HERMAN BAVINCK

# CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW

TRANSLATED & EDITED BY

Nathaniel Gray Sutanto, James Eglinton,
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# Contents

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Gray Sutanto, James Eglinton, and Cory Brock
Jakarta, Edinburgh, and Jackson
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# Editors' Introduction

## Herman Bavinck for the Twenty-First Century

Since the recent English translation of his *Reformed Dogmatics* (2003–2008), Herman Bavinck (1854–1921)—the chief dogmatician of the Dutch Reformed tradition in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—has gained a wide hearing among theologians in the twenty-first century. Bavinck was born into the orthodox Reformed tradition stemming from the 1834 Secession (*Afscheiding*) within the Dutch Reformed Church, a tradition committed simultaneously to Protestant orthodoxy and to the articulation of that orthodoxy in the rapidly changing cultural environs of the late modern Netherlands.

The cultural experience common to modern Europeans—Bavinck included, by implication—was marked by constant social, intellectual, technological, cultural, and spiritual upheaval. T. C. W. Blanning memorably describes

that generation's ever-present awareness that "the ground [was] moving beneath their feet."[1] Bavinck, a professor of systematic theology at the Theological School in Kampen and then (at the time of writing this work) at the Free University of Amsterdam, wrote this treatise as a theologian addressing his constantly changing late modern world. The ideas found in this book were first aired in a rectorial address in Amsterdam in 1904. That address was immediately published and sold quickly. An expanded second edition was printed in 1913, with a third (posthumously released, otherwise unchanged) edition appearing in 1927. It is also worth noting that he intended his 1908 Stone Lectures, published as *Philosophy of Revelation*, to be a kind of sequel that further elaborated on the ideas in this work.[2] This volume, *Christian Worldview*, is the first English translation of Bavinck's address to a world in the throes of profound change on every front.

## Contours of a Christian Worldview

In Bavinck's context, the philosophy of Ernest Renan—with its spirit of scientific materialism—had dominated the late nineteenth century. Alongside this thinking, however, the youth of Zarathustra had failed: religion had not died, although the classic Christian religion was under

1. T. C. W. Blanning, introduction to *The Oxford Illustrated History of Modern Europe*, ed. Blanning (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 1.

2. Herman Bavinck, *Wijsbegeerte der Openbaring* (Kampen: Kok, 1908), 275n31. For a modern English translation, see *Philosophy of Revelation: A New Annotated Edition*, ed. Cory Brock and Gray Sutanto (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2018), 23n61.

suspicion and despised. In this milieu, Bavinck began his book *Christelijke wereldbeschouwing*, or *Christian Worldview*, by noting the consequence of this "modern" problem: "Before all else, what strikes us in the modern age is the internal discord that consumes the self."[3] The corrupted consciousness of the human personality in the prevailing world, he argued, derives from the "aversion to the common Christian faith" and to historic religion in general.[4] While every human being is undeniably religious at heart, that era's denial of objective religion gave way to the awakening of a sickness in body and soul: the discord of the disordered personality. There is, then, Bavinck wrote in 1904, "a disharmony between our thinking and feeling, between our willing and acting. There is a discord between religion and culture, between science and life."[5]

The modern self, he argued, both disparages religion (feeling) at the hand of science (thinking) and desperately needs what it rejects. The modern will feels the weight of the moral order but acts in dissociation with its own deepest needs and desires. Herein, one finds a brief definition of *worldview*: it is an attempt to unify the self, the head and heart, on the ground of a primary agreement between religion, science, and philosophy. A world-and-life view means, in brief, faith seeking understanding. It is important to note that Bavinck's preferred term is

3. See p. 22 below. In this editors' introduction, quotations from Bavinck's *Christian Worldview* are cited by page number within this volume.
4. See p. 24 below.
5. See p. 22 below.

*world-and-life view*, rather than merely *worldview*. In a world-and-life view, the term *world* refers to the objective domain, reality outside the self; the term *life* refers to the human subject, the consciousness and its needs, desires, knowledge, and affections. A unified world-and-life view seeks justification for the unity between the subjective and objective. And at the dawn of the twentieth century, Bavinck argued, "A 'unified' [*einheitliche*] world-and-life view is lacking, and therefore this word is the slogan of our day."[6]

For this reason, in a significant adaptation of Immanuel Kant's (1724–1804) notion of the *Anschauungen* ("intuitions"), Bavinck's and Abraham Kuyper's (1837–1920) *wereldbeschouwing* helped birth the contemporary use of the concept *Christian worldview*. The Christian *wereldbeschouwing* uniquely addresses several fundamental questions that all worldviews must face and offers a derivative thesis:

> What is the relation between thinking and being, between being and becoming, and between becoming and acting? What am I? What is the world, and what is my place and task within this world? Autonomous thinking finds no satisfactory answer to these questions—it oscillates between materialism and spiritualism, between atomism and dynamism, between nomism and antinomianism. But Christianity pre-

6. See p. 22 below.

> serves the harmony [between them] and reveals to us a wisdom that reconciles the human being with God and, through this, with itself, with the world, and with life.[7]

These questions are shorthand for substantial topics in the spheres of philosophy and theology, the types of questions that impose themselves on every thoughtful individual at some point. The first aforementioned pairing (between thinking and being), for example, concerns epistemology. How do I know that I see reality as it truly is? Or, more appropriately, how do I know that the reality I experience is trustworthy? The second pair (between being and becoming) is a veiled reference to how identity relates to change. How can we account for identity across time, or for a unity of essence in the midst of a multiplicity and even disparity of parts? Third, the pairing of becoming and acting refers to the questions of ethics. How should I live? What is good? Individuals seeking a coherence of head and heart combine questions like these, alongside the cosmogonic and teleological, to form a world-and-life view.

But how so? How, for Bavinck, does worldview arise? The reader will find no single definition or singular thesis for worldview or worldview formation within this treatise. Rather, one must cobble together regular phrases, synonyms, and implicit explanations. In the first chapter, Bavinck helpfully parses the common route the individual

7. See p. 29 below.

takes to arrive at a worldview. One might begin there, with the path to knowing an all-inclusive reality, the physical and metaphysical. Also, similar terms to worldview do abound. Worldview is (at least) closely related to a "comprehensive wisdom"[8] or, in the case of a particularly Christian worldview, to a "Christian wisdom."[9] Nevertheless, for Bavinck, wisdom and worldview are not mere synonyms: "Whoever rejects the word of the Lord cannot have wisdom."[10] (In that regard, this text provides an interesting counterpoint to the recent trend in Anglophone Reformed theology to pit worldview against wisdom, as though the former were a largely cerebral affair, in contrast to the wholesome embodied nature of the latter.)

Each individual, Bavinck argues, is first addressed by the world through means of sensation. These sensations birth concepts—concepts that correspond to the world of being. We experience, we judge, we learn, and we gather. These experiences beget the search for truth, for metaphysics. Metaphysical awareness, like wisdom in its most historical sense, does not arise a priori. The "results of science are and remain the starting point of philosophy."[11] Wisdom, or philosophy, aims above the sciences. It seeks the truth where it can be found. It unifies and "press[es] through" to the first principles.[12] It

8. See p. 48 below.
9. See p. 52 below.
10. See p. 39 below.
11. See p. 50 below.
12. See p. 50 below.

traces "leading ideas" within the domains of philosophical thought and finds their common place.[13] Wisdom seeks the "idea of the whole in the parts," and when it discovers it, one finds there not only the unifying principle of philosophy but also the ground of religion.[14] Comprehensive wisdom seeks to know reality as a whole, as it truly is, and to know all that it demands. A world-and-life view arises here—where one obtains a vision for the final ground of all things, wherein all the domains of knowledge cohere, where the primary cause both explains and gives life, and where religion comes to bear on that comprehensive wisdom, unveiling the same primary cause for all life.

Worldview, for Bavinck, is neither apriorism nor a tenuous theory for separating public intellectuals into neat compartments. Rather, it is a controlling principle and posture that is first discovered when religion comes to bear on both science and wisdom (philosophy), discovering between them a unity—one which attempts to satisfy both head and heart. Citing Friedrich Adolf Trendelenburg, Bavinck argues that wisdom stems from and leads to a worldview, "because it is indeed the 'science of the idea' [*Wissenschaft der Idee*]."[15] Wisdom is possible because the world was first freely known by divine wisdom. Since religion is inescapable, in Bavinck's view, even the materialist holds to a world-and-life view that is both

13. See p. 50 below.
14. See p. 51 below.
15. See p. 51 below.

religious and scientific, a matter of faith and fact. Even when considering nothing more than sense perception, the revelation of God speaks and says to the personality, "Look up and see." It is only the Christian worldview that provides true harmony of self: true harmony between God and the world, God and the self, and the self and the world.

To put it otherwise, Bavinck offers a threefold frame for thinking about how we think. First, science in general arises from our observation and judgment making. We learn things about the real world. Second, based on our relation to this reality, we also make metaphysical judgments—we search for truth, both what is true and how to live truly, and this search is the discipline of wisdom. Finally, when wisdom, in search of a comprehensive unity, meets and bows to the demands of religion, in both its ontological and ethical demands, there is a world-and-life view. From there, one's world-and-life view does not remain static. Rather, it rereads the cosmos, the sensations, and the metaphysical claims and makes ongoing adjustments, always seeking the satisfaction of head and heart. It strives for subjective and objective unity. A worldview is a map, drawn over time from careful research, derived from actual knowledge of the geography, from pious religion, from the desire for truth, and it is amenable to updating. After all, maps are made from research—some careful, meticulous, and true and some not. Some maps account for the details as they are presented, and some

are false. But map making we must do. Aside from the metaphor, a world-and-life view means that, over time and in engagement with reality as it presents itself, one has arrived at a basic, primary answer to the fundamental religious and philosophical questions of existence: What am I? Where did I come from? How does my mind relate to the world outside me? Do I, and how can I, know? How should I act? And what is the point of life? To where am I going?

In the treatise that follows, translated from the updated (1913) edition, Bavinck explains why only Christianity has solutions for the discordant self in the modern world, paying special attention to epistemology, change, and ethics. On the ground that God's grace restores and perfects nature, Bavinck argues that only Christianity can make sense of the deepest human needs while simultaneously "justif[ying]" the "presupposition[s]" from which we approach the objective world.[16] This is so, he argues, because Christ is the steward of creation and re-creation, of both nature and grace.

**Note on the Text**

The original Dutch text includes untranslated terms and phrases in German, Greek, Latin, and French. Instead of simply translating these phrases into English, we have indicated every instance in which Bavinck uses these foreign terms, since they often signal important sources

16. See p. 40 below.

for Bavinck. In that light, we present two classes of bracketed foreign terms in our translation: Dutch terms and non-Dutch foreign terms. First, we use brackets for Dutch terms because the original Dutch may prove helpful to English readers or may communicate a nuance that might otherwise be missed if the original were not provided. For the English translation of Dutch terms, we omit quotation marks to retain the sense that these terms were native to the original reader. Second, we bracket other foreign language terms and set the English translations for these in quotation marks, which signals that these terms were foreign to the original reader. In a few cases, the foreign terms seemed important enough to keep in the main text, so in those instances the English translation (rather than the foreign term) appears in brackets.

We have sought to maintain precision and to preserve the original meaning without sacrificing smoothness of English prose in this translation. In some cases we have added words where we felt that sentences, when rendered into English, would not make sense without them. Our goal is to make the text as accessible as possible, while also encouraging scholarly readers to study the original text in conjunction with this translation.

# Preface to the Second Edition

The first edition of this *Christian Worldview*, which appeared in 1904, has been sold out for some time, and the publisher was of the opinion that a second edition would still be well received. For this reason, I meticulously read the treatise through once more and introduced some changes. In 1904, this work also served as a rectorial address, but because of its length, only a small segment was actually delivered; now [in its written form], all that would bring that address [in its shortened form] to memory is omitted. There are indeed changes here and there; in the text and especially in the notes, some clarifications and additions are included. Finally, to elevate the usefulness of this little book, I included a table of contents and an index at the end. May its reading greatly strengthen you in the faith, unto the truth and beauty of the Christian worldview.

H. Bavinck
Amsterdam, May 1913

# Introduction

With the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century, many people of renown made daring attempts to determine the character of the centennial era that had just ended.[1] Although providing only an approximation, they attempted to do so in order to offer their opinion regarding the direction that the current of life was flowing.[2] But this field they were to survey was so extensive and the phenomena that drew their attention were so diverse, important, and complex that no one has been successful in summarizing that rapidly advancing century under a single formula or in defining the direction of the future with some singular character trait. While one person was looking for *the* character of the previous century in the awakening of the historical or natural sciences, others gave attention to the development of commerce, to the

1. Bavinck's original address dates to 1904.—Ed.

2. For example, see H. S. Chamberlain, *Die Grundlagen des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* (München: Bruckman, 1904); Theobald Ziegler, *Die geistigen und socialen Strömungen des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* (Berlin: Bondi, 1901); Ludwig Stein, *An der Wende des Jahrhunderts* (Freiburg: J. T. B. Mohr, 1899); Ernst Troeltsch, "Neunzehntes Jahrhundert," in *Realencyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche* (Graz: Akademische Druck- u. Verlagsanstalt, 1896–1913), 24:244–60.

significance of the creation of the machine, to the desire for emancipation, or to the development of democracy. And while some believed we were living in a time marked by neomysticism or neo-Romanticism, others decided that psychologism or relativism, autonomy or anarchy were better descriptions of the direction in which we were moving. Although truth may indeed be found in all these designations, none of them expresses the fullness of modern life.

This is so because, before all else, what strikes us in the modern age is the internal discord that consumes the self and the restless haste that drives it. The *fin de siècle* ["turn of the century"] is characterized as a period of dramatic change—although this is a designation that says little, because every time is a time of change. But the peculiarity of this moment is that everyone feels an epoch of change, when all people realize they cannot remain the same, and that some long for this moment to pass by more swiftly than others.[3] There is a disharmony between our thinking and feeling, between our willing and acting. There is a discord between religion and culture, between science and life. A "unified" [*einheitliche*] world-and-life view is lacking, and therefore this word is the slogan of our day.[4] The search for this concord is the work in which all who follow their era with interest participate.

3. Ziegler, *Die geistigen und socialen Strömungen*, 561.

4. On the origin and meaning of the word, see James Orr, *The Christian View of God and the World* (Edinburgh: Elliott, 1893), 1, 415; Albert Maria Weisz, *Die religiöse Gefahr* (Freiburg: Herder, 1904), 106.

Now that the "period of Renan" (with its scientific materialism, its religious modernism, its moral utilitarianism, its aesthetic naturalism, and its political liberalism) is no longer the spirit of the age, a younger generation has arisen that, disappointed in expectations that were awakened but not fulfilled, has again become tormented by the mysteries of being. A new generation has come to the fore, which has exchanged the insight that we have moved forward so gloriously far, for the appreciation that the unknowable and unrecognizable surrounds us on all sides. Alongside the ongoing idolization of science and culture on the one hand, a return to mystical idealism, to a vague belief in things unseen, which is influential in every field of study, can be perceived on the other. If we choose to, we can perceive both a shameless employment of bare egoism and a dedication to the community, which, even in its deranged ascetic and communistic forms, fills us with respect. In literature and art, the flattest realism is exchanged with love for the mysterious in nature and history and with the honoring of the symbolic. Here patriotism degenerates into narrow-minded chauvinism and, as a result, is sacrificed to a "humanity without fatherland." The place of the *milieu* theory and the notion of racial instinct[5] is challenged by hero worship, the cult of genius,

5. Here Bavinck refers to deterministic theories advanced in nineteenth-century Europe by the likes of Ernest Renan (1823–1892), who argued that instinctual racial characteristics determined behavioral traits, and Hippolyte Taine (1828–1893), who argued that genius was the product of both race and environment (*milieu*).—Ed.

and the apotheosis of the *Übermensch*.[6] Besides a historical sensibility, which glorifies all existence, we discover a revolutionary impulse that despises the historical. Repristination and emancipation wrestle with each other for the plunder. Marx[7] and Nietzsche work together to curry the public's favor. Between socialism and individualism, between democracy and aristocracy, between classicism and Romanticism, between atheism and pantheism, between unbelief and superstition, civilized humanity swings back and forth.

Shared by both movements, nevertheless, is, undoubtedly, an aversion to the common Christian faith. While one modern movement is indeed different from another, what is clear is that historical Christianity has had its day. It no longer fits with our Copernican worldview, or with our knowledge of nature and her immutable laws, with our modern culture, with our "this-worldliness" [*Diesseitigkeit*] outlook on life, with our valuation of material goods. The thought world of Scripture is no longer embedded in our ways of thinking. The whole of Christianity, with its Trinity and incarnation, with its creation and fall, with guilt and atonement, with heaven and hell,

6. Bavinck is referring to the "cult of genius" typical of much German Romanticism. In contrast to the aforementioned deterministic theories of behavior, Romanticism celebrated the genius as one whose heroism was rooted in an ability to transcend and break with laws and conventions. This view was represented by Friedrich Schlegel (1772–1829), and the genius was celebrated as the "Superman" (*Übermensch*) in the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), a German philosopher who held significant influence over Western thought.—Ed.

7. Karl Marx (1818–1883) was a German philosopher and political theorist whose writings shaped much of later socialist thinking.—Ed.

belongs in an obsolete worldview and is, accordingly, gone for good. It no longer speaks to our generation and is separated by a deep chasm from our modern consciousness and life. The "shibboleths" [*Schlagwörter*] "God," "soul," and "immortality," says Meyer-Benfey,[8] have lost their meaning for us. Who still feels the need today to dispute about God's existence? We no longer need God. There is no place for him in our world. Let the old hermit in the forest continue to worship God. We, the youth of Zarathustra, know that God is dead and will not be resurrected.[9]

The convergence of this rejection of Christianity and the inner discord that disturbs us in modern life gives occasion to the question whether the two phenomena exist in a causal relation. And this question is urgent when we see that at the demise of the Christian religion, no one can find comfort and everyone is fantasizing about the search for a new religion. Although there are thousands who confess with their mouths that not only Christianity but all religion is finished, the number of those who call for a new religion, a new dogma, and a new morality increases day by day. The age in which religion's day was thought to have passed flies swiftly by our eyes. The expectation that science, virtue, or art would make religion superfluous is entertained by few. It is precisely the loss

8. Heinrich Meyer-Benfey (1869–1945) was a German literary scholar.—Ed.

9. Heinrich Meyer-Benfey, *Moderne Religion* (Leipzig: Diederichs, 1902), 130. [Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* was a philosophical novel that sets out the death of God and the emergence of the *Übermensch*.—Ed.]

of religion that gives rise to the inventors of new religions everywhere—and in great numbers. They are built up from the strangest and wildest elements. One goes to the school of Darwin and Haeckel, to Nietzsche and Tolstoy, to Hegel and Spinoza.[10] One sets off, on the basis of the histories of religious lands and peoples, in order to find what he wants in India and Arabia, in Persia and Egypt. One borrows elements from occultism and theosophy, from spiritism and magic. And everything is then made into an object of religious veneration, both world and humanity, heroes and geniuses, science and art, state and society, the world of spirits and the power of nature. Each has its own divinity. While it is not only [seen like] this, religion has become, for many, a private matter, which they arrange to their own liking. And yet they all hope to work toward a "betterment of religion" [*Weiterbildung der Religion*], toward a new religion yet to come, toward a "this-worldly religion" [*Diesseitsreligion*] and a "world religion" [*Weltreligion*] that can supersede and repair the supernatural and "other-worldly" [*jenseitige*] Christianity.[11]

10. Bavinck is referring to English naturalist and evolutionist Charles Darwin (1809–1882), German biologist and philosopher Ernst Haeckel (1834–1919), German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910), German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831), and Jewish-Dutch philosopher Benedict de Spinoza (1632–1677).—Ed.

11. Weisz, *Die religiöse Gefahr*, 78–110; Engelbert Lorenz Fischer, *Die modernen Ersatzversuche für das aufgegebene Christentum* (Regensburg: Manz, 1902); E. Haach, *Die modernen Bemühungen um eine Zukunftsreligion* (Leipzig: Wallman, 1903); Pierre Daniel Chantepie de la Saussaye, "De godsdienst der wetenschap," *Onze Eeuw* (November 1904): 394–420; Theodor Simon, *Modern Surrogate für das Christentum* (Berlin: Hobbing, 1910); Pearson M'Adam Muir, *Modern Substitutes for Christianity*, Baird Lectures 1909 (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1909);

The Christian religion views this seeking and groping of a corrupt humanity not with indifference but rather with a sublime peace and even a joyful certainty. Christianity stands antithetically to all that is brought before the market today under the name *religion*. If we understand Christianity's warrant and maintain a desire to preserve her essence, then we can do nothing else but take a resolute position against the systems of the day and the worldviews of its own invention and fashioning. There can be no question of "mediation" [*Vermittlung*]. There can be no thought of reconciliation. The times are too grave to flirt with the spirit of the age. The deep, sharp contrast standing between the Christian faith and the modern person[12] must provide us with the insights that picking portions of each is not possible and that deciding between alternatives is a duty. However lovely peace would be, the conflict is upon us.[13]

But there is no reason for despondency. The adversary supplies us the weapons in hand to combat him. When the reconciliation that Christianity offers is rejected, the above division, which abides in the human heart, inevitably comes to the surface. All disharmony in our being has its origin therein. That is, although

David Balsillie, *Is a World-Religion Possible?* (London: Griffiths, 1909). One thinks further still to the religious movement of the *Monistenbond*, the Order of the Eastern Star; of the Church of the New Thought; of the world religion of Tokonami, deputy minister of domestic affairs in Japan; of Annie Besant; of 'Abdu'l Bahá; etc.

12. Bartholomaus von Carneri, *Der moderne Mensch* (Stuttgart: Strauss, [ca. 1910]).

13. Ernst Gustav Steude, "Auf zum Kampfe," *Beweis des Glaubens* 40 (January 1904): 3–23.

we, according to the testimony of our conscience, are removed from God by our sin, we cannot do without his fellowship.[14] If we reject Christianity because it does not suit us, it instantly proves at the very same time that Christianity is indispensable for us. So when the world cries out, "Away with Christ," Christ shows precisely in his death that he alone gives life to the world. Christianity does not fit the deviant concepts that modern humanity forms about the world and life. It stands diametrically opposed to them. But there is a better fit between the world and life as they are in themselves. Whoever shakes off the idols of the day and knows to rise above the prevailing prejudices in science and the academy, who faces up to the things themselves, soberly and watchfully, and takes world and humanity, nature and religion as they truly are in themselves, presses on, evermore strengthening the conviction that Christianity is the only religion whose view of the world and life fits the world and life.[15] The idea of Christianity and the meaning of reality belong together like lock and key: they make sense together. This much is made somewhat clear by three problems addressed from ancient times, the questions that formed a world-and-life view then.

14. Cf. Paul Tillich, *Mystik und Schuldbewusstsein in Schellings philosophischer Entwicklung* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1912).

15. That Christianity, although not in itself a science or philosophy but a religion, implies a defined view of both world and life is clearly demonstrated in Orr, *Christian View*, 3–36.

In ancient Greece, philosophy, as academic study was known generally, was divided into dialectics, physics, and ethics. (These names can be amended to an extent or be exchanged for others, such as logic [noetics] and natural and mental philosophies, but all frameworks eventually come back to this older trilogy).[16] The problems that confront the human mind always return to these: What is the relation between thinking and being, between being and becoming, and between becoming and acting? What am I? What is the world, and what is my place and task within this world? Autonomous thinking finds no satisfactory answer to these questions—it oscillates between materialism and spiritualism, between atomism and dynamism, between nomism and antinomianism. But Christianity preserves the harmony [between them] and reveals to us a wisdom that reconciles the human being with God and, through this, with itself, with the world, and with life.

16. Eduard von Hartmann, *Philosophie des Unbewussten* (Leipzig: Haacke, 1904), 3:18.

1

# Thinking and Being

This reconciliation occurs first in the light of the problem of thinking [*denken*] and being [*zijn*]. From ancient times onward, humanity has pondered how the mind [*geest*][1] in us can have consciousness of the things outside us and how the mind can know [*kennen*] them—in other words, what is the origin, the essence, and the limit of human knowledge [*kennis*]? The fact is certain that of ourselves and without coercion, we presume a world that exists outside us, that we seek to make it our mental property by way of perception and thinking [*denken*], and that acting thusly, we also suppose that we should obtain a

1. *Geest* has a wide semantic range and can refer to the mind, the spirit, or a ghost.—Ed.

certain and trustworthy knowledge of it. But on what grounds does this faith in a reality that is independent from our consciousness rest, and what guarantee is there that our consciousness—enriched through observation and thinking—corresponds to the world of being [*zijn*]?

For as long as the human being has occupied himself with this problem, he almost always ends up on one side or another, either sacrificing knowledge to being or being to knowledge. Empiricism trusts only sensible perceptions and believes that the processing of elementary perceptions into representations and concepts, into judgments and decisions, removes us further and further from reality and gives us only ideas [*denkbeelden*] that, though clean and subjectively indispensable, are merely "nominal" [*nomina*] and so are subjective representations, nothing but "the breath of a voice" [*flatus vocis*], bearing no sounds, only merely a "concept of the mind" [*conceptus mentis*]. Conversely, rationalism judges that sensible perceptions provide us with no true knowledge; they bring merely cursory and unstable phenomena into view, while not allowing us to see the essence of the things. Real, essential knowledge thus does not come out of sensible perceptions but comes forth from the thinking of the person's own mind; through self-reflection we learn the essence of things, the existence of the world.

In both cases and in both directions, the harmony between subject and object, and between knowing and being, is broken. With the former [i.e., empiricism], the

world is nominalistically[2] divided into its parts; with the latter [i.e., rationalism], reality is hyper-realistically identified with the idea. In the former, the danger of sensualism and materialism threatens, and in the latter, that of idealism and monism. With both, the concept of truth, of "conformity of intellect and thing" [*conformitas intellectus et rei*], a correspondence between thinking and being, is lost. For in empiricism it falls together with the empirical, sensibly perceptible reality, and in rationalism it follows out on a correspondence between thoughts with themselves, on an internal clarity, on logical necessity. So in both directions the final question arises, whether there is truth, and [if so,] what it is.

Now, however, truth is the indispensable good for our cognition and thus the goal of all science [*wetenschap*]. If there is no truth, gone with that, too, is all knowledge and science. The Christian religion thus shows its wisdom primarily in this, that it knows and preserves truth as an objective reality, which exists independent of our consciousness and is displayed by God for us in his works of nature and grace. Accordingly, each person proceeds spontaneously on the basis of the conviction that the objective world exists outside him and that it exists as he has come to know it in clear perception. Doubt does not arise in him. Only when he later tries to give

2. "Nominalism," as used by Bavinck, refers to the philosophical view that there are no universal essences or abstract concepts in reality. It is the view, rather, that these abstract concepts are reducible to linguistic aids that serve pragmatic purposes.—Ed.

an account of the reasons and grounds on which he can proceed in such a manner can doubt emerge concerning the justification of his action. For first, the distinction and the distance between physical reality and psychical sensation is so great that it seems there can be no talk of a correspondence and concurrence between them. And another issue is that a spontaneous act of faith underlies the acceptance of the reality of an external world and our trust in the truth of sense perception, a faith whose scientific credentials cannot be proved under the scrutiny of the sharpest reflection. Here whoever does not want to begin with faith but demands sufficient proofs bars himself from the way of science and has set his foot on the slippery slope of skepticism.

This misstep has already been taken with the claim that we know nothing immediately beyond our own sensations [*gewaarwordingen*] and representations [*voorstellingen*]. Whosoever speaks this way has already been caught in the snares of idealism and cannot free himself by any reasoning: the very same reasoning would apply to all the evidences one would want to bring forward for the reality of the outside world and for the trustworthiness of sense perception. No law of cause and effect can release the one who accepts the principle and starting point of idealism from the Circassian Circle [*toovercirkel*][3]

3. The "Circassian Circle" was a folk dance wherein participants form a large circle through which they move, constantly changing partners throughout the progression of the dance.—Ed.

of his representations: out of one representation he can only deduce another, and he is never able to bridge the chasm between thinking and being by reasoning. Neither can voluntarism provide any service here. From the standpoint of idealism, the opposition that the will encounters turns the will itself into a representation. And will and opposition are then not two independent realities from my consciousness but two acts of consciousness [*bewustzijnsacten*] that stand in a certain relationship to each other. The idealism adopted in principle leaves no room for realism, even for critical and transcendental realism; no more proof is possible to show that the category of causality possesses transcendent validity, for such a category might well have strength in a world that exists but not in a world whose reality must first be proved.

None of this denies that the object can only become known by the subject and be known through thinking. No one can repudiate it, in the sense that a man cannot watch himself walk along a street and cannot stand up on his own shoulders. We know the external world only through our sensations and can never approach it from beyond them. The one who does not trust knowledge until he has been able to control that which is outside himself makes an impossible and absurd demand of knowing, precisely because knowing is always—and can never be other than—a relation between subject and object. As soon as one or both falls away, there is no more knowing.

But this acknowledgment, that knowledge of the object comes only through the subject, differs vastly from the idealistic assertion that the subject immediately knows only his own sensations and representations. Our sensations and representations first become the object, the immediate object of knowledge, when we devote ourselves to psychological studies and reflect on our own soul life [*zieleleven*]. But psychology is something other than "epistemology" [*Erkenntnisstheorie*]. If we perceive the world outside ourselves, then the sensations and representations we receive by it are not the *object* of our knowledge but the knowledge itself, which we have directly obtained through perception of the outside world. In the sensations, we have knowledge not of those sensations, at least not in the first place and not immediately, but of that which is sensed [*gewaargewordene*]. And out of the sensations, we do not deduce, by syllogisms, a world beyond ourselves, which then might not exist or which might exist wholly differently from what we perceive. But in the sensations, the objective world is given to us, and this is recognized and accepted by us, just as we perceive it.[4] Naturally, those sensations are often impure and imprecise; our senses are faulty, and our subjec-

4. Friedrich Adolf Trendelenburg, *Logische Untersuchungen* (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1862), 2:476; Engelbert Lorenz Fischer, *Die Grundfragen der Erkenntnisstheorie* (Mainz: Kirchheim, 1887), 240; Wilhelm Wundt, *Grundriss der Psychologie* (Leipzig: Engelmann, 1897), 52; Georg Theodor Ziehen, *Leitfaden der physiologischen Psychologie* (Jena: Fischer, 1900), 30; Johannes Reinke, *Die Welt als That* (Berlin: Paetel, 1903), 25, 97; Rudolf Eisler, *Wörterbuch der philosophischen Begriffe*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Ernst Siegfried Mittler und Sohn, 1904), 1:269.

tivity also often exerts influence on perception. But this impurity and imprecision in our sensations, which can be remedied only through ever-repeated, rigorous perception, does not abrogate the conviction that in sensations and representations we possess a trustworthy knowledge of objective reality. Even the qualitative properties of things, such as colors and sounds, are, as currently again more commonly recognized, not to be explained merely out of an innate, specific energy of the senses but are also determined in part through the external stimuli on the nerves.[5]

This now is the fact that underpins all sensation and representation. He who denies it undermines all truth and science. He comes then with Nietzsche to the doctrine that subject and object are two absolutely different spheres, that in the act of knowing, the human person always gets in his own way and always veils things by his subjective sensations. The logical upshot is, then, to claim with the same philosopher that there is no world of being and no realm of truth; the apparent [*schijnbaar*] world is the only one, and the so-called "true" world is something that we make up. It is but a moral prejudice and an ascetic ideal that the truth has more worth than

5. James Orr, *David Hume and His Influence on Philosophy and Theology* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1903); Christoph Willems, *Die Erkenntnislehre des modernen Idealismus* (Trier: Paulinus, 1906); Richard Hönigswald, *Ueber die Lehre Humes von der Realität der Aussendinge* (Berlin: Schwetschke, 1907). Cf. Herman Bavinck, *Wijsbegeerte der Openbaring* (Kampen: Kok, 1908), 61ff. [For a modern English translation of this work, see Herman Bavinck, *Philosophy of Revelation: A New Annotated Edition*, ed. Cory Brock and Gray Sutanto (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2018), 61ff.—Ed.]

the appearance. The only word of worth in the New Testament is Pilate's skeptical question: What is truth?[6]

Knowledge of truth is possible only if we begin with the fact that subject and object, and knowing and being, correspond to each other. This fact stands firmly in the immediate awareness of all people and is accepted—consciously or unconsciously—by all who still believe in truth and science. It is science's task to explain this fact, but if it cannot do this, it will then, on pain of suicide, have to leave the matter untouched. And it will be capable of explanation only if it allows itself to be illumined by the wisdom of the divine word [*Goddelijk Woord*], which sets on our lips the confession of God the Father, the Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth. This confession is not only the first article of our Christian faith but also the foundation and cornerstone of all knowledge and science. Only with this confession can one understand and uphold the harmony of subject and object, of thinking and being. The organs of our perception are thus connected to the elements, out of which the whole cosmos is composed, by virtue of a common origin, and so each

6. Friedrich Rittelmeyer, *Friedrich Nietzsche und das Erkenntnisproblem* (Leipzig: Engelman 1903), 6, 16, 33, 60–62. This is actually nothing other than the doctrine of the old Sophists, who called the human being the measure of all things. But recently this sophism has been renewed, though not in such a crass form as that of Nietzsche, mainly by the so-called pragmatism of William James, which is anti-intellectualist and seeks its mark of truth in the utility and productivity of knowledge. Joseph de Tonquédec, *La notion de vérité dans la Philosophie Nouvelle* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1908); August Deneffe, "Relative Wahrheit," *Stimmen aus Maria-Laach* 78 (1910): 56–66; Bronislaus Switalski, *Der Wahrheitsbegriff der Pragmatismus nach William James* (Braunsberg: Bender, 1910); J. G. Ubbink, *Het Pragmatisme van William James* (Arnhem: Tamminga, 1912).

of us knows the world in a particular way and from a particular side. In each of these resides a specific energy that corresponds to the distinct works that the objective world confers to the senses.

Thus, all intellectual knowledge begins with sense perception. To acquire knowledge, Scripture refers man not to his own reason but to God's revelation in all his works. Lift up your eyes, and see the one who has created all things; [lift them up] to the teaching and the testimony; otherwise, they shall perish. Whoever rejects the word of the Lord cannot have wisdom. This is the truth of empiricism: being is a reality to which the sense perception of the subject corresponds.

The connection between subject and object receives an even greater weight when the human being elevates himself from sense perception to science by means of thinking. Observations, provided that they are taken in the general sense and not limited to visual perception, are indeed the basis and the material of our knowledge; without them, concepts are empty, just as observations without concepts remain blind. But as the human mind [*geest*] forms concepts from representations, and from these in turn forms judgments and determinations, it already appears as if he were leaving the terra firma of reality and were building castles in the sky.

One can do away with this serious difficulty by saying that such reasoning is an altogether unpractical and useless metaphysics, but this is not an answer worthy of

the man of science. The conceivability and knowability of the world is certainly the presupposition of all knowing [*weten*], but this presupposition is of such a great significance that it must be considered and ought to be justified. Whoever works scientifically must give account to himself and others of what he does and does not do. If we were inclined to neglect this objection, we would soon be rapped on the knuckles by empirical criticism. For Nietzsche is not the only one who calls the concept the "burial site of the intuition" [*begräbnisstätte einer Anschauung*];[7] Mach and Avenarius[8] are also of the opinion that when we speak of an entity [*lichaam*], only certain visual, tactile, and thermal perceptions are actually and objectively given to us. In their view, the world consists not of physical things and psychical subjects but rather of colors, tones, pressures, temperatures, spaces, times, and so on—that is, of the simplest parts of our perception. When we nevertheless speak of entities [*lichamen*], we do so only because we cannot take up each sensation separately, thus leading us, out of a practical and economic concern, to sum up a number of sensations that usually appear in connection with each other into a group. Representations and concepts do not thus correspond to an objective reality but are abbreviations, "thought symbols" [*Gedankensymbole*] for a group of

7. Cited in Rittelmeyer, *Friedrich Nietzsche*, 15.

8. Ernst Mach (1838–1916) was an Austrian physicist and philosopher, and Richard Avenarius (1843–1896) was a German philosopher. Both developed (though independently) forms of empirical criticism based on experience as fundamental.—Ed.

elements that usually appear in connection with each other. They have no intellectual but only psychological value; they serve as temporary aids to orient us to the world provisionally and to support us practically. It is not the entities [*lichamen*] that bring forth sensations in us, but rather, it is the groups of sensations formed by us that form the entities [*lichamen*]. And so what is posed is not only the objectivity of the world but also the subjectivity of man. The *I* is not an objectively existing reality and is nothing but a group of elements that usually appear together; it does not form something real but only an ideal, a unity produced by practical reason [*denk-oeconomische eenheid*], which changes with every passing moment.[9]

9. Ernst Mach, *Populärwissenschaftliche Vorlesungen*, 2nd ed. (Leipzig: Barth, 1897) [translated by Thomas J. McCormack as *Popular Scientific Lectures* (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1986)—Ed.]; Mach, *Erkenntnis und Irrtum: Skizzen zur Psychologie der Forschung* (Leipzig: Barth, 1905) [translated by Thomas J. McCormack and Paul Foulkes as *Knowledge and Error: Sketches on the Psychology of Enquiry* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1976)—Ed.]; Richard Avenarius, *Kritik der reinen Erfahrung* (Leipzig: Reisland, 1888–1890); Max Verworn, *Naturwissenschaft und Weltanschauung* (Leipzig: Barth, 1904); Verworn, *Die Mechanik des Geisteslebens* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1907). Connected to this is the immanent philosophy of Van Schuppe, Schubert-Soldern, M. R. Kaufman, et al. Cf. Richard Hönigswald, *Zur kritik der Machschen Philosophie: eine erkenntnistheoretische Studie* (Berlin: Schwetschke, 1903); Bernhard Hell, *Ernst Mach's Philosophie* (Stuttgart: Frommann, 1907); Oskar Ewald, *Richard Avenarius als Begründer des Empiriokritizismus* (Berlin: Hofmann, 1905); C. B. Spruyt, *Her empiriocriticisme, de jongste vorm van de wijsbegeerte der ervaring* (Amsterdam: De Bussy, 1899); A. Schapira, *Erkenntnistheoretische Strömungen der Gegenwart: Schuppe, Wundt und Sigwart als Erkenntnistheoretiker* (Bern: Scheitlin Spring, 1904); John Bernhard Stallo, *Die Begriffe und Theorien der modernen Physik* (Leipzig: Barth, 1901); Hans Kleinpeter, *Die Erkenntnistheorie der Naturforschung der Gegenwart* (Leipzig: Barth, 1905); Johannes Wilhelm Classen, *Vorlesungen über moderne Naturphilosophen* (Hamburg: C. Boysen, 1908); Dominicus Gerbrandus Jelgersma, "Modern Positivisme," *Gids* (October–November 1904); Bernard Hendrik Cornelis Karel van der Wijck, "Hedendaagsch Positivisme," *Onze Eeuw* (May 1905): 228–97; Willem Koster, *De Ontkenning van het bestaan der materie en de moderne physiologische psychologie* (Haarlem: Tjeenk Willink, 1904).

How the greatest uncertainty and the grossest confusion now rules over the field of the mind (*kenleer*) is clearly shown by Konstantin Kempf, "Der Bankrott der modernen Erkenntniskritik," *Stimmen aus Maria-Laach* 79 (1910): 146–56. Cf.

Now it is indeed undeniable that our representations are connections of a mass of different perceptions received by our different senses, and these concepts, in turn, are abstractions and combinations, formed out of a great number of diverse representations. There is no experimental, mathematical proof available that our representations and concepts correspond to an objective reality. Whoever desires such a proof prior to believing in an objective world of subjects and objects sets a condition that is in no way receptive to fulfillment. Even then he is also forced to deny perception all transcendent value, for here, too, there is no conclusive argument to be brought forth that the sensations are caused by an objective world of colors, sounds, movements, and so on. And also if one edges away from this skeptical consequence, the nominalistic view of representations and concepts renders all science and all truth an illusion. This is, moreover, acknowledged by Mach himself, for example. For after he first exposes the subjective character of all representations and concepts, he goes on to show that their formation is provided by the practical, economic, and teleological side of our cognitive faculty and is necessary for the acquisition of science: "All our attempts to reflect the world in our thinking would come to nothing if we were not able to find something enduring in all the kaleidoscopic change."[10] The origin and

Leonard Nelson, *Ueber das sogennante Erkenntnisproblem* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1908).

10. Though Bavinck does not provide a citation here, he was working with the second edition of Mach's work. This quotation can be found in Mach, *Populärwis-*

application of science is "bound to the great constancy of our environment."[11] How such an enduring stability is found with Mach's view of subject and object is difficult to see. It finally comes down to the conclusion that the human person, for the sake of his economic interests, attributes to subject and object the predicate of endurance [*bestendigheid*], which they do not have in themselves. It is the human being that brings order and regularity into phenomena and thus turns them into nature. He creates the "sufficient uniformity of our environment"[12] necessary for science. The intellect is here, according to Kant himself, "the legislation for nature."[13]

In the end, then, in spite of its own testimony, empirical criticism declares that science presupposes a being, something permanent and enduring, within the fluctuating of phenomena, and thus an essence, an idea of things. And if it believes that it cannot find this in the object, it places it into the object from the subject, allowing nature to be formed by the human being.

However, this is no more than a desperate move [*noodsprong*]. For it is one or the other: the human intellect does this wholly arbitrarily, without the objective

*senschaftliche Vorlesungen*, 216. Bavinck gives the quotation in German, "Alle unsere Bemühungen, die Welt in Gedanken abzuspiegeln, wären fruchtlos, wenn es nicht gelänge, in dem bunten Wechsel Bleibendes zu finde."—Ed.

11. Mach, *Populärwissenschaftliche Vorlesungen*, 223. Bavinck gives the quotation in German: "Eine grosse Beständigkeit unserer Umgebung gebunden."—Ed.

12. Bavinck gives the quotation in German: "hinreichende Gleichförmigkeit unserer Umgebung."—Ed.

13. Cited in Hönigswald, *Ueber die Lehre Humes von der Realität der Aussendinge*, 27. [Bavinck gives the quotation in German: "die Gesetzgebung für die Natur."—Ed.]

world offering any grounds for it, which means that the phenomenal world is shaped by our mind, nothing but an image of a dream, and thus, according to Nietzsche's view, is simply something that we make up. Or the intellect is justified in doing this; it acts in accordance with its endowed nature and being, presupposing, too, that nature itself, which is interpreted by the intellect, contains the information for it. And as such, the intellect and nature must both exist in thought—the former subjectively and the latter objectively—and be brought forth from it.

"For all knowledge," says rightly Berlin professor Ferdinand Jakob Schmidt,[14] "that expresses not merely subjective, empirical certainty but objective truth is grounded on the categories, axioms, and ideas that originate from the general unity of spirit in universal existence and life. And without this, there is no scientific knowledge, to whichever specific area it might pertain."[15] And H. Rickert, in his book *The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Science*,[16] demonstrates most emphatically the reasons why the world-governing [*wereldbeheerschende*]

14. Ferdinand Jakob Schmidt (1860–1939) was a German philosopher.—Ed.

15. Ferdinand Jakob Schmidt, *Der Niedergang der Protestantismus* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1904), 4. [Bavinck gives the quotation in German: "Denn alles Wissen das nicht bloss subjective, empirische Gewissheit sondern objective Wahrheit ausdrückt, ist gegründet auf die aus der allgemeinen Geisteseinheit des universellen Daseins und Lebens entspringende Kategorien, Grundsätze und Ideen, und ohne diese gibt es këine wissenschaftlichte Erkenntnis, auf welches Sondergebiet sie auch immer gerichtet sein mag."—Ed.]

16. Heinrich Rickert (1863–1936) was a German neo-Kantian philosopher. See Rickert, *Die Grenzen der naturwissenschaftlichen Begriffsbildung: Eine Logische Einleitung in die historischen Wissenschaften*, 6th ed. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1929). Translated by Guy Oakes as *The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Science: A Logical Introduction to the Historical Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).—Ed.

goodwill is the presupposition behind all our thinking and knowing.[17] No matter how we look at it, the concept of truth and science—if we think consistently and without prejudice—brings us to Christian theism.

This teaches us that all things are brought forth from the wisdom of the Word of God and thus, in Augustine's words, that all things exist according to "reason" [*rationes*], in measure, number, and weight. Scripture understands this not in a pantheistic sense, according to which all things would have originated from a contentless "reason" [*Vernunft*], an unconscious identical with a "superconscious" [*Überbewusste*], an illogical will, or a blind force of nature. For how would the ideas, which are in the world, ever be able to find an explanation of their origin there? Just as materialism is capable of understanding thinking [*het denken*] as a product of material alterations [*stof-wisseling*], so it is possible for atheism to explain the world out of the unconscious, calling this either reason or will. If the world can be the content of our knowing, it must itself be clear and distinguished by thought beforehand. Only as all things are from the "foreknowledge" [προγνωσις] of God are they altogether a "manifestation" [φανερωσις] of his thoughts. The *universalia* are *in re*, for they existed *ante rem* in the divine consciousness [*bewustzijn*]. The world would not be known to us if it did not exist, but it would not exist

17. Cf. Heinrich Rickert, *Der Gegenstand des Erkenntnis: Einführung in die Transzendental-philosophie*, 2nd ed. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1904).

if it were not thought of beforehand by God. We know the things because they are, but they are because God has known them.[18] The doctrine of the creation of all things by the Word of God is the explanation of all knowing and knowing about [*kennen en weten*], the presupposition behind the correspondence between subject and object. Just as the senses concur with the elements of things, so does the understanding respond to thought, which binds the elements to things, to bodies, to a nature and the world. For "what is seen" [το βλεπομενον] did not come to be "out of the visible" [εχ φαινομενων] (Heb. 11:3); the "invisible attributes of God" [ἀορατα του θεου] can be "perceived" [νοουμενα] through his works, becoming beheld by the "mind" [νους] (Rom. 1:18).[19] The *universalia in re* move over into our consciousness along the path of sense perception, then through the thinking activity of the "mind" [νους]. The world becomes, and can only become, our spiritual [*geestelijk*] property, for it is itself existing spiritually [*geestelijk*] and logically and resting in thought.

Hence, we now gain this great and rich advantage—that for us, objective truth is displayed to us in all the works of God's hands, in nature and history, in creation and re-creation. The knowable [*weetbare*] precedes our science [*wetenschap*], just as the faith that we believe pre-

18. Augustine, *Conf.* 13.38; *Civ.* 9.10.
19. Though Bavinck cites Rom. 1:18 here, he is paraphrasing more directly the wording of Rom. 1:20.—Ed.

cedes the faith by which we believe. The objects of knowledge are the measure of knowledge.[20] And the deeper one thinks this through, [the clearer it becomes that] all truth is understood in the Wisdom, in the Word, who was in the beginning with God and who himself was God. The one who denies this Wisdom undermines the "foundation" [*fundamentum*] of all science, for "whoever denies ideas, denies the Son" [*qui negat ideas, negat Filium*].[21] On this Christian standpoint, all autonomy of the human mind falls away, as if it could produce truth out of its own reason and through its own means. The human being is not the creator and former of the world; his understanding does not write its laws on nature, and in his scientific research he does not have to arrange things according to his categories. To the contrary, it is the human who has to conform his perception and thinking to God's revelation in nature and grace: "Reality does not have to make itself comply with our reason, but rather, on the basis of the whole experience of the whole age, our thinking must seek to lay bare the metaphysic that God has woven into reality."[22] To enter into the realm of truth, we must

20. Otto Willmann, *Geschichte des Idealismus* (Braunschweig: F. Vieweg und Sohn, 1896), 2:403. [The latter part of this line is composed of Latin phrases: ". . . zooals de *fides*, *quae* aan de *fides*, *qua creditor*. *Scibilia sunt mensural scientiae*." Furthermore, though Bavinck does not cite the specific edition of Willman's work from which he is drawing, it is likely that he was working with the 1896 edition, since the first edition of *Christian Worldview* was published in 1904, which preceded the 1907 edition of *Geschichte des Idealismus*.—Ed.]

21. Willmann, *Geschichte des Idealismus*, 3:802.

22. Gustav Portig, *Das Weltgesetz des kleinsten Kraftaufwandes in den Reichen der Natur*, vol. 1, *In der Mathematik, Physik und Chemie* (Stuttgart: Kielmann, 1903), cited in *Beweis des Glaubens* (September–October 1904): 260. [Bavinck gives the quotation in German: "Nicht hat sich die Wirklichkeit nach unserer Vernunft zu

become children: "It is of nature to bring forth, and freedom, the freedom brought from truth."[23] All knowledge consists in the conformity of our consciousness to the objective truth. One thus knows the truth to the extent that he himself is in the truth. To understand the truth, one must be of the truth.[24]

But even with sense perception and science, with representations and concepts, the human mind does not stand still. It is not satisfied with these but strives above both toward a comprehensive wisdom.[25] Science and wisdom are doubtless closely related, but they are not identical. In former times, Aristotle's distinction was normally granted, that science [*wetenschap*] consisted in "the knowledge of the thing through the *proximate cause*,"[26] while wisdom, on the other hand, stretched toward "the knowledge of the thing through the *primary cause*."[27] This distinction has remained in force up to the present day. It is true, however, that in the last century, out of a reaction against the aprioristic speculation of Hegel and

richten, sondern unser Denken muss auf Grund der Gesamterfahrung eines ganzen Weltalters die von Gott in die Wirklichkeit verwobene Metaphysiek blosszulegen suchen."—Ed.]

23. Bavinck gives the quotation in Latin: "Naturae parere, libertas, libertas ex veritate." Bavinck deploys these same terms and this same pattern of reasoning in his "Evolution," in *Essays on Religion, Science, and Society*, ed. John Bolt, trans. Harry Boonstra and Gerrit Sheeres (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 113.—Ed.

24. Willmann, *Geschichte des Idealismus*, 2:993.

25. According to Cicero's account, the name *sophoi* ["wise men"], which was first used by the Greeks, was turned into *philosophoi* ["philosophers"] by Pythagoras, on the grounds that wisdom pertains to God alone, whereas humans can only desire and strive for wisdom.

26. Bavinck gives the quotation in Latin: "cognitio rei per causam *proximam*" (italics original).—Ed.

27. Bavinck gives the quotation in Latin: "cognitio rei per causam *primam*" (italics original).—Ed.

his school, the wisdom of the heritage of knowledge was banished, and the right of existence for all metaphysics was denied. Science had to limit itself in a positivist sense to the investigation of the phenomena and of their mutual connections, the *nexus rerum*.[28] And as long as science itself lived in the delusion, and gave others the illusion, that it would solve all the riddles of the world and life, it could, in naïve innocence, deem all philosophy superfluous. But when the mysteries increased from all sides in advanced research, wisdom itself had to assert its rights again and claim a place in the field of human knowledge. Metaphysics, philosophy, world-and-life view currently celebrate their glorious return, not only in theology and the humanities [*geesteswetenschappen*][29] but also in the natural sciences [*wetenschap der natuur*].[30] The human mind does not set a limit for itself in its search for knowledge, not even with Kant or Comte.[31] If science [*wetenschap*] does not quench its thirst for truth, it eagerly stretches out toward the source of wisdom. After all, humanity has not only the faculty of perception [*waarnemingsvermogen*]

28. This Latin term denotes the universal connections that bind all things together.—Ed.

29. G. Wobbermin, *Theologie und Metaphysik: Das Verhältnis der Theologie zur Modernen Erkenntnistheorie und Psychologie* (Berlin: Duncker, 1901); Johannes Wendland, "Philosophie und Religion," *Theologische Studien und Kritiken* (1903): 517–85; Emil Pfennigsdorf, "Theologie und Metaphysik," *Theologische Rundschau* (1904): 399–413; Herman Groenewegen, *De Theologie en hare wijsbegeerte* (Amsterdam: Rogge, 1904).

30. Wilhelm Ostwald, *Vorlesungen über Naturphilosophie* (Leipzig: Veit, 1902); Ostwald, *Grundriss der Naturphilosophie* (Leipzig: Reclam, 1908); Reinke, *De Welt als That*; Hans Driesch, *Naturbegriffe und Natururteile* (Leipzig: Engelmann, 1904); Alfred Dippe, *Naturphilosophie: Kritische Einführung in die modernen Lehren über Kosmos und Menschheit* (München: Beck, 1907).

31. Auguste Comte (1798–1857) was a French philosopher.—Ed.

and a mind [*verstand*] but also reason, which can find rest and satisfaction only in the "Absolute" [*Unbedingte*].

The distinction between wisdom and science does not, however, sever its connection with this truth. True wisdom is not served by aprioristic speculation; it has not to do with tenuous theories but with knowledge of reality. Just as sense perception is the basis [*grondslag*] of all science, the results of science are and remain the starting point of philosophy. Yet it is incorrect that philosophy should be no more than the summary of the results of the various sciences and that they should be set together only as the wheels of a clock.[32] Wisdom is grounded on science but is not limited to it. It aims above science and seeks to press through to "first principles" [*prima principia*]. It already does this if it makes a special group of phenomena—religion, ethics, law, history, language, culture, and so on—into the object of its reflection [*denkende beschouwing*] and tries to trace the leading ideas therein. But it does this, above all, as it seeks for the final grounds of all things and builds a worldview thereon.

If this is the nature and task of philosophy, then it is presupposed—to an even greater degree than sense perception and science—that the world rests in thought and that ideas control all things. There is no wisdom other than that which is in and out of the faith in a realm of unseen and eternal things. It is built on the reality of ideas,

32. Tilmann Pesch, *Die grossen Welträthsel*, 2nd ed. (Freiburg: Herder, 1892), 1:69.

because it is indeed the "science of the idea" [*Wissenschaft der Idee*] and because it seeks the idea of the whole in the parts and of the general in the particular.[33] It tacitly proceeds from the Christian faith, which states that the world is grounded in wisdom and reveals wisdom in its whole and in all its parts (Ps. 104:24; Prov. 3:19; 1 Cor. 1:21). It is the same divine wisdom [*Goddelijke wijsheid*] that created the world organically into a connected whole and planted in us the urge for a "unified" [*einheitliche*] worldview. If this is possible, it can be explained only on the basis of the claim that the world is an organism and has first been thought of as such. Only then do philosophy and worldview have a right and ground of existence, as it is also on this high point of knowledge that subject and object harmonize, as the reason within us corresponds with the *principia* of all being and knowing. And what philosophy has demanded according to its essence is then guaranteed and explained for us by the testimony of God in his word. It is the same divine wisdom that gives things existence and our thought objective validity, that bestows intelligibility to things and the power of thinking [*denkkracht*] to our mind, that makes the things *real* and our thoughts [*denkbeelden*] *true*. The intelligibility of things is the content of our intellect. Both being and knowing [*het zijn en het kennen*] have their "reason" [*ratio*] in the Word, through whom God created all things.[34]

33. Trendelenburg, *Logische Untersuchungen*, 1:5, 6; 2:461.
34. Willmann, *Geschichte des Idealismus*, 1:279, 433 cf. 541, etc.

Finally, it is from this high and glorious standpoint, on which Christian wisdom places us, that a surprising light is cast on the relationship of religion and philosophy. All great thinkers have felt and recognized their kinship. Led by his dialectical method, Hegel came to the view that religion was the primitive philosophy, the allegory-shrouded, imaginative metaphysics [*aanschouwelijke metaphysica*] of the common people [*volk*], and thus that philosophy is religion transposed into concepts by thinkers. In so doing, he fell short in describing the essence of both, particularly so in the case of religion. For even if it were true that philosophy could provide a complete explanation of the world and a perfectly pure concept of God, it would still not be enough for the human being. The thirst of his heart goes forth not primarily for a pure concept of God [*Godsbegrip*] but for the living God himself. The human being finds no rest until God becomes *his* God and *his* Father. While philosophy may have such a glorious task and calling, we ourselves do not find God [when led] by her hand; we approach him, we enter into fellowship with him, only by way of religion. Even for the deepest thinker, there is no justification thanks to the concept [of Hegel];[35] it is only from faith. Jesus, God be thanked, pronounced not the wise and the prudent blessed but rather the little ones, those who are small among the philosophers. Bet-

35. Just as Dr. G. A. van den Bergh van Eysinga claims, in *Allegorische Interpretatie* (Amsterdam: P. N. van Kampen & Zoon, 1904), 28. [Here Bavinck refers to Gustaaf Adolf van den Bergh van Eysinga (1874–1957), a Dutch New Testament scholar who belonged to the Dutch school of Radical Criticism.—Ed.]

ter than Hegel's method was the idea of Schleiermacher,[36] who derived religion and philosophy from two totally distinct needs and functions of human nature and thus ensured an enduring place for both in human life. But this dualism also does not satisfy: philosophy is not limited to the finite, and thus it also comes in contact with God as the final cause of all things; and religion, bringing the human being first into fellowship with God, thereby also determines his relationship to all creatures. It does not proceed in passionate feelings [*gevoelsaandoeningen*] but follows very concrete representations [*voorstellingen*] and always contains in seed form a whole worldview.[37]

Now by the nature of things, a worldview is always "unified" [*einheitlich*]. As long as we have not understood, however, all the realms and spheres of creation as parts of a whole, our worldview is not rounded out and complete. Of course, the question here is not whether we have already brought our worldview to that point or ever shall do so, but the concept implies harmonious unity. As such, there can be no essentially different worldview in religion and in philosophy, for the common people and for the learned, for the academy and for life. If religion contains a worldview in seed form, and philosophy, in searching for the final ground of all things, always seeks

36. Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) was a German theologian influential in the rise of modern Protestant theology.—Ed.

37. On the distinction between philosophy and worldview, see Hans Richert, *Philosophie: Ihr Wesen, ihre Probleme, ihre Literatur* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1912), 18; on that between world imagery [*wereldbeeld*] and worldview [*wereldbeschouwing*], see C. Wenzig, *Die Weltanschauungen der Gegenwart* (Leipzig: Quelle and Meyer, 1907), 1.

after God, then it follows naturally that they, in all their distinctions, have to conform inwardly to the essence of the matter and cannot compete with each other.

Only the Christian worldview can fulfill this demand, because it makes known to us one God, the living and true God, and cuts the root of all polytheism. There is not a different God for the child and the elderly person, for the simple and the learned, for the heart and the head. The separation, an imitation of Gnosticism now made by many between exoteric and esoteric doctrine, between representation and concept, between fact and idea, is in principle unacceptable. In pedagogical terms, it gives rise to all sorts of misunderstanding and untruthful conduct. In addition to this, it fails to recognize both the ideal reality of being and the tethering of consciousness to the world of reality. It is incorrect to claim that truth can be found only *in* and *for* the concept [*het begrip*] and that everything else is image and likeness.[38] For we do not have enough in blind facts and empty ideas. Hence, in the Christian religion both are intimately united. Creation and re-creation are acts of God in time, but at the same time, they are the embodiment of his eternal counsel. The philosophy that remains true to its own idea and does not lose itself in vain speculation thus leads to the same God revealed to us by the Christian religion as a God of wisdom and grace. And the Christian religion makes

38. Van den Bergh van Eysinga, *Allegorische Interpretatie*, 28.

known to us that same theism by its revelation, which upon unprejudiced investigation is made known to be the basis of all science [*wetenschap*] and philosophy. The same God needed by the pious believer and the philosopher is the one who makes himself known to both in his works. It is the same Word who made all things and who, in the fullness of time, became flesh. The same Spirit who renews the face of the earth changes the heart of the sinner. And thus: *verus philosophus amator Dei* ["The true philosopher is a lover of God"], and: *Christianus verus philosophus* ["A Christian is a true philosopher"].[39]

39. Cf. Lactantius, who, in the fourth book of his *Divinae Institutiones*, provides a discourse on "true wisdom" [*vera sapientia*] and "religion" [*religione*] and therein shows the indissoluble relationship between the two. [An English translation is available as Lactantius, *The Divine Institutes, Books I–VII*, vol. 49 of *The Fathers of the Church*, trans. Mary Francis McDonald (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1964).—Ed.]

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