

Robert D. Knudson's
INTRODUCTION
to
The Secularization of Science
By
Herman Dooyeweerd

Secularization runs like a broad stream through modern life, covering it in all its parts with its rivulets. It saturates talk about "man's coming of age" and "the death of God." It enters into such issues as "freedom in education" and the women's liberation movement. It sends out its strong currents into the mission fields at home and abroad, putting the church under pressure as it seeks to bring the Gospel to the lost.

"Secularization" may indeed refer to the removal of lands, goods, spheres of influence, etc., from the control of the church as an institution. In this sense secularization was part of the massive transformations that marked the transition from the Middle Ages to the modern world. In the former the institutional church occupied a central position in society. In the latter it takes its place more clearly as one institution next to others. In the above sense secularization may be altogether harmless. It comes to expression in an invidious sense, however, when "man come of age," that is, "secularized" man, thinks that he can live without God and the revelation He has given of Himself in Jesus Christ. Used in this way, "secularization" refers to a process in which man seeks autonomy for himself and for his world.

It is in this latter sense that Herman Dooyeweerd uses the term secularization in his timely writing, “The Secularization of Science.” He recognizes the pervasiveness of the influence of secularization on our modern world and points to secularized science as one of the major sources of this secularization process.

Unlike many Christians, Dooyeweerd refused to make a treaty of peace with secularization, understood as an expression of man’s vaunted independence from his Creator. He refused to accommodate himself to it. He did not go the way of many contemporary theologians and incorporate it and its effects into his Christian thought. Secularization, he said, may not be understood as a perfectly legitimate attempt on the part of man to assert his humanity in the face of an oppressive authoritarianism. It is, on the contrary, a result of man’s sinful alienation from God. It is an expression of man’s attempt to understand himself and to develop himself and his world independently of God and His revelation. It is, therefore, at bottom religious. A product of the heart of apostate man, it must be resisted by those who, with all their weaknesses and shortcomings, are in their hearts, religiously, in the service of God in Jesus Christ. Secularization must be challenged in the most basic way. It must be cut off, as it were, at its root. That is the spirit of Dooyeweerd’s “The Secularization of Science.”

All philosophy – indeed, all of thought – is religious, Dooyeweerd taught. To counteract the forces of secularization one has to lay bare their religious foundation and to resist them from the standpoint of a thought, a philosophy, that is consciously built on Christian presuppositions. Dooyeweerd belongs to the number of those who, in the spirit of Abraham Kuyper, have sought to erect a Christian, a truly scriptural, philosophy.

The philosophy of Dooyeweerd laid claim from the first to be a Christian philosophy in a radical sense. It came with a Christian transcendence standpoint, which is set in bold opposition to that of “immanence philosophy.” Only the Christian faith can present us, Dooyeweerd said, with a transcendence standpoint from which the task of philosophy can properly be undertaken, to embrace in a synoptic view the multiplicity of aspects of the created cosmos in

their coherence, their deeper unity, and their true reference to their origin, the God who has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ.

This philosophy has now been discussed in a sizable number of monographs, doctoral dissertations, and periodical articles. It is frequently mentioned in college and seminary classrooms. It has given rise to a movement that has spread far beyond the confines of Holland, where it was conceived, to the Americas, to Africa, and to Australasia. Indeed, in various circles an earlier phase of enthusiastic interest and endorsement has given way to a more considered and critical attitude. Of itself this development is welcome, because all philosophical viewpoints are open to examination and criticism. It is welcome, moreover, even from the standpoint of Dooyeweerd's philosophy itself. He never presented his philosophy as a panacea, as a universal problem-solver. His philosophy, for instance, does not parade as a substitute for the piety and obedience a Christian owes to his Lord, Jesus Christ. Indeed, the Christian community is obliged to develop a Christian philosophy as it attempts to serve and to glorify God in every realm of life; but no philosophy, no matter how much it lays claim to being Christian, may come with the unconditional demand for acceptance and obedience that the Word of God makes. The theories of a philosophical system may not be canonized; they must always be held open to scrutiny and criticism. True Christian philosophy is in its own fashion critical philosophy.

Insight into its own dependent role has been made part and parcel of the method of Dooyeweerd's philosophy itself. It is intended to be a help, an instrument, to bring men to an awareness of the religious nature and foundation of their life and thought, even in science and philosophy. Thought must be constrained to acknowledge its dependence upon the God-given order of reality and to realize that this order is understood only in the light of divine revelation. Philosophy must develop a readiness to listen to what is brought to it from the special sciences – from history, psychology, biology, etc. – which investigate one or another aspect of the creation. It must realize that these sciences of themselves are unable to attain to the synoptic view which characterizes philosophical reflection and are therefore unable of themselves to

gain proper insight into their own foundations. Philosophy must seek to bring to a focus the particular methods and results of the special sciences, showing all the while that the conduct of the special sciences depends upon more ultimate presuppositions. At the same time, philosophy must reflect critically upon itself, keeping in view that it itself is driven by deeper, even religious, motives. Contrary to the claims of a secularized science, it must show that all thought must live out of and reflect back on the revelation of God in Christ.

That all philosophy is impelled by deeper, religious motives involves, Dooyeweerd taught, that any philosophical system must be approached in terms of its own final and most basic presuppositions. It is only by way of such an analysis in depth that the meaning of its concepts will be opened up.

Dooyeweerd requested that his own philosophy be approached in the same manner. He asked that one take the time to immerse himself in his philosophy, so that he might be able to penetrate beyond the conceptual theories to the religious impulse controlling them. If one does not make this effort, he said, he will remain with a surface understanding, without ever arriving at that which gives his thought its meaning.

Such examination of philosophical standpoints in depth, Dooyeweerd claimed, is necessary if there is to be true philosophical communication. It is only in terms of the ultimate driving motives of any position that the meaning of its conceptual framework is understood. Apart from such analysis in depth, one position is set up against the other, without any significant contact having been established.

The process of penetrating to the underlying motives of a position contains an analogy with Dooyeweerd's own career. Like many philosophers before him, Dooyeweerd came to the study of philosophy after having been struck by the foundation problems of his own particular discipline. His early training was in law. After having practiced law for a time, he became Adjunct Director of the Abraham Kuyper Foundation in The Hague. The nature of his duties there gave him opportunity to study the philosophical problems underlying statecraft and jurisprudence. During this period he published a series of articles in the journal of

the Kuyper Foundation, *Antirevolutionaire Staatkunde (Anti-Revolutionary Statecraft)*. These studies provided the foundation for his later writings and opened up the way to an academic career. From 1926 until his retirement in 1965 he was a professor of law at the Free University of Amsterdam. After his retirement, until his death in 1977, he continued to write and to edit the scholarly journal of the Association of Calvinistic Philosophy, *Philosophia Reformata*.

At a very early point along this path Dooyeweerd came to the insight that philosophical thought cannot be independent of religious commitment. Originally, he said, he was strongly under the influence of neo-Kantianism and then of the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl. The great turning point came with the discovery of the religious root of all thought. From that time his aim was to combat the idea of the autonomy of theoretical thought, to unseat the prejudice that the starting point of theoretical thinking can be found within that thinking itself. On the contrary, he discovered, theoretical thought is not self-sufficient. It does not circle around itself, as a secularized view of thought maintains. Theoretical thought itself is dependent upon more fundamental, even religious presuppositions. It is able to come to itself only as it is led by the Word of God.

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