by economic policies dominated by utilitarianism. See the ftn. 99 above and Cramp's booklet “Notes Towards a Christian critique of Secular Economic theory.” (Institute for Christian Studies 1975) This linkage is rooted in the (utilitarian) culture of western economies.

That is also why my sketch of the rise of capitalism has depicted a process in which not only structural but also cultural and religious barriers had to be broken through.

Goudzwaard senses that his analysis might be received without reckoning with this development of a comprehensive *way of life*. It is not only Christianity or Marxism that seeks to bring about transformations in society in terms of what people believe. He has tried to chart the victory of the utilitarian faith in progress at the heart of capitalism.

If that is true of the rise of capitalism, then effective realization of the disclosure of society will certainly not involve fewer obstacles.

Goudzwaard's analysis is subtle: if the reductionistic utilitarian way of life meant systematic and progressive removal of all barriers, then any resistance to that way will also involve an unremitting adherence, to a way of life over generations, that seeks a blossoming social life enriched with the simultaneous realization of “the norms of economic development and those of ethics, the norms of justice and of the unfolding of technique which ought never to be played off against each other.” (p.65)

Disclosure implies a genuine change in the order of society because progress may no longer function as the absolute criterion for society. But this change, in turn, has no chance of success, now or in the future, unless it is supported

culturally by society as a whole,¹¹⁰ and harmonizes with what people in that society as a whole experience as the meaning of life. In material terms alone, societal disclosure may require such sacrifices that people will simply shrink back from it. The road to societal disclosure is not only difficult to find; it is also difficult to travel.

Goudzwaard's diagnosis pinpoints the cause of the disease of Western society. It is not progress *per se*, it is the ideological commitment to *progress as absolute*, as *means* (subjective commitment to progress) and *goal* (objectively quantifiable increase in consumption = happiness) Goudzwaard is not appealing to individuals to take up the "disclosure" task as if it is a campaign, say for equality of human rights, in some or other dimension of social responsibility.

What follows below, therefore, presents no program of action. *It can perhaps best be described as a search for the necessary conditions for the disclosure of our society, coupled with a number of personal thoughts on how those conditions might be met.* I have neither the right nor the desire to make greater claims. But that need not rob the attempt of significance, for only on the basis of some knowledge of the possibilities and conditions of [189] disclosure can we individually and collectively consider whether the price is not too high, and whether it is indeed worthwhile to pursue this route.

THE BARRIERS REVISITED

To get a clearer picture of the content of these conditions, it may be useful to call to mind the three barriers encountered in Part One of this book: of church and heaven, of fate and providence, and of paradise lost. It was no accident that these barriers constituted a watershed between two totally different types of social order.

The two totally different types of social order are the medieval-hierarchical (scholastic Christendom) on the one hand and, on the other, the post-Enlightenment, (humanistic) industrial revolution society with its democratic and utilitarian culture. The three barriers to be identified, their particular power in maintaining the pre-modern social structure were: of church and heaven, of fate and providence, and of paradise lost.

What is meant by these three as barriers? Clearly they are not social institutions but ways of construing the world - we might say components of a "world-view" - for living within the inherited spiritual, cultural and mental constraints of medieval society.

If we must consider a fundamental change in our society, then the recollection of these barriers can help us discern the true nature and difficulty of our problems. On our way out of the existing tunnel society we might well

¹¹⁰ An interesting exchange can be found between Goudzwaard and his mentor Jan Tinbergen as part of their deliberations in the 1982 Dutch Post-Keynesian Economics Study Group. Goudzwaard's paper "Economic value and the purposes and instruments of economic policy: a commentary" is commented upon by Tinbergen's "Economische waarde en de doeleinden en instrumenten van economisch beleid" (Economic value and the purposes and instruments of economic policy) B de Gaay Fortman (ed) **Economie en Waarde** Samsom Uitgeverij Alphen aan den Rijn/Brussel 1982. pp. 137-162. There are also responses by other group members. Goudzwaard's exposition of an 'economic policy of enough', redefines economic value not in terms of perpetual growth in production and consumption, but of "sustainability". Tinbergen expresses sympathy for an 'economic policy of enough' but notes the lack of cultural support that will have to be overcome before it can be realistically implemented. This suggests an "idealistic" reading of Goudzwaard's policy, lacking due realism, but his policies have addressed the instruments that would have to deal in an ongoing way with the many in society who have not yet reached the "enough" threshold. Sustained political education of the citizenry is needed for such policy. Goudzwaard's comments here indicate his awareness of such a criticism of such a policy.

encounter resistances comparable to those which arose in connection with these earlier barriers.

Goudzwaard assumes and emphasizes that he is seeking the way out of utilitarian flattening - even of the culture that demonstrates utilitarian victory or success. This may also mean an understanding of Christian discipleship as a “way” that will lead to the disclosure of a renewed understanding of what it means to be a Christian congregation. Membership in the Body of Christ is not something to be sought in order to return to some lost paradise, in order to return to some past constellation of how “church” was organised. It may mean a new appreciation of how we are to live, day by day, supporting each other as members of the Body of Christ.

Perhaps we can approach the same topic in another, albeit more speculative way. The three barriers owed their significance largely to the fact that they had to be successively razed in order for the West to move from the medieval social order to capitalism.

This is, admittedly, not so much speculative as anticipatory, looking forward with hope. It is hard to see immediately what Goudzwaard has in mind. But the “way out” is not a “return” to a previous dispensation. It may well mean confrontation with restrictive forces that, paradoxically, are maintained by those seeking to restore the removed barriers from previous times that then gave a humanistic momentum to “western” progress.¹¹¹ Goudzwaard doesn’t identify the disclosure of a Christian way with any particular place and task of Christian people or congregations. But this is an issue that needs to be taken up.

At the same time they functioned, as it were, in the opposite direction. When capitalism was established, they prevented it from returning to the earlier medieval structure of society. In other words, once barriers have been taken, they cut off escape, and leave open only the road ahead. But why should the limiting and hindering effect of the barriers, once taken, be exclusively a matter of the past? Is it not possible that these three barriers continue to surround our social order to this day, closing it off from every other fundamentally different direction but that of blind material progression?

There is no “return” in history. Once barriers have been surmounted they cannot be put back into their former place of constraint. Are we not on the “other side” of those three razed and surmounted barriers - Church and Heaven; Fate and Providence; Lost Paradise - and do they not still pertain to our circumstances *but in the opposite sense*? Goudzwaard suggests that they now may close off the path and we wonder how they do that without being constraining in spiritual, cultural and mental ways. Every day we confront the question of whether we are subject to the fate of a “blind material progression”. The razing of barriers to Medieval constraint still maintains a powerful hold on social and cultural life. Is the answer to be found in a “new monasticism”? Goudzwaard’s answer is “No” but he notes that further discussion will be needed.

¹¹¹ **Capitalism and Progress** is accused by Gary North to be Goudzwaard’s attempt to promote a disguised medieval “guild socialism”. https://www.garynorth.com/freebooks/docs/pdf/millennialism_and_social_theory.pdf Like Gilbreath and Novak, North quotes “*What follows, therefore, presents no program of action*” (*C&P* p.188) ignoring the italicised comment that follows - see above p.73. Moreover, it hardly recognizes that it was written *from within the author’s own participation in a political programme*. The criticism of Goudzwaard’s testing of his hypothesis for the study of “Comparative Economic Systems” that hones in on his analysis not providing a “programme” suggests a political programme, on the part of such critics, that is *ideologically* driven, one might say it is complying with the view that one’s commitment provides the analyst with the final historical goal of the economy and thus the programme is the articulation for “marching orders” of a “long march” through the institutions.

These questions are sufficiently intriguing to investigate further. In any event, by renewing the relevance of these three barriers, we can perhaps come to a better understanding of the very real problems connected with a disclosure of our society. We shall, therefore, begin with the barrier which is historically closest to us: the barrier of paradise lost.

At this point Goudzwaard's methodology may prove hard to follow. He has developed his hypothesis by focusing upon the barriers that had to be surmounted before the pre-modern West could take an historical path that enables the West to reach what is before us (in his book's terms: in the 1970s). This "barrier removal" is a description of long-term cultural processes that took place in Western societies over hundreds of years and is still in process.

We could proceed by an assumption that this diagnosis has simply left us with the view that the only option left is "disclosure". But it needs to be kept in mind that the entire analysis has already charted the disclosure of faith-in-progress to bring us to where we are today.

The key point is what he states in the opening paragraph of the next Chapter 18 "Paradise Lost Revisited". The belief that human progress would never be able to bring about complete human happiness on earth took leave of men's hearts and minds. We might observe that though it was a belief, it was a negative belief that was to repudiate another prior belief. This then confirms, once more, that this is a book - in Part 4 (Chapters 16-22) - that should be read slowly. That is what our commentary has sought to emphasize.

CONCLUSION

So what has this all been about? **Capitalism and Progress** is a book that carries an important diagnosis about our life in Western society. Bob Goudzwaard has succeeded in presenting a rather formidable case and there is a healthy respect for what he has achieved from scholars around the world.

But what has been achieved with this "Slow Reading" exercise? To be frank that remains to be seen. But it has been undertaken because I believe it is important that a new generation of Christian students - and not only students in the historical and social sciences - take up Goudzwaard's challenge.

Capitalism and Progress is not an easy read. A reader who comes to the book with the expectation that it could be read like a novel, or even a conventional history text, will very soon be disappointed. There is a sentence in the text above, that I have pondered over for some time. I think it actually provides an insight about the drive that has coincided with what we call "modernity". It reads like this: *The belief that human progress would never be able to bring about complete human happiness on earth took leave of men's hearts and minds.* This is a hard sentence to "get one's mind around". It refers to what sounds like a negative view that "took leave" of the hearts and minds of people, to be replaced by another view, purportedly one that was positive and optimistic. By formulating it in this way, Bob Goudzwaard is attempting to identify a *belief, a faith* that has hitherto driven Western culture. Moreover, it is a belief that considers that humans are not autonomous, that humans are self-insufficient: this is to be in denial of basic respect for human life because human life is given to us. Life is a gift.

And it is this “taking leave” that accounts for the so very tight interweaving of capitalism and the idolatrous ideology of progress that needs to be understood as we develop a “diagnosis of Western society”, probing how it also has an impact upon ourselves and our own health.

Bob has also given us a clue as to why this interweaving is so tightly bound. And maybe also why our lives are so constrained.

Capitalism and Progress is directed by his recognition that, in most basic terms, the industrial revolution was a failure because of its “flattening out” of human responsibility in the management of economic life. That is the irony he seeks to trace in this treatise. The assertion of human autonomy leads, in time, to the “flattening out” of the rich tapestry of human responsibility. Capitalism and its presupposed ideology, progress, were so tightly bound together by a concern for fitting ends to means, and thereby overturning any human concern for the normative conditions of human responsibility. His work is an account of why economic life cannot unfold its true meaning and significance when there is no *simultaneous realization of norms*. (see **Capitalism and Progress** p. 65) His hypothesis is not to be read in *fatalistic* terms, as if economic development *per se* is an evil to be resisted, but he is providing an outlook that helps us understand why with such wealth there is such a regressive downside neglecting economic stewardship as a normative precondition for our ongoing health, our shalom.

Capitalism and Progress is a many-pronged stimulus - it serves as a guide to develop an ongoing diagnosis of global society, and the continuing global impact of Western cultural life. It is a call to live *normatively* in terms of a creational heteronomy subject to the ways of the LORD who has continued to watch over His handiwork. The encouragement of this book is to go on living in hope as we seek to find the pathway of trust that considers the next step as our own personal responsibility as we pray “Your Kingdom, Your will be done, on Earth as in Heaven.”

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