

# The Amateur Economist: Abraham Kuyper and Economics

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*Abstract.* One of the earliest attempts at formulating a systematic religious approach to economics was undertaken by neo-Calvinists, first in the Netherlands, and later in the twentieth century also in the Anglo-Saxon world. While their approach to and achievements in economics have received due attention, the economic views of neo-Calvinism's inspiring founder, Dutch theologian, statesman, and journalist Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920), have been largely neglected. This article seeks to fill this gap by discussing Kuyper's take on the science of economics in light of his neo-Calvinist ideals. It shows that he thought highly of the German historical school, but in the end deemed a further reformation of the field necessary. What the social question of poverty and unemployment required was a truly Christian (and hence Calvinist) approach to economics.

*Keywords:* Abraham Kuyper, neo-Calvinist economics, social question, German historical school

## 1. Introduction

One of the earliest attempts at 'religious economics,' i.e. economics treated in a religious framework, was undertaken by Dutch neo-Calvinists. What started in the first half of the twentieth century at the religiously inspired Vrije Universiteit (Free University) of Amsterdam as Calvinist political economy (Hengstmengel 2013) evolved into an international, distinctively Christian economics from the 1970s to the 1990s. It was elaborated by economists like Bob Goudzwaard in the Netherlands and Douglas Vickers, Alan Storkey, John Tiemstra, and many others in the US, Britain, and Australia. They were influenced by the Dutch neo-Calvinist philosopher Herman Dooyeweerd, and ultimately by the founder of Dutch neo-Calvinism: theologian, politician, and journalist Abraham Kuyper (see Koch 2006 and Bratt 2013 for biographies). The neo-Calvinist or 'Kuyperian' branch of reformed economics rejects the nineteenth-century separation of economics, theology, and ethics and is highly critical of

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(neo)classical economics. Kuyperian economists believe that economics, like all science, is ultimately founded on religious presuppositions: there simply is no such thing as a value-free and purely objective science of economics. Faithful to the belief that Jesus Christ is Lord of all creation, including the economy and economic science, they aim at reforming economics.

Much of the literature on the neo-Calvinist tradition in economics (Goudzwaard 1986; Hoksbergen 1992; Tiemstra 1999; Goudzwaard and Jongeneel 2014, esp. 215-20; Pahman 2016; Oslington 2020) deals more with Kuyper's heritage than with Kuyper's own economic views—and understandably so, for Kuyper was anything but a professional economist. Moreover, his extensive and wide-ranging oeuvre contains little that counts as economics proper. Nevertheless, Kuyper showed a more than average interest in what was by then known as the science of political economy (*staathuishoudkunde*). On various occasions, he stressed the importance of economics and made a thorough study himself of some of its practitioners. Already in Kuyper's early work (e.g., Kuyper 1872), there is an awareness of the role played by political economy, both in theory and in practice, in the economic problems of his days. His contribution to this so-called “social question” of improving the working and living conditions of laborers is well-documented—and will therefore not be discussed here. His views on economics as a discipline, however, have thus far been largely neglected.

The nineteenth century, to which Kuyper belonged intellectually, was dominated by classical economics. This school of Adam Smith, Thomas Malthus, John Stuart Mill, and others worked mostly deductively, in search of economic laws. It assumed self-interested economic behavior, and argued for a harmony of interests and minimal government interference. The middle of the century saw the emergence of various types of socialism that attacked the classical framework. Building on earlier expressions of utopian socialism, Karl Marx gave birth to a ‘scientific’ socialism that criticized the capitalist system for exploiting laborers and predicted the eventual downfall of capitalism. In Germany, the rise of historicism led to the development of the school of historical economics, subdivided into an older school of Wilhelm Roscher, Bruno Hildebrand, and Karl Knies and a younger one led by Gustav Schmoller. Rejecting the absolutism of classical economic theory, both schools took a historical approach to economic development, with due attention to political, legal, and cultural aspects. Thanks to their concern for the laboring class, adherents of the school were known as state or armchair socialists (*Kathedersozialisten*). Between 1875 and 1925, several other schools less important to our story emerged, including marginalism, institutionalism, and welfare economics. These followed upon a “battle of methods” (*Methodenstreit*) that Kuyper was probably unfamiliar with.

In the Netherlands of Kuyper (see Duyverman 1978; Vermaat, Klant and Zuidema, 1987; Boschloo 1989; Zuidema 1992; Elzas 1992; Hasenberg Butter 2011), economics enjoyed an early academic institutionalization. As early as 1815-6, the new science was taught as a separate course

in Leyden by H. W. Tydeman, and by 1830 almost all Dutch faculties of law had their own economic chair. One usually distinguishes between four generations of early Dutch economists. The first is formed by the “godfather” of Dutch economics, G. K. van Hogendorp (1762-1834), who played an important role in transmitting foreign economic ideas. He served as a mentor to the second generation (±1815-1850), consisting of Tydeman and Utrecht professor J. Ackersdijk, the “father” of Dutch economics, among others. Both were strongly influenced by British classical economics. The third generation (±1850-1890), headed by Leyden professor S. Vissering, “the Dutch Bastiat,” rather followed the French school of classical economics. Except for “the Dutch Ricardo,” banker W. C. Mees, they were hardly original and lacked a purely theoretical interest. Due to the second and third generations, classical economics dominated the first three-quarters of the nineteenth century.

Beginning in the 1870s, the period during which Kuyper began to write about the social question and entered politics, Dutch academia witnessed a growing interest in the historical school and marginalist approach in economics. The former appealed to people like H. P. G. Quack, who sympathized with Christian socialism, politician H. Goeman Borgesius, J. A. Levy, author of a book on English academic socialism, and M. W. F. Treub, who proposed a ‘social economics’ (Tieben and Schoorl 2016). The latter was adopted by a new generation of economists, including N. G. Pierson, J. d’Aulnis de Bourouill, and C. A. Verrijn Stuart. Whereas Amsterdam professor Pierson dominated Dutch economics since the 1880s, after his death in 1909 Groningen professor Verrijn Stuart became the most influential theoretical economist. Interestingly, Kuyper the politician crossed swords with many of these fourth-generation economists in the Dutch House of Representatives (henceforth: parliament).

Given this short account of nineteenth-century economics both abroad and at home, it is interesting to know where such an influential figure in Dutch politics and society as Kuyper stood. What role did economics play in his writings and speeches,<sup>2</sup> and how far did his knowledge of the school struggle in economics extend? Answering these questions is the focus of this article, which is organized as follows. Section 2 deals with the way Kuyper linked the social question to political economy as a science, and the classical school more specifically. Section 3 discusses the scope of Kuyper’s readings in economics as well as his sympathy for the German historical school. In section 4, Kuyper’s preference for the historical approach to economics is illustrated by his contributions to the debate on free trade versus protectionism. The penultimate section 5 sketches his ideal of a Calvinist economics. Finally, section 6 concludes.

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<sup>2</sup> Kuyper’s numerous economic contributions to the Dutch newspaper *De Standaard* have not been systematically checked.

## 2. The social question in scientific form

Due to the influence of classical economists such as Smith, Jean-Baptiste Say and Frédéric Bastiat, the science of political economy in the Netherlands for a long time conveyed a liberal-economic message. Virtually all economists of the second and third generations were staunch liberals who believed the economy could be left alone, as it was governed by eternal laws. As a rule, they optimistically pleaded for economic freedom and opposed state intervention. With regard to the question of poverty, which rose to prominence only in the 1850s, the liberal economists took a passive stance (Boschloo 1989, 118-28, 196-247; Schoorl 2001). Foremost a moral problem, pauperism was said to disappear automatically, provided that the government did not interfere. Several of these economists participated at the conferences organized by the Algemeene Vereeniging tegen het Pauperisme (General Association against Pauperism), defending a *laissez-faire* position. Poor relief was seen as a private and ecclesiastical affair, and poverty alleviation ultimately required economic, moral, and religious education. However, there were a few exceptions. Tydeman, unlike his colleagues, was an interventionist who published on the question of poverty and supported the Poor Law of 1854. Though a supporter of *laissez faire*, also Amsterdam professor J. de Bosch Kemper showed an above-average concern for the poor that resulted, among other things, in a lengthy historical study of poverty. His student Quack, professor of economics in Utrecht and Amsterdam, wrote a six-volume work on the history of socialism from antiquity to modern times.

The late Dutch industrialization in the 1870s brought to the fore a new “social question” (or “workers question”). It covered a range of socio-economic problems, from deplorable working and living conditions and mass unemployment to child labor and alcohol abuse, which all cried for a solution. Again, the answer of the older generation of liberal economists was one of non-interventionism based on a belief in the progressive evolution of society. They maintained that there was actually no social question at all. De Bosch Kemper, Quack, and later academic socialists, by contrast, strove for what the former called an “emancipation of the factory workers.” In 1870, a younger generation of liberals including Delft professor of economics B. H. Pekelharing founded the Comité ter bespreking der sociale quaestie (Committee for discussing the social question). Several years later, *Vragen des tijds* (*Contemporary Questions*) was launched as an alternative to the well-known liberal periodical *De Gids* (*The Guide*), in which the older liberal economists published their work. The new journal developed into a platform for Dutch academic socialists who believed that the conditions of laborers cried out for social action and state intervention. In the first quarter of the twentieth century, a Dutch school of Marxism emerged, with Rudolf Kuyper as one of its theorists (Kalshoven 1995).

As a Member of Parliament (MP), our Abraham Kuyper was supposed to deal with economic problems as well. Most of these revolved around the social question, which he deemed of great urgency. His efforts effectively made him an amateur economist. His pupil Tiemen de Vries (1904, 7-8) indeed called political economy “the social question in its scientific form.” Kuyper’s best-known discussion of the social question was his 1891 address, *The Social Question and the Christian Religion*—which has rightly been called the Protestant equivalent of Leo XIII’s *Rerum Novarum* published in the same year. His lifelong passion to help the poor (Bratt 2002; Van Dyke 2013) left many other traces, though. From a practical point of view, Kuyper as MP called for a code of labor law and chambers (councils) of labor; in his role of prime minister from 1901 to 1905, he presented a series of legislative proposals for social reform (three of which were actually adopted). In his writings, the social question first features in an inaugural sermon preached in 1870 and is still present in a political speech held in 1918, two years before his death. In the half-century between, he published various theological and political works dealing with poverty, unemployment, and labor conditions (Kuyper 2021 provides an English anthology).

Repeatedly, Kuyper presented the economic distress of his times as an effect of the French Revolution. Although he had to admit that the revolution of 1789 was not the only cause, it was, he asserted, the main cause. Kuyper envisioned a close relationship between prevailing world views or ideologies and the way that societies are organized and governed. World views come with different conceptions of society, which in turn give rise to corresponding economic theories and policies. The French Revolution he viewed as an atheistic world view that glorified individual man. It showed itself to be thoroughly individualistic, conceiving of society as a sum of egoistic, self-seeking individuals. Having dispensed with the supernatural dimension of life, revolutionaries elevated money as man’s highest good.

The revolutionary ideology was provided with a political-economic vindication by classical economics, a school that Kuyper fought all his life (Smeenk 1937, 15-6). He denoted it interchangeably as Adam Smith’s “old-orthodox school,” “Manchester school,” or “liberal school” of economics. This school, he once explained to his colleagues in parliament, “found in Stuart Mill its strongest representative, and can be characterized as the school of the individualistic principle, which takes selfishness as its lever, and sets utility as the supreme goal” (1890, 193). When it came to economic policy, it preached a “mercantile gospel of *laissez faire, laissez passer*” that resulted in a struggle for money and, eventually, a struggle for life in society (1891, 21). The *laissez-faire* politics of the liberals reduced the laborer to a “sort of appendix of the machine” (1889, 19).<sup>3</sup> This led to the birth of the problems addressed by the social question. Whereas the classical school promised the greatest happiness of the greatest number, Kuyper cited theologian

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Marx’s and Engels’s (1848, 7) observation that the laborer became a “bloßes Zubehör der Maschine.”

Rawson Birks, “the greatest discontent of the greatest number, seems almost to be the result” (1890, 194).

Liberty, however, was not the only ideal of the French Revolution, nor were liberalism and liberal economics its only products. Indirectly it also gave birth to socialism and social democracy, which in a sense were faithful to the other revolutionary ideals of equality and fraternity. In Kuyper’s eyes, socialist concerns about the economic problems of his day were fully justified. He also mostly shared their analysis of the causes. In his 1891 address on the social question, Kuyper warned his audience not to think of socialists as ignorant or utopian hotheads. As a matter of fact, they were respectable and learned people. “Marx was, like Marlo and Rodbertus, a man of outstanding learning and high scientific sense” (1891, 64; cf. 1909, 263 on Lassale, Marx and Engels). As a Dutch example, he mentioned Quack. Unlike earlier communists and utopists as Charles Fourier and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, the socialists studied the problems of capitalism carefully. “The very serious power of the socialists precisely lies in study and thorough research” (1891, 70). Their solution to the social question in terms of extensive state intervention, however, was erroneous.

### **3. Kuyper among the economists**

Inspired by the example of the socialists and Roman-Catholic writers alike, Kuyper believed that finding an answer to the social question required in-depth study (cf. De Gaay Fortman 1956, 21-2)—not only of the factual situation but also of the existing literature. “Also on our side,” he states in the notes to his 1891 address, “there must be study and work. One won’t get further with the social question by sentimental talk or superficial generalities” (1891, 70; cf. 1897, 5). The extensive footnotes to the printed version of his address, which listed all the relevant literature as he saw it, testified to Kuyper’s own intellectual wanderings. His interest in socio-economic literature dates from at least 1869, when he borrowed a book by Bishop Von Ketteler, probably *Die Arbeiterfrage und das Christenthum*, from Groen van Prinsterer’s wife. Since most of the titles mentioned in the footnotes date from the 1770-80s, Kuyper must have read a great many books in these years. He studied works written not only by Roman-Catholics but also by a great variety of socialists and liberals. The posthumous catalog of Kuyper’s private library groups all of these writings under “Oeconomie.”

Only a smaller part of the titles that Kuyper mentions in his footnotes can be classified as economics proper. Yet there is no doubt that he saw the importance of the young science, not least because of the influence of economic theories on politics and everyday life. In 1872, in a letter to Groen van Prinsterer, he inquired for “the best, most Christian-Historical work written on political economy” (Goslinga 1937, 179). While Groen was unable to answer his question,

Kuyper continued his readings in economics. Two years later, in a letter to Groen again, he mentioned Marx, suggesting that he had started in *Das Kapital*. His hours spent with Marx proved helpful later in life when he confronted socialists and social democrats in parliament with what their “chieftain” wrote. Not only did Kuyper believe that reality disproved Marx’s predictions about the collapse of capitalism; Kuyper also claimed that Marx’s materialistic system of thought in the end was atheistic (1909, 75, 91, 93-4). Ultimately, the choice for Christian members of parliament concerned with the social question was one between Marx or Christ (1909, 265).

Of course, Marx was not the only economist in Kuyper’s economic universe. The appendix to this article lists all the titles by professional economists that appear in his works. If we suppose that he read everything that he quoted from or referred to by edition or page, then all these books were once at his desk or on his bookshelves. What may in any case be deduced from this list is that Kuyper mainly studied economists in the classical-economic tradition and members of the German historical school. Of Smith, Malthus, and Ricardo he consulted later editions—Ricardo even in French, and Marx’s *Capital* he knew at least in two editions. That said, it is possible that Kuyper studied Smith and Marx primarily from secondary sources, since he also refers to J. F. Baert’s *Adam Smith en zijn onderzoek naar den rijkdom der volken (Adam Smith and his Inquiry into the Wealth of Nations, 1858)* and Gabriel Deville’s *Le Capital de Karl Marx, résumé (1883)*. Eisenhart, Laspeyres, Roscher, and Block apparently served as his guides to the history of economic thought.

Kuyper, it is clear, was well aware of the different currents of economic thought. To the same extent as theological departments, he observed, faculties of law where political economy is studied are characterized by discord (1908, 234, referring to Treub’s critique of Pierson). In his address on the social question (1891, 28-30), he summarized all the varieties of nineteenth-century socialism, from nihilism and anarchism to state socialism, and the historical school in economics more specifically. He also realized that the classical school was far from extinct. In a series of newspaper articles, Kuyper (1880b) classified Minister of Finance (and former professor of political economy) Vissering as “leader and spokesman of the egoist school of political economy,” the dehumanizing theories of which reduced man to a labor force.<sup>4</sup> As an alternative, Kuyper mentions the “ethical school”—unfortunately without providing details. Thirty years later, he pointed out in parliament (1908, 122-3) that liberal economics was represented in Utrecht by d’Aulnis and in Amsterdam by Treub.<sup>5</sup> Thanks to the German economist Albert Schäffle, however,

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<sup>4</sup> Other characterizations of Vissering by Kuyper include: “academic incarnation of a throughout egoistic political economy” (*De Standaard*, August 21, 1879) and “captain and veteran of the economists of Smith’s school” (September 15, 1879).

<sup>5</sup> This shows that Kuyper was unaware of the fact that d’Aulnis stood in the new marginalist tradition, and Treub rather represented the historical school.

the “old school of Bastiat and Cobden” was abandoned by younger economists (*Handelingen* 1910, 488). It was with the younger and older German historical schools that his own sympathies lay.

In Dutch parliament, Kuyper once openly sided with the Germans (cf. Zijlstra 1987, 155). Commenting on the new liberal Pierson cabinet formed in 1897, he publicly questioned whether it was sufficiently homogenous in its principles and plans. After all, Prime Minister and former professor of political economy Pierson and Minister of Foreign Affairs W.H. de Beaufort were, in his eyes, followers of the classical school of economics, while Minister of Justice and former professor of political economy P. W. A. Cort van der Linden had armchair-socialist sympathies. This led Kuyper to call into question whether the social reforms promised by the Pierson cabinet would be sufficiently consistent. He lectured on this topic for about 15 minutes:

When it comes to social reforms, there is not a single road. Many people still believe this, and most organs of the liberal press write as if there is only one school in economics. But anyone who crosses the border and takes note of academic studies abroad knows better. Indeed, there is not one but two schools, which oppose each other like water and fire, namely the old-orthodox school of Smith, Say, and Ricardo and the younger one of Carey, Friedrich List, and Roscher. Now it of course interests me to know whether the cabinet when it is ready for its social reforms, these will be dominated by the spirit of the old or the new school. ... I insist [on this question] since the Christian parties in this country have followed the dispute between both economic schools with particular interest. (...)

Precisely because these [parties] fight for the Christian and historical (I do not say Christian-historical) philosophy of life [*levensbeschouwing*], they could not but oppose the older-orthodox school of economics. Burke had already blown the anti-revolutionary trumpet against the false individualism, and after him all opponents of revolutionary principles (all those, whether Protestant or Roman-[Catholic], who have stood up to fight the pernicious principle of the French Revolution) have increasingly committed themselves to the historical school. And, when they got involved in economics, they felt ever deeper and have pronounced with increasing clarity that also to them the old school in economics went against the grain, since it shared with the French Revolution the same deductive method, the same one-sided individualism, the same magic with a certain view of man [*menschentype*], the same indifference towards the national and the ethical interest.

So when, gradually, in economics altogether different historical-social ideas were proclaimed by men like Carey in America, by Friedrich List and others, men of Christian conviction in almost countries have expressed their sympathy. (...)

But, incidentally, by virtue of their social principle Christian parties had to take side against the individualistic school of economics and could not but applaud the interference of the ethical, historical-social school. It must have their sympathy that men like List, Schäffle, Roscher, Knies, Schm[o]ller and others again put forward the national element against the cosmopolitan, the social and organic against the individualistic, and no less the ethical against the Mammonist.<sup>6</sup> (...)

Isn't it natural that Christian parties, which do not put the material but spiritual aspect first and, not of recent origin, historically have a genealogy of centuries behind them,—isn't it natural, I ask, that Christian parties, which thus represent the social and organic aspect, in full appreciation of the many good and excellent things with which the orthodox-economic school has enriched us materially, had anyway to be grateful that finally the time came that liberated us from its spell, and a youthful and fresh economic school arose that, by again valuing the social and ethical aspect of man, can now be said to be the economic school of the future in Germany?

This is not to say that Christian parties should follow this school uncritically. By no means. We applaud its combat against those things which, in our eyes, deserve to be combatted, just like we have applauded the often effective hammer blows inflicted on the false individualism of the old school by Sismondi and later by Marx, Rodbertus, Lasalle, and other social-democrats. But in a positive sense—as the nature of the question requires—we also differentiate ourselves from the new school and go our own ways. After all, the younger economic school does want to connect moral and material interest through the link of law, and in that sense we too say that “social justice” must be done by a revision of the law, but if we ask those men what law is, then we hear about a *panta rei kai ouden meneê* and the evolutionary principle finally leads to define law as that what adapts itself to the existing circumstances in the best way. And this is where we go our separate ways. We are not allowed to follow them on those pantheistic, evolutionary paths. For we, from our side, do recognize that much in the legal order of society today requires change, but in judging this we apply the standard of God's Word (1908, 210-5).

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<sup>6</sup> This is based on List (1841, 255, my translation): “The system of the [classical] school suffers ... from three main defects: firstly, from boundless *cosmopolitanism*, which neither recognizes the nature of nationality, nor takes into consideration the satisfaction of its interests; secondly, from a dead *materialism*, which everywhere regards chiefly the mere exchangeable value of things without taking into consideration the spiritual and political, the present and the future interests, and the productive powers of the nation; thirdly, from a disorganizing *particularism* and *individualism*, which ... considers private industry only as it would develop itself under free interchange with society, i.e. with the whole human race, were it not divided into separate national societies.”

Kuyper's love for the German school was clearly not unconditional. Three years later in parliament, he presented the anti-revolutionary economic policy he advocated as an alternative to state socialism and "Manchester egoism" (*Handelingen* 1911, 1038-9). The dangers of the former he illustrated with some quotations from the leading armchair-socialist Adolph Wagner, the latter term he borrowed from *Die Katheder-Socialisten und die Manchester-Egoisten, oder der Socialismus und Communismus im Frack* (1873) by Nicolaus Schüren. This time, Kuyper's verdict of the classical school was not entirely negative. One of its most prominent representatives after all was Bastiat, who conceived of society as an organism created by God and governed by divine laws, which thanks to its perfect harmony could be left alone. The degeneration of nineteenth-century capitalism nevertheless proved Bastiat and his fellows wrong.

#### **4. The question of protectionism**

Kuyper's sympathy for the historical method in economics is clear from various political debates in which he participated. One example is the 1874 parliamentary debate over child labor, a problem that Kuyper wanted to approach inductively rather than deductively (Woldring 1987, 125-8). His approach is more explicit in his stance toward the question of protectionism or the "tariff question" (Kasteel 1938, 208-10). Besides debating the question in parliament, Kuyper began in 1880 to devote to the issue numerous lead articles and short commentaries (so-called asterisms) in his newspaper *De Standaard*. In his own words, he was neither a free trader nor a protectionist. Given the great variety of nations, both from a historical and contemporary perspective, dogmatically sticking to free trade or protectionism would hardly be realistic. Economic theory simply could not provide a definitive answer on the matter. "The scientific study of this question can never lead to a general conclusion, which points to a decision for each specific country at any given time" (1916, 526). What counted in the end were hard facts.

Regarding it as one of the tenets of classical economics, Kuyper in any case distrusted the call for free trade. Although a free-trade policy would be perfect for a world without borders, it had negative effects in a situation of competing nation-states. This standpoint, Kuyper claimed in 1900, by now was recognized by "the best politicians and economists," including Minister of Finance Pierson (1908, 577). A genuine free-trade policy not only was rare; it had moreover not proven to be better than a protectionist policy. Nations with even higher tariffs than the Netherlands managed to generate sustained economic growth. Tariff increases, which Kuyper deemed necessary to pay for the social question, could very well be justified. Whereas the economic literature warns against the negative consequences of such increases, he argued, "then I have to say that I did read those things, and I do like those theories, but still attach more importance to experience" (1908, 578). The latter showed that an increase in import duties

improved rather than disadvantaged a nations' economic welfare. Two examples included Germany and the United States (see 1899, 28-33).

Yet free trade versus protectionism was not only a question of economic consequences. According to Kuyper, the former hindered the development of what he called national or nationalized economies. Here, Carey and List were his authorities. To form a truly Dutch economy—or Dutch style of national economy, as Groen van Prinsterer spoke about a “Dutch thought in politics”—protectionist policies to benefit domestic workers and industries were indispensable (1908, 581). Even more importantly, free trade was an offense to the divine order. As Kuyper (1913, 12-8) explained in a speech for the anti-revolutionary party, there was no need to fear the Tariff Law proposed by the Christian Heemskerk cabinet (1908-1913) that envisioned various tariff increases. Full freedom of trade could be justified in some very specific cases, but as a dogma thwarted God's plan. By dividing mankind into different nations and endowing these with different products and resources, God sought to create international inequality and diversity. Free trade leads to cosmopolitanism and, as exemplified by Adam Smith's faithful follower Thomas Cooper, a denial of a God-given differentiation. The latter illustration Kuyper derived from List.

Kuyper's defense of tariffs was far from a whim. As early as 1879, in his anti-revolutionary political program, he argued for an increase in, even a doubling of, import duties. The section is still there, in the fourth edition of *Our Program*, published in 1898. As Kuyper saw it, at the end of the nineteenth century free trade was on its way out. Whereas in the 1840s the “spirit of Cobden” began to win the hearts of scholars and statesmen on the Continent, now a growing number of liberals and freetraders had lost its faith (1909, 51-6). Examples included the English MPs Bernhard Samuelson and Samuel Morley, Cardinal Henry Manning and, earlier, the author of *Principles of Political Economy*, John Stuart Mill. The details, Kuyper pointed out to his colleagues in parliament, could be found in George Curtiss's *Protection and Prosperity. An Account of Tariff Legislation and its Effects in Europe and America* (1896). It would be only a matter of time before free trade disappeared. Treub, “one of our best economists,” he argued in one of his asterisms, shared in this belief.

## 5. Towards a Calvinist economics

Kuyper viewed society as an organism made up of a variety of spheres. In addition to more obvious spheres such as church, school, and family, he distinguished such economic spheres as trade, labor, and capital. Each of these has its own God-given laws and norms. It was the economist's calling to discover the divine ordinances for the economic spheres of life. Regarding

himself as “merely a dilettante economist” (1909, 564), Kuyper thought it better to leave this task to others.<sup>7</sup>

Fully convinced of the legitimacy of an independent science of economics, Kuyper believed it also deserved a place at his Vrije Universiteit. An economics department was established only in 1948, nearly seventy years after its foundation (Visser 1999), but Kuyper did recognize its importance from the outset (Knol 1980, 407-8, 417). In his speech at the dedication of the Vrije Universiteit, Kuyper as first *rector magnificus* stressed the necessity of an own faculty of law—and hence economics—to be able to oppose “the prevailing political economy, the current business practices, and the rapacious nature of social relationships” (1880a, 34). A truly Calvinist economics, in other words, was essential to help solve the social question. The appointment in 1904 of P. A. Diepenhorst as economics professor at the faculty of law was a first step. Diepenhorst’s dissertation, entitled *Calvin and the Economy*, and his inaugural address attacking the classical school were entirely in the spirit of Kuyper.

What precisely Kuyper’s ideal science of economics looked like, we do not know. His famous Stone Lectures on Calvinism (1898) explore the importance of Calvinism for politics and science, but unfortunately ignore the subject of political economy. While mentioning economics as auxiliary science, his discussion in the *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology* (1894) of the science of law does not cover it, either. From *Common Grace* (1904, 162-3), however, we learn that a science of political economy that reckons with the authority of Scripture is fundamentally different from one that is allegedly neutral. A principal characteristic of a Calvinist economics, apparently, is that it reviews economic developments in the light of the Bible. From what has been discussed above, it can also be concluded that such an economics is historical rather than natural-scientific, dealing with man as a social and ethical being. Sound economics, in short, needs an “ethical element” (Kuyper 1875). This was the ideal shared by Kuyper’s teacher Groen van Prinsterer, who wrote: “The *Oeconomia Politica* is an invaluable science, practiced far too faintly in our fatherland. But, with the full excellence of its research and effort, it becomes powerless or at least comparatively infertile, when it seeks its strength only in material considerations” (1849, 246-7).

To Kuyper, a good if not the best example of a genuine Christian economist was Frederick Maurice. Having discovered this English founder of Christian socialism in 1874, Kuyper extolled his work for at least two years. Kuyper repeatedly insisted on the importance of a Dutch translation of Maurice’s *Lectures on Social Morality*. To his surprise and delight, professor Quack (1874) published a summary of Maurice’s views in *De Gids*. Since at the time this periodical had

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<sup>7</sup> That said, his theological works contain several economic digressions. In *Common Grace* (1904, 425-33), one finds an extensive historical account of economic development; *Pro Rege* (1912b, 115-25) has a section on the history and power of money.

only limited distribution, and copies of Maurice's book were even more scarce, Kuyper decided to devote a feuilleton in *De Standaard* to "Maurice, the Christian-economist" (Kuyper 1874; 1874-5). Its readers learned about Maurice's ideas (e.g., man as a member of organic spheres like family and the state; the lasting relevance of Christ's Sermon on the Mount for trade and manufacturing) as well as his activities on behalf of the social question. Unfortunately, Kuyper did not bother to explain why Maurice can be seen as an economist and representative of what Quack called a "most exalted Christian political economy."

Kuyper's ideal of a Calvinist economics geared toward reforming society was in two respects at odds with mainstream economics (Duyverman 1978, 14-9). First, it opposed the trend of distinguishing between economics as a science and economics as an art. As a growing number of political economists in Kuyper's times argued, economics as a theoretical quest for economic laws should be separated from practical questions of economic policy. Second, Kuyper's ideal ignored the related distinction between positive economics and normative economics or economic ethics, which also won in popularity. In this conception, economics, to qualify as a science, ought to be neutral and value-free, leaving ethical considerations to ethicists. Samuel van Houten, a follower of the historical school in economics and author of the child labor bill, even claimed that social science aims at discovering causal laws, and hence faces "the heavy task of eliminating theological reasoning. ... Reconciliation of theology and science is a pipe dream" (cited in Duyverman 1978, 16). As it happened, Kuyper (1912a, 74-6), in his role as Prime Minister, precisely quoted these words to show that the "antithesis," in this case between a truly Christian and allegedly neutral social science, is a fact.

## 6. Conclusions

Near the end of his life, Kuyper (1912c) called *oeconomie* the new "magic word." If he were not mistaken, the twentieth century would be remembered as the age of economics. Economic science and economic literature were about to conquer—or had conquered already—people's hearts. 'The economic' was the only thing that mattered within and outside the realm of politics. In Kuyper's words, exchange, production, and capitalism formed a new trinity. And yet it would be inappropriate for Calvinists to renounce economic life. Ever since he was placed in paradise, man faced an economic vocation, which historical Calvinism later fully endorsed. However, the material in Calvinism could never be separated from the spiritual, which ultimately has priority. This is why economics that tends to displace the spiritual by the material should be prevented from becoming dominant. "*Oeconomia* and all other science of the visible, material, and sensible may never claim for itself anything more or else than the lower floor of the holy temple of science. Above there is higher and holier."

Anyone reading these latter words in isolation may easily conclude that Kuyper looked with some disdain upon the science of economics. Nothing is further from the truth. The same newspaper article from which these words are taken asserts that economics had for too long been neglected at the Vrije Universiteit of Amsterdam and was now being caught up with in the work of Professor Diepenhorst. In the current article, we have seen that Kuyper had rather a love-hate relationship with the emerging science in question. On the one hand, he could not help but see economics as a legitimate and essential field of research. On the other, he was critical of the methodology and conclusions of mainstream classical economics. He thought highly of the alternative German historical school, but eventually deemed necessary a further reformation of economics. Like the Catholics, whose attempt at Catholic economics mirrors the slightly later neo-Calvinist one (Almodovar and Teixeira 2008; Teixeira and Almodovar 2014), Kuyper in addressing the social question tried to formulate a third way between liberalism and socialism. What the problem of unemployment and poverty called for was a truly Christian—hence Calvinist—approach to the science of political economy.

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### Appendix. Economists referred to by Kuyper

<i>author</i>	<i>title</i>	<i>source</i>	<i>school</i>
Adler, Georg	<i>Rodbertus, der Begründer des wissenschaftlichen Sozialismus. Eine sozial-ökonomische Studie</i> (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1884)	1891, 63	(younger) German historical economics
Arendt, Otto	<i>Allgemeine Staatsversicherung und Versicherungssteuer</i> (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1881)	1895, 22-6	
Block, Maurice	<i>Die Quintessenz des Kathedersozialismus</i> (Berlin: Herbig, 1878) <i>Les progrès de la science économique depuis Adam Smith. Revision des doctrines économiques</i> (Paris: Guillaumin, 1890)	<i>Handelingen</i> 1911, 1039 1891, 70	classical economics
Brentano, Lujo	<i>Die Arbeiterversicherung gemäss der heutigen Wirtschaftsordnung</i> (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1879)	1895, 26-30	(younger) German historical economics <sup>8</sup>
Carey, Henry Charles	<i>Principles of Political Economy</i> (edition unknown, 1837-40)	1908, 581	American protectionist economics (The American System)
Eisenhart, Hugo	<i>Geschichte der Nationalökonomik</i> (Jena: Fischer, 1891 <sup>2</sup> )	1908, 214	

<sup>8</sup> Kuyper here confusingly characterizes Brentano as an ardent supporter of the “old economic school.”

Elster, Ludwig	<i>Wörterbuch der Volkswirtschaft</i> , 2 vols. (Jena: Fischer, 1898)	1912a, 647	(younger) German historical economics
George, Henry	<i>Progress and Poverty. An Inquiry into the Cause of Industrial Depressions and of Increase of Want with Increase of Wealth. The Remedy</i> (New York: Lovell, 1879)	1891, 64; 1917, 499	British Socialism
Hadley, Arthur T.	<i>Socialism in the United States</i> [?]	1891, 50	American Apologists
Hertzka, Theodor	<i>Die Gesetze der sozialen Entwicklung</i> (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1886) <i>Freiland. Ein sociales Zukunftsbild</i> (Dresden/Leipzig: Pierson, 1890 <sub>4</sub> )	1891, 61, 63 1891, 51	classical economics
Houten, Samuel van	<i>Das Kausalitätsgesetz in der Sozialwissenschaft</i> (Haarlem: Willink, 1888)	1912a, 74	
Laspeyres, Etienne	<i>Geschichte der volkswirtschaftlichen Anschauungen der Niederländer und ihrer Litteratur zur Zeit der Republik</i> (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1863)	1891, 60	(younger) German historical economics
List, Friedrich	<i>Das nationale System der Politischen Oeconomie</i> , in <i>Gesammelte Schriften</i> , ed. Ludwig Häusser, vol. 3 (Stuttgart / Tübingen: Cotta, 1851)	1908, 570, 581; 1913, 18	German historical economics (forefather)
Malthus, Thomas Robert	<i>An Essay on the Principle of Population</i> (London: Reeves & Turner, 1872 <sub>7</sub> )	1891, 74	classical economics
Marlo, Karl	<i>Untersuchungen über die Organisation der Arbeit oder System der Weltökonomie</i> (Kassel: Appel, 1850)	1891, 63	German socialism
Marx, Karl	<i>Das Kapital. Kritik der politischen Oekonomie</i> , vol. 1, <i>Der Produktionsprocess des Kapitals</i> (Hamburg: Meissner, 1872 <sub>2</sub> ) <i>Das Kapital. Kritik der politischen Oekonomie</i> , vol. 1, <i>Der</i>	1891, 64 1909, 75	Marxian economics

	<i>Produktionsprozess des Kapitals</i> (Hamburg: Meissner, 1890 <sub>4</sub> )		
Miaskowski, August von	<i>Das Problem der Grundbesitzverteilung in geschichtlicher Entwicklung</i> (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1890)	1891, 73	
Mill, John Stuart	<i>Principles of Political Economy</i> (edition unknown)	1890, 176, 182; 1891, 61	classical economics
Périn, Charles	<i>De la richesse dans les sociétés chrétiennes</i> (Paris: Guillaumin, 1861)	1891, 49	Catholic economic thought
Pierson, Nicolaas Gerard	<i>Grondbeginselen der staathuis- houdkunde</i> (Haarlem: Bohn, 1891 <sub>3</sub> )	1891, 76	classical economics
Quack, Hendrick Peter Godfried	<i>De socialisten. Personen en stelsels</i> (Amsterdam: Van Kampen, 1887 <sub>2</sub> )	1891, 64	
Ricardo, David	<i>Rente, salaire et profits</i> (Paris: Guillaumin, 1889)	1891, 76	classical economics
Rodbertus, Johann Karl	<i>Zur Erkenntnis unserer staatswirtschaftlichen Zustände</i> (Berlin: Neubrandenburg & Friedland, 1842)	1891, 63	German socialism
	<i>Zur Erklärung und Abhülfe der heutigen Creditnoth des Grundbesitzes</i> (Jena: Mauke, 1869)	1891, 64	
	<i>Das Kapital</i> (Berlin: Puttkammer & Mühlbrecht, 1884)	1891, 57	
Rogers, James E. Thorald	<i>Works and Wages</i> (London: Swan Sonnenschein, [1890])	1891, 76	English historical economics
Roscher, Wilhelm	<i>Geschichte der National-Oekonomik in Deutschland</i> (München: Oldenbourg, 1874)	1891, 59, 70	(older) German historical economics
Ryan, John A.	<i>A Living Wage: Its Ethical and Economic Aspects</i> (New York: Macmillan, 1906)	1917, 520	

Sartorius, August	<i>Der moderne Sozialismus in den Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika</i> (Berlin: H. Bahr, 1890)	1891, 65	
Say, Léon	<i>Le socialisme d'État</i> (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1890)	1891, 76	classical economics
Schäffle, Albert Eberhard Friedrich	<i>Das gesellschaftliche System der menschlichen Wirtschaft</i> , 2 vols. (Tübingen: Laupp, 1867 <sub>2</sub> )	1891, 64	(younger) German historical economics
Smith, Adam	<i>An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations</i> (London: Ward & Lock, 1812)	1891, 61	classical economics
Sombart, Werner	<i>Der Bourgeois</i> (München/Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1913)	1917, 534	(younger) German historical economics
Thompson, Robert Ellis	<i>Protection to Home Industry. Four Lectures Delivered in Harvard University</i> (New York: D. Appleton, 1886)	1908, 578	American protectionist economics (The American System)
Thun, Alphons	<i>Geschichte der revolutionären Bewegung in Russland</i> (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1883)	1891, 66	
Thünen, Johann Heinrich von	<i>Der isolierte Staat in Beziehung auf Landwirtschaft und Nationalökonomie</i> , 3 vols. (Rostock: Leopold, 1842 <sub>2</sub> )	1891, 65	proto-marginalist economics
Wagner, Adolph	'Staat (in nationalökonomischer Sicht)', <i>Handwörterbuch der Staatswissenschaften</i> (edition unknown), vol. 7, pp. 727-739	<i>Handelingen</i> 1911, 1038	(younger) German historical economics
	<i>Grundlegung der politischen Oekonomie</i> (Leipzig: Winter, 1879 <sub>2</sub> )	1891, 67	
	<i>Finanzwissenschaft. Einleitung; Ordnung der Finanzwirtschaft; Finanzbedarf; Privaterwerb</i> (Leipzig: Winter, 1884 <sub>3</sub> )	1891, 67	

	<i>Finanzwissenschaft</i> , vol. 2, <i>Gebühren und allgemeine Steuerlehre</i> (Leipzig: Winter, 1880)	1891, 67
Wittelshöfer, Otto	<i>Untersuchungen über das Kapital. Seine Natur und Funktion</i> (Tübingen: Laupp, 1890)	1891, 57
Wright, Carroll D.	<i>The Industrial Evolution of the United States</i> (edition unknown, 1887)	1908, 579