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KNOWING, THINKING, SCIENCE

Prof. Dr. J. P. A. Mekkes

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When we are asked to contribute an article for the “*Tydskrif vir Christelike Wetenskap*” (“Journal for Christian Scholarship”), the organ of the Association for Christian Higher Education in the country which we love all the more as the Lie of “this world” conspires against its government, then we find ourselves—without detours—brought into contact with the struggle on the scientific field as well. For the proclamation of the dictation of science as the last valid word within Western culture confronts us directly with the great lie just mentioned.

The truth about science is this: that it belongs to our created existence and, within the boundaries drawn by the Creator, it may serve us as a consciously distinguishing activity—a service that sharpens responsibility in human action. If science is to help bring truth to light, then it must begin by setting out from the Truth. This does not mean placing Scripture texts at the beginning of scientific arguments; it means practicing science from a heart turned toward the Truth, as one of the many expressions of life demanded of the human being.

About science as such one cannot say that it lies or speaks truth: it is the human being who, with its help, does the one or the other. If, proceeding from God’s truth, he searches for truths in creation, then science takes on for him the form of a handmaid. But if, without accountability to the God of revelation, he wants to “track down truth” through science, then he has—and thus the West has acted for a long time—proclaimed it an almighty goddess. He then says that he knows of, or acknowledges, no other controlling authority over science than “science” alone; and we see the consequences drawn in contemporary neopositivism, pragmatism, operationalism. In the end, the computer must deliver the certificate of truth.

When considering the place, the appreciation, and the systematization of science, it is not possible to place ourselves outside history. What one thinks and does with regard to science can, for us—people of the latter half of the twentieth century—be assessed only when one observes thinking and acting as it has now come to be. Here too we are experiencing the consummation of the formative process of the preceding centuries. And in this connection two things must be kept in mind.

First, that we ourselves—the evaluators of this process—have also been formed by it. But then equally, that in this case the matter concerns the practice of science, which through the ages can have no other structure than that of scientific practice itself, however much the spheres of its interest and its methods may change and evolve in history.

The structure of the practice of science is that of theoretical thinking. It takes place in carrying out intentional, systematically analyzing and synthesizing acts of thought within a world of abstractions thus obtained. Along this path “knowledge” is acquired, but knowledge of a special kind. It is not the case that our so-called everyday knowledge (also called pre-theoretical, or even “naïve”) may indeed be sufficient for our practical life and experience, but that only through theoretical thinking is real knowledge first obtained. Whoever imagines it that way betrays an insight that is anything but theoretical—thus, a very practical, and indeed central, insight into what he regards as the essential core of our existence. And in that he is in very ancient company. “Being is the being of Thinking,” said the ancients—and the most modern still say nothing different. What does our modern “operationalism” do other than, by means of the theoretical model of thought, try to give form to what “is” (the “contingent” reality that exists)?

The man who thinks that true knowledge is obtained only by means of theoretical thinking identifies himself with one of his many functions—namely, along the path of theoretical thought. He therefore proclaims it theoretically as well. But why? To that question he can give no answer—and so he does not; instead he refers, intentionally or not, to the (Western) tradition just mentioned. He speaks of theoretical thinking (practicing science) not as a continuously evolving genus within the encompassing human existence, but himself—remaining within an ever-present “now”—taking his stand in “thinking” as the unchangeable innermost core of his being human. The late-twentieth-century Westerner believes he can do this as correctly as possible, including all relativity and uncertainty, and in doing so in a manner beyond reproach—responsible. Does he know?

Who will answer that question? Where is the test? “Whereof one cannot speak—cannot put into words by thinking—thereof one must be silent,” a famous philosopher said not long ago. Must the pretension “to know” therefore be accepted—silently—and obeyed? Is there no account to be given here; and if there is, then where?

This pretension—that knowing is identical with thinking—is not a result of theoretical thinking. Rather, this pretension gives voice to “knowing,” that is, knowing in the sense of a proclamation of origin, as is also expressed in compounds such as *re*-cognize (*herkennen*), *ac*-knowledge (*erkennen*), and *con*-fess (*bekennen*). Such knowing points out what the known thing is.

In the most original sense, as with Heidegger, the matter concerns a knowing-of-being (*Seinskönnen* / *Seinskennen*), in which “being”—even when written with the article (“the being”)—remains a verb. Heidegger attempted to elevate “Thinking,” which “sets forth the relation of Being to the essence of the human being” (*den Bezug des Seins zum Wesen des Menschen ... vollbringt*), to a rank that goes beyond ordinary theoretical thinking. Reflection on Being is the human being’s innermost self-reflection—and conversely. Yet it still remains the case that the philosopher states this as something supra-existential, valid for all and always, i.e., something that can be justified within scientific reasoning. So, the question of knowing, even in him, ends up running out into theoretical thinking.

What this shows is that thinking is *known* as an origin that can no longer be questioned and can no longer be further “thought about.” The situation is no different on the other wing of modern (the “silent”) philosophy, which “knows” the unaskable origin only in the dialectic of ongoing

modeling—perhaps soon, computer-dialectic. Meanwhile, however, no model can be conceived with whose help thinking could be tested experimentally as to whether it corresponds to the model.

As one observes the fundamental antinomies in the—open or self-concealing—philosophies of origin-thinking, the mists gradually lift before the eyes of the Christian who desires to know, and behind the described pretension of identity he perceives the face of the Lie.

Now, taught in and through history, he turns his gaze backward and sees all the forerunners of today's proclaimers of final truth—those who in their time even assigned God a place within the philosophical and/or theological system—caught from the outset (often against their will) in what is by now the old Western lie. One even sees them, in the belief that they are rendering worship to God, breaking through to a speculation about “thoughts of creation” in the Creator—thoughts that the believing practitioner of science would supposedly have to approach by reflecting. It meant nothing less than designing the heavenly plan according to the pattern shown on earth—positing God's “thinking” as analogous to human thinking.

We are far from praising, or recommending, what today is called *secularization in bonam partem* (in a “good” sense). For this theological commodity is intended for the political marketplace in the broadest sense, with the aim of undermining direct faith in Scripture—dismissed as “pietism”—and thus seizing power for itself. Yet it is also the case that the groupings meant here, to a significant degree, both display and provoke reaction against theological-theoretical and clerical lust for domination; for whoever rationalizes the Creator necessarily prepares the way for Nietzsche's and Heidegger's nihilism of Being.

Observing the path along which the identification of knowing and thinking has led opens our eyes to the negative result—the outcome of un-truth. Among other things, what in the Netherlands is called Reformational philosophy has opened our eyes to the necessity of an immanent philosophical critique all the way up to the “transcendental” limits of philosophical thinking. Making it clear to one's conversation partner that his last point of support cannot be justified by way of thinking is the furthest we can go theoretically. But the conversation partner sees no other road open before him than that of continuing to think.

This is self-evident, for he has been brought here to precisely that point where the side road of theoretical activity branches off from the central road of life, which must lead the human being—in the fullness of his human existence—toward his destination. Whoever stubbornly takes the side road to be the main road will not see his error until he has arrived at the end of all roads, the end of life.

But we must also pay attention to yet another, decisive, point. The doctrine of “transcendental critique” rightly maintains that this critique has its own structure, belonging to the practice of science. This, however, can be seen only if one knows the main road. The function of the side roads can be understood only from there, and their ultimate destination is to lead back to the main road. Only through a view of the main road of an integral life-destination can the philosophical function of philosophical critique be understood. Put differently: the ending of a road in a lie can show itself only from the road of truth.

We said that the identification of thinking and knowing, ancient or modern, brings us to the lie

because it itself rests on a lie. If thinking is only a (though fundamental) auxiliary function, then quite a bit more is required before we can lay claim to “knowing.” For in *knowing*, the *whole person—I*, in the full sense of the word—is involved.¹ It is the activity of our whole existence, directed toward everything that has been entrusted to us in creation, and this has no further boundary. It is in the distinguishing (discrimination) that undergirds knowing that “thinking” has been given to us as a functional instrument of conscious awareness.

Why, and from where, then, must we “know”?

That modern scientific practice has so readily arrived, philosophically speaking, at maintaining the old equation of knowing and thinking is due in no small part to the ever-increasing influence of natural science. And its pre-eminence in this regard stems primarily from the necessity of ensuring that the substrate upon which our entire temporal existence rests continues to fulfill its purpose. This purpose, after all, is nothing more or less than the maintenance of life, the coexistence, in increasing complexity, of all that belongs to it in terms of space and movement. Without this life, after all, there is no human existence. And at this point the first principled choice confronts the human being concerning the direction he must take in realizing his existence: will he throw himself with all his strength into the expansion of the substrate that must serve him, or—recognizing the necessity, indeed the urgency, of that expansion—will he, in every question, seek to gain insight by first keeping in view the destination he is meant to serve, and from there determining his judgment?

Humanism has been unable to find an answer to this decisive question because, in the course of history, the tension between the poles of its religious ground-motive proved to leave no room for it. It now finds itself shattered between an extreme pragmatism and an inwardly exhausted contemplation of being, with the result being a practically definitive—yet nevertheless meaningless—flight into the substrate which, besides nature and technology, also takes up systematic thinking. Stammering about a “responsible society,” even a “great community,” is unable to cover up this embarrassment.

Against the overwhelming force of such a historical background, it seems hopeless to speak about “knowing” in the strict sense in any way other than as exact thinking: a thinking wholly directed toward experimentally uncovering the possibilities of the life-substrate, and which has continually had to refine itself in doing so.

Positivism had already, with A. Comte, proclaimed itself the only philosophy of science. Its intention was to learn to control all spheres of life exactly by this method. The pragmatist-materialist power-tendencies of our century no longer have any ideal of science. But all the more sharply do they fasten themselves to neopositivist model-methodology, which is already being applied—with exclusive intolerance—particularly to the sciences of society.

The old humanist slogan—“break down the reality given in its interconnections methodically into the simplest element, in order to recreate it *more geometrico* (in the manner of

¹ Only here does knowledge enter, in its full depth, into everything that the human being experiences through action and undergoing experience. Discriminating thinking here—as may also be evident from the text—forms an ever-present modality. Acts that are qualified by this modality within a particular individuality-structure are specific acts of thinking; and as a total structure they are, of course, also involved in the whole of human realisation-in-disclosure. Our concern now is to break through the identification of modality and acts, which abstracts from the human being.

geometry)”—under the guidance of positivist doctrine led to a truly dogmatic individualism and a pragmatically useful determinism. When natural science had abandoned its illusion of demonstrating a reality (at least laws of reality) *an sich* (“in itself”), it nevertheless thought, with respect to the reliability of the cogito—the “I think” that searches out experimental phenomena—that it could make do with the doxa (“opinion,” “belief”) which the ancients had rejected as an anchoring ground.

In the positivist approach to the non-natural domains, that station has already been passed, and one subjects the human being and his society—so far as generally valid knowledge of them is concerned—without legitimized accountability, to neopositivist-pragmatic modeling. One gives no account a priori of the qualification of the individuality-structure of human social relations. The original and universally determining character of these qualifications may, according to the exclusivist rule of positivism, not even be brought into view.

Thus, in what appears to be the most definitive way, thinking—as determinative “knowing” by means of theoretical systematization—has taken the place of human knowing; and none of the variations, offered from the side as auxiliary modalities of the work of knowing from Parmenides up to our century, proved able to hold their ground. Indeed—though in a different sense than Heidegger intended—das Denken vollbringt den Bezug... (“Thinking accomplishes the relation...”).

For the Christian, it becomes a matter of choosing or sharing in the consequences. What does he want, what must he understand by “knowing”? May he join the traditions described above of the so-called “Western community of thought” (the term already speaks for itself)? And where must he begin in giving his answer?

Here the temptation arises to glance once again—out of the corner of one’s eye—toward the “community of thought”; and even reformational philosophy, in its initial talk of the Gegenstandsrelation (“object-relation”) as a “structure encountered beforehand in theoretical activity,” was threatened by this enchantment. In our view, it did not sufficiently recognize the cultic character of this figure. Instead of being a possible basis for conversational contact, the so-called Gegenstandsrelation—even when not explicitly discussed philosophically—was and is the not-further-questionable figure of origin for the sovereignty of thought within the humanist life-world.

Where, then, is the rule to be found that truly establishes community—a community that first makes even the most extreme mutual opposition possible and experienceable?

A community of thought can be no more than an aspect of a community of life (in the full sense), and thus within it—and by virtue of it—it can lead to differences of thought, first of all in reflective thinking about the whole of our existence. The community of life, or of being, therefore encompasses all this, as for example Karl Jaspers in his own way rightly perceived. Hence he found it so difficult, for himself, in his relation to believers in revelation. For him the difficulty lay in the impossibility of acknowledging, from his standpoint, a rule that regulates community—a rule that also gives the inner contradictions their respective positive or negative meaning.

He therefore could neither see nor undergo the truly final choice, namely the choice concerning sovereignty that also transcends “Reason” and, in the last decision, judges every opposition and sets it before itself. He could not see this choice because, for him, openly confessed Reason

is the last founder of community within Being. And “Reason” was (and is) the symbol par excellence of knowing through thinking.

If we cannot accept this identity in the manner of Western wisdom over many centuries, then by what path are we ever to bring into view the authority from which the regulating norm proceeds and which—against the resistance of all centuries—demands validity?

The danger that threatens precisely the Christian at this point is this: to return, behind the back of all preceding critique-of-reason, to scientific theology as the last guarantor of truth, only then to discover—to his radical disappointment—that it too, in its widely diverging “thinking,” continually fails to give an account of the correctness of the supposed identity of thinking and knowing. Alongside natural science, it too has its “relation of uncertainty”: it (namely, dogmatics) still lacks verification, but *believes* that this verification will turn out positively (H. M. Kuitert, *De Realiteit van het Geloof*, Kampen 1966, p. 213).

There is only one way to the unchangeable point of departure: it consists in turning away from the idea of a community of thought except as an aspect of the total community of life, and determined by it.

This community of life exists, but is rejected by the human being. We must be led back there in knowing—and this immediately brings us into the most profound opposition to every humanistic idea of community, which is after all grounded in trust in thinking, i.e., in the human being who lies.

So there is no chance of finding the way except by turning ourselves to the Origin, which cannot be “known” within the reach of ...thinking. Nor can it have an irrational character, since that would once again mean measuring by the possibilities of thought. Yet only from Him can a decision finally be made between the ways of life, between main road and side road, between the way of truth and the way of error. Whoever wants contact in thought with his fellow travellers, and seeks a serious method for arriving at mutual understanding within the structured theoretical domain of thought, will nevertheless not be able to find the road-structure meant here except from the Origin lifted above all “structure.” The only alternative is simply to end up once again with thinking as origin—after which all the questions already passed return. The vicious circle of every wandering astray.

But if the true Origin is found, then from there all roads will run straight. Whoever does not find it can only seek the cause in himself. The order of the roads that are to be traced will soon also begin to show itself in abstracting thought, which rules out in advance any tendency in an *a priori* positivizing direction.

In exactly the same way as the human being, on the countless roads of the “practice” of life, must begin by choosing his direction, so too he must do this in the sector of scientific thinking. Whoever imagines that, in choosing direction there, only the prescription of “scientificity” applies has from the outset overlooked that here too he stands and moves within a sector of full life; and by that very fact he has implicitly given to this one sector of the circle of life the place of center, the place “from which the command proceeds.”

The Christian rejects that choice. In order to know, he begins with his Origin. And as soon as, from there—called as an “intellectual”—he approaches the scientific domain of abstraction and abstractions, he cannot forget that “scientific truth,” the truth on the side roads of theoretical thinking, can only be oriented to the main road; it can only point out the truth of that road’s direction. This therefore cannot possibly mean an attempt to deduce practical and theoretical truths logically from a given premise; for by doing so one would already have departed from the main road into the side terrain of a “logical” linkage detached from its center—a linkage that can never again lead us back to the integral direction of truth.

The Christian’s “knowing” does not begin with thinking, but with lived experience. It does not begin with metaphysical or modern analytic logic, nor along the *methodos* of the “silent philosophy,” in the positivizing methods of so-called pure science. And when his lived knowing is compelled to pass through the abstract zone, he will above all guard against letting his sight of the living whole be taken away by common denominators—by which the true nature of his seven-hundredfold experience would become definitively irretrievable.

For the believing philosopher who wants to serve the practice of the specialized sciences, the question arises concerning the mutual relation of methods—their unity in diversity. It is then clear that methods for the sciences of the human being and society can never be oriented to the methods of the natural sciences, and that therefore no positivist modeling can be in view here. Even elements that present themselves as retrocitations upon natural factors, and for whose study a correspondingly adapted method may be of passing service, will do so only in the light of their normative destination without losing their true meaning. Conversely, precisely in the theoretical treatment of the natural substrate itself it must continually be kept in view that “theoretical truth” concerning its phenomena—including the thesis of the “contingency” behind them—is in principle not something that can be enclosed or comprehended within natural science as such, but finds its destination only in normative *un*-folding (disclosure).

It may be necessary to note that by this we do not mean what is sometimes called, in one sense or another, the natural-scientific “ethos.” Insofar as one would mean by that the absolute openness, honesty, and willingness to give account that belongs to the laboratory, it can only have our spontaneous assent. It is not the development of the natural sciences that is to blame for the undermining of scriptural faith; the guilt for this lies with theological pride. But if, with the term “ethos” in this connection, one intends the position of science in being made available for use by industry and politics, then we have arrived on the other side of the boundary between science and practice, and one should rather speak of an economic and political “ethos.” That does not end the responsibility of the person—or of the institution—of science, but it does end his scientific responsibility.

Here a new sphere opens itself to the one who wishes to see. We call it the sphere of powers, and we have already pointed to it when we spoke about the political means applied by today’s secularization-theology. The reality of “power” directs our attention to the so-called “historical” aspect of human existence, where human responsibility is at issue in giving ever new positive form to the norms that are meant to determine human life in its meaning.

Contemporary pragmatism, allied with the historicism of the preceding and the present century, wants to have the human being be absorbed into his historical aspect, in order then to study and direct his actions with the help of methods oriented to natural science. Then there can no longer be any question of any normativity of interpersonal relations, economics, law, politics, and so on. The distinction among these terms carries no more than a nominal character, needed only

to indicate real behaviors that present themselves under those names and stand in disharmonious relation to one another. Their study can take place only theoretically from the ever-present “moment,” and then positivistically. “Knowing” is now fully aligned with theoretical-methodical thinking. The natural-scientific methodological common denominator has been fully accepted—and as such, as an instrument of the exercise of power.

Science as a power among the powers finds, in this sense, general recognition today. Alongside it stand the powers that use science—and to whom, conversely, science points the way. A Christian who still identifies knowing with thinking must be seeing yet blind; and “Awake, you who sleep, and arise from the dead” is more relevant than ever.

We know which power of knowing wants to rescue us from the grip of the power of thought, and we must allow ourselves to be rescued.

If that happens, then faith, love, justice, beauty, cooperation, progress—despite the passage of history and precisely thanks to its continuing course—will again be known in their abiding meaning. For we will never, ever learn to “know” these by the path of thinking. We come to know our love by loving; and our knowledge of faith “knows” no “theological” relation of uncertainty, but only its own firm hope—called by Scripture itself “the anchor of the soul.”

From this knowledge we must, historically, continue the ordering of life by norms in which the generations before us lived with both good and evil. Our task is to direct it ever more surely toward its destination out of past, present, and future—fully convinced that we cannot form judgment without remembering that we ourselves also belong to the great history which, as such, transcends its historical aspect and which, despite our efforts to absolutize the “present,” continues to take the natural substrate up into itself, laying at our feet the invitation to disclosure. If we wish to speak of an “ethos,” then it lies here—and it is of an absolutely non-self-sufficient character, pointing beyond itself.

In doing so we leave behind every reminder of the “ethical,” and we reject—beneath us—every (in any case theoretical) thought of a “super-nature.” The issue is nothing less than the stretching forth of our history as the fulfillment of meaning for the creature toward the decisive Advent. Every denominator—metaphysical-“positive” or “historical”—fails us, and no theory is able to teach our thinking what “knowing” is. How could it—our crippled helper...? For it was a matter of life itself, of which all that has been mentioned can be only a facet.

“Life”? Only He teaches this, He who gives it. He does not fail to tell it to us, for Himself at the point of laying it down: “This is eternal life: that they know You, and Him whom You have sent—Jesus Christ.”

How do I find the way from all my “thinking” to this knowing that penetrates the meaning of the creature? In the willingness to lay down my life behind Him. And then... I shall know as I have been known.