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PAUL CORTOIS

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# Science, Culture, and the Science of Culture: Beth's View

Paul CORTOIS  
KU Leuven/UFSIA Antwerp

**Abstract.** In this article some less well-known aspects of Beth's general philosophical ideas are reviewed and connected with each other, viz. his views on the perspectives for a new systematic philosophy, on the identity of the humanities, and on the role of philosophy and science with respect to culture and life. The resulting picture is that Beth did have a rather sophisticated view on the identity of the humanities. By means of a distinction between 'method' and 'mode of thought' (*beschouwingswijze*), he defended their objectivity and, at the same time, the ineliminable role of an account in terms of intentions. Beth's 'scientific philosophy', on the other hand, has a double face: it is a philosophy of science and a scientific philosophy of life. The perspectives for a scientific philosophy of culture and life appear to be limited, however, as Beth came to recognize implicitly. In all these respects, Beth's views have been developed in close connection with his intellectual environment, as is shown, notably in (critical) interaction with H.J. Pos.

**Résumé.** Quelques aspects moins connus de la philosophie générale d' E. W. Beth sont étudiés ici à partir de sources en partie non-publiées. Les vues de Beth dans trois domaines sont mis en rapport les uns avec les autres (et avec des conceptions jouant un rôle dans le développement de Beth, notamment celles, rivales, de son ami H.J. Pos): notamment ses idées sur l'avenir d'une nouvelle forme de philosophie systématique, sur l'identité des humanités, et sur les tâches d'une philosophie de la culture. L'intérêt réside surtout dans la philosophie des sciences humaines, développée dans un manuscrit non publié sur *Nature et esprit* (1944/45). A partir d'une distinction entre 'méthode' et 'mode de concevoir', Beth

défend l'objectivité de l'étude des faits humains en même temps que le rôle essentiel de l'explication intentionnelle. Quant à la relation entre science et culture, la 'philosophie scientifique' (à l'élaboration de laquelle Beth voulait contribuer) est d'une part une philosophie des sciences, d'autre part une 'philosophie scientifique de la vie'. Les perspectives d'une telle philosophie de la vie et de la culture sont d'ailleurs limitées, comme Beth a fini par plus ou moins reconnaître.

## **Introduction**

The problems addressed in my paper belong to a threesome of domains: science, culture, and the idea of a science of culture. In this connection, I will review both Beth's ideas about the status of the sciences of culture, and about the role of philosophy with respect to science and culture. In the course of this study, I will indicate some philosophical problems raised by Beth's ideas in these domains.

In a first part, the context of Beth's ideas in the fields mentioned will be sketched. In the second part, I will concentrate on the status of the humanities as sciences of culture, on their inclusion within the general scheme of the sciences as well as on their peculiarities according to Beth's conception. In the third and final part, I will turn to the other major aspect of Beth's approach to this problem area, viz. the role of philosophy in the area of tension between science and life (or culture in general). In a number of respects, Beth's views on these matters resulted from a critical interaction with the views of his older philosophical friend and opponent H.J. Pos (1898-1955). Some aspects of this dialogue and other elements of the cultural setting explaining Beth's interventions will be presented in an appendix.

Before going into these matters, I wish to add that only a first sketch can be attempted on these less well-known aspects of Beth's general philosophy, given the fragmentary state of the study of available materials in this area of his multi-faceted work (and given the fragmentary state of my knowledge of these materials as of yet). In the sense, among other things, that it is based on some of the evidence revealed in sources recently inventorized, my essay is intended as a supplement to the (excellent) studies of [Doorman 1972] and [Mooij 1972]. I will not reiterate what they have said about Beth's critical rationalism and anti-dogmatism, but just add a bit to the complexity of the portrait of Beth as a philosopher.

I wish to thank here mainly Henk Visser, as the one person responsible above all for supplying such sources as well as suggestions. If I were to add that his horn of plenty has been overwhelming in riches until the last minute, I

think I were speaking for many of the participants of the Beth Conference. Furthermore, thanks are due to the Evert Willem Beth Foundation for permission to quote from unpublished materials belonging to the E.W. Beth Papers. The translations of passages from articles or manuscripts only available in Dutch are mine.

## 1. Towards a new systematic philosophy

In 1956, Beth delivered a series of conferences at the *Université de Liège*. These lectures were to be elaborated in the booklet *La crise de la raison et la logique* [Beth 1957]. Basically, Beth gave an overview of a number of those aspects and problems of symbolic logic to which he had made philosophical as well as technical contributions: mainly, the method of semantic tableaux and its applications to the foundations of mathematics, and, on the other hand, the Locke-Berkeley controversy and Beth's interpretation of the importance of the expository syllogism for philosophy. But the most remarkable fact about the lectures and the book is the way these rather special problems are framed within a very broad philosophical perspective. This is surprising in view of the fact that Beth not only kept an open attitude with respect to general philosophical questions, but at times verged to the perhaps slightly paradoxical stance of refusing to take a stance on such undecidable matters as philosophical stances. The domain of rational debate and criticism had to be closed off, he stated [*e.g.*, Beth 1964], from the domain of 'persuasion'. It is nonetheless undeniable that in *Crise de la raison* the point of departure is given by an exposition of some rather 'strong opinions' on precisely such matters as basic philosophical options.

Indeed, as the title clearly announces, the starting point of the lectures is a diagnosis of the 'crisis of reason', neither more nor less, and the stated aim is to make a contribution to overcome this crisis. The possible solution Beth envisages is a way of rethinking philosophy through logic. What exactly this crisis amounts to, Beth does not say here. However, the things I will mention should illustrate what he has in mind. That the things referred to can be tacitly agreed upon already indicates that, at least in part, his is a response to a shared climate of the day. But there is more, as I hope to show. Let us, just as Beth does, take a point of departure in the description of the state of the art in philosophy.

Grossly, there are, in the scheme Beth sets before our eyes, three contemporary ways of doing philosophy, which determine the place the latter occupies within the cultural setting. (For one contextual element illustrating the

genesis of Beth's trichotomy, see the Appendix.) On the one hand, there are the remains of a traditional systematic philosophy, which is more or less sterile, and powerless with respect to the challenges of science and culture. This way of doing philosophy has got stuck in metaphysical systems which, despite their origin as rational enterprises connected with the epistemic problems confronting their originators, have lost contact with the radically altered and permanently evolving state of rational investigation in science. Initially, the elements of logical analysis, present in this way of doing systematic philosophy may have matched the empirical and conceptual insights and problems of their day. Since they have remained the same age-old elementary doctrines however, taken as eternal truth, these systems have lost all capacity of playing the fundamental role of philosophies, viz. of providing a foundational study of the scientific disciplines of their own day. (Here 'Aristotle's principle',<sup>1</sup> embodied in epistemology as the 'evidence postulate', would provide an example albeit not of a purely logical doctrine, yet of a logico-philosophical piece of systematic philosophy outliving itself.)

The second way of doing philosophy half way the twentieth century is related in two ways to irrationalism. Irrationalism in philosophy in part *reflects* a crisis: it builds images of reality and of man which mirror discoveries, made during the last century, to the effect that the optimistic Enlightenment vision of man and history as engaged in a process of constant progress had to be abandoned. (Beth often refers to darwinism and the psychology of the unconscious in this respect.) And in turn, the philosophical elaboration of these images in existentialism and related schools, have served to *heighten* the consciousness of irrationality out of all proportion, to an extent unthought of in terms of the facts and discoveries on which they could draw, thus illustrating that the 'crisis of reason' is a crisis of irrationalism for Beth. (It is characteristic, perhaps, that Beth only refers to *intellectual* developments as throwing doubt on rational self-images of man.)

The third way of doing philosophy is a new scientific rationalism, Beth says, inspired by, among other sources, mathematical logic. Logic is seen as an element of a philosophy to be developed, which, in turn, is seen as an instrument in view of surmounting the said crisis. Logic could turn into such an

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<sup>1</sup> I recall the formula Beth uses to characterize 'Aristotle's principle' or the 'principle of the absolute' in [1946b, 7]: "Wherever there are entities  $u$  and  $v$ , such that  $u$  possesses the relation  $F$  to  $v$ , there is also a entity  $f$  (called the *absolute* of the relation in question), which is such that, given an entity  $x$  (not identical to  $f$ ), it always stands in the relation  $F$  to  $f$ , while  $f$ , on the other hand, never has the relation  $F$  to  $x$ ." (Beth refers to [Rougier 1920] for a related definition).

element once it will have been developed in such a way that its own construction is as transparent and as elementary as possible, and once its relevance for philosophy and science will, in this way, have become apparent. (The assumption is that, up to now, logic has not been matching the corresponding tasks.) Philosophy should incorporate those logical methods that are shown to be decisive for an adequate analysis (or even a solution) of several problems that have been raised in the history of philosophy. (I do not have to go into the details of such problems here, as others have done that: just think of the Locke-Berkeley problem, or realism and nominalism, or the 'principle of the absolute'). At the same time, and in so doing, the superfluousness or the inadequacy of several philosophical doctrines (such as the doctrine of an irreducible absolute intuition in mathematics) will become apparent, once an alternative view, or a rational reconstruction of the origin of the problem, has been given, with the help of a logical analysis.

Now, Beth is not content to show the mutual incomprehension of the three conceptions of philosophy, and to diagnosticize the three corresponding components of a crisis: (i) the atrophy of traditional systematic philosophy, (ii) the irrationalist deadlock, and (iii) the mistrust of logic. He does not acquiesce in the situation, of course. Neither is he taking refuge in a mere partisan position, condemning rival viewpoints without further ado. He begins in fact by (strategically?) recognizing the partial well-foundedness of 'irrationalism'. The new insights taken from nineteenth century and early twentieth century science, and serving as challenges to traditional accounts of rationality, cannot be dismissed without dismissing *rational* attitudes towards evidence, after all. What is more positively revealing for us now, is the fact that Beth is not simply disqualifying traditional philosophy either, or at least the attempts made in the course of the philosophical tradition to build a systematic rational philosophy. That is to say, in so far as there has been an attempt to take into account the contemporary state of knowledge, or even to contribute to integrating it into a coherent picture, systematic philosophy does not coincide with any particular philosophical tradition.

Indeed, although the irrationalist and the traditional conceptions are at least as inimical to each other as logic is to each of them, it seems that Beth is taking the view that logic could play the role, not of reconciling the two extremes, but at least of showing a way out of the deadlock. This it could do by means of an original reconstruction of a philosophical project, taking as building blocks, among other things, some of the valuable elements from both tendencies. Something of the aim of the tradition of *systematic* philosophy has to be conserved, or rather brought to its possible fulfilment for the first time:

I believe to have given modern logic a form which renders it a suitable foundation for the development of a new epistemology and a new ontology [1964/1968, xii].

A new ontology: that is not a slip of the tongue. Neither is the role of logic for the systematic construction of philosophy left in the dark:

Nous avons constaté que le manque d'une logique formelle adéquate a fortement gêné le développement de la philosophie systématique. Il en résulte qu'une logique formelle adéquate constituera un élément de la philosophie future.

Dans l'absence d'une logique adéquate, la philosophie systématique s'est heurtée à l'impossibilité d'arriver à une analyse correcte du raisonnement mathématique. Une telle analyse sera un élément dans la nouvelle synthèse doctrinale [1957, 8-9].

Another element has to do with the ontological presuppositions of logic:

J'ai déjà fait remarquer que la haute scolastique a produit une logique formelle de grande allure. Cependant, cette logique a à son tour engendré une tendance nominaliste qui a bloqué le développement d'une ontologie rationnelle. Nous devons donc nous attendre à la création d'une ontologie rationnelle, liée de quelque manière à la logique formelle [1957, 9].

'Doctrinal synthesis', critique of nominalism, rational ontology: very few traces are found here of reticence and of Beth's "distrust... of 'productive synthesis'" [Staal 1965, 165]. Much as he was always eager to show the delicate balance of pro's and con's (on nominalism, for example), Beth's own preferences come to the fore. He concludes with a few examples:

...nous sommes obligés d'envisager la reconstruction de la philosophie systématique sur une base nouvelle et plus solide. Or, il me semble que le développement d'une nouvelle philosophie systématique peut être anticipé dans un avenir assez proche. On pourrait penser, dans cet ordre d'idées, à la philosophie d' A.N. Whitehead ou au pansomatisme de T. Kotarbinski qui sont de date récente et tiennent compte de l'état contemporain de la recherche scientifique. Cependant, je ne pense pas à tel ou tel système particulier; je pense, pour ainsi dire, à une philosophie mondiale, comparable au stoïcisme antique<sup>2</sup> ou à la scolastique médiévale [1957, 8].

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<sup>2</sup> In connection with this example, see also the Appendix.

It may seem as if the attainment of a systematic response to the need of a global world picture in times of hardship (read, fatalism and fragmentation) is even more important than the particular content and outlook this eventual world picture would display. It is of prime importance to have something like an orienting world view, permitting man "to adjust the intellect to contemporary conditions of life, to make a critical evaluation of the different forms of rationalization and to control the irrational forces in man" [1964/1968, xii]. Such, however, are not motives originating within ontology. And indeed: a rational ontology is not the only aspect of Beth's hopes for a new general philosophy.

A second major aspect is practical philosophy. At the end of the Preface to [1964/1968], Beth says

Moreover, the conditions have partly been created for the development of a new ethics which does justice to modern psychological insight, and at the same time avoids the extremism of present-day irrationalism [1964/1968, xiii].

Altogether, on this aspect of Beth's concerns, no explanations are given, either in this book or in *La crise*.<sup>3</sup> Neither is Beth detailing his ontological program (in so far as one could speak of a program at all in this stage of elaboration of his thought). But the concerns are clearly present, and they are manifested with some insistence.

At least two things are clear by now, corresponding to the needs of theoretical and for practical philosophy: respectively internally, there is the drive to give a new content, however hesitatingly, to the idea of a philosophical system; and externally, there is the conviction that the corresponding attempt is vital response to a cultural need in the contemporary constellation of man and society. I will go into some aspects of the second point (a philosophy of life and culture as a content for practical philosophy) in the final section and in the appendix.

With respect to the first point, it is obvious that a sensible new systematic philosophy would have to differ strongly from any of the old systems, in form as much as in content. As to the content, there can be no

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<sup>3</sup> Only one brief passage in [1956] discusses ethical questions a scientist may face in connection with developments of scientific and technological research and applications. Furthermore, a passage in [1939] brings to the fore the question in how far the discussion of values and ethical norms could become fields of application of logic.



general 'principle of the absolute', which is considered by Beth as the common property of all metaphysical systems taken into consideration hitherto. In certain contexts, however, instances of the principle could turn out to be valid or at least worth serious investigation.<sup>4</sup> Focusing on form, there is no ultimate system of invariable truths over and above the flux of scientific insight, no evidence bespeaking basic truths, and no unique form pertaining to the chain of thoughts or propositions (since there is no unique logic to begin with). There is a systematic development or overview of the basic features of the different domains of human investigation and concern, however. In the next section, I will locate my other main topic, the cultural sciences, in the context of such an attempt at giving a systematic development of different domains of human investigation.

Obviously, Beth's concerns in these matters were not of a passing and sporadic nature. Moreover, Beth, the logician who also was an erudite historian of ideas, did not have a merely historical interest in topics like these (philosophical systems and their principles). On the contrary, he was convinced that, having respected the historiographer's requirement of impartiality, there remained a fact of the matter to the question as to what was right and what was wrong about the ideas studied, and as to the role some of these ideas still have to play.

## 2. The Sciences of Culture

That the hypothesis of a merely circumstantial interest is out of the question, is confirmed by a number of tracts where the same interests are recurring, often mixed with related topics such as the cultural relevance of philosophical ideas, or the importance of linking science and the humanities. Several published sources, for instance, specify the ontological implications and presuppositions

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<sup>4</sup> Such as in the case of a certain form of so-called platonism in the foundations of mathematics, where Hilbert's and Bernays' so-called epsilon-axiom is shown to be an embodiment in modern logic of the thought that the common noun denotes neither a class nor a property but a 'paradigm' (the absolute of the property 'possessing the property *f*'). Cf. [1944, 51-53]. It is remarkable that a second example is immediately added: the same train of thought leads to the so-called thomistic argument for the existence of God in the sense of the *ens realissimum* [ibid., 53]. Compare [1948, 11], where the principle of the absolute is more elaborately analyzed as part of what one could call the 'logic of metaphysics': "it should be noticed that Plato's doctrine of ideas relies on a solid foundation, and that at least one of the proofs for the existence of God mentioned by Thomas Aquinas can be formulated in a way which is still acceptable today".

of formal philosophy by pointing to the by now well-known 'ontological pluralism' we have been referring to throughout this conference [1959a, 643ff; 1948c, 352ff; 1960, 99].

More importantly for us, a treasure of materials is contained in the unpublished typescript *Natuur en Geest* of 1944/45 (partly revised, as late as 1960, in view of a publication) [1944b]. Here we have a book manuscript which, though it was obviously meant also as an introduction in general philosophy, bears some resemblance to a *traité en forme* of systematic philosophy. The systematic outlook, moreover, has to do not only with the synthetic nature of a didactic enterprise, but clearly also with a desire to present the riches of 'scientific philosophy' in such a way that its ability in dealing with the different 'spheres of reality' (an expression echoing the passages on ontological pluralism) can be demonstrated. The different spheres of reality, in the sense of theoretical as well as of practical philosophy, take the form of an hierarchical layering. Here is all the contrary of a reductionist image of knowledge and reality (often associated with the view of scientific philosophy or philosophy of science in those days). The consecutive extension of the class of domains of phenomena amenable to a rational treatment (and the corresponding enrichment of the basic concepts needed to describe them) from logic and mathematics, through nature to man, values, culture and society, is what gives the enterprise its systematic outlook. Without suggesting that we have anything like 'Beth's system' here, it still seems that we have the most extensive report of his systematized thoughts on the variety of domains of experience, with a strong focus on culture. considered, in its own diversity, as a correlate of the interest in values. Only the humanities, as one central layer on the top level of Beth's cultural realities, situated on the intersection of science and culture, will be discussed here. I will summarize some striking points, mainly from [1944b], chapter 6 ('Man').

Let me start, however, with a general remark on the connection between ontology and Beth's idea of systematic philosophy. In chapter 3 of the book, ontology is presented as a part of formal philosophy. Indeed, there is a formal ontology, which is reached (more or less as in the case of Husserl) by reading the logical principles or truth in a certain way. In Beth's case, it is the semantical reading which gives an ontology in this sense: the logical identities become ontological theorems (relative to a given logical system, to be sure).<sup>5</sup> However reading the later chapters, it seems to me that, in a larger sense

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<sup>5</sup> In Husserl's case, it is rather the formal, and in this sense still syntactical, development of the notion of an object as such which results in a formal ontology.

corresponding to Beth's plural *zones of reality* [1959a, 644], the studies of *material* domains deployed after the exposition of the formal sciences in the book, could be conceived as aspects of ontology as well (or at least as aspects of the systematic philosophy that has to fill out the content of the application of (formal) ontology to reality).<sup>6</sup> It is the material aspect of ontology which is expounded then, in the emergentist development of layers of reality starting from physical nature. The main difference with Husserl (and Kant), then, seems to be twofold. First, it consist in the fact that, although basic concepts and basic epistemic categories (or attitudes) appropriate to the respective domains are being revealed, they are always provisory and under the control of the scientific development. Nevertheless, a conceptual analysis of the object domains of scientific thought is part of the job of the philosopher.<sup>7</sup> Second, Beth's emergentist picture of objectively given realities is certainly anti-idealistic in intent.

Thus culture and the sciences of culture emerge in the picture on the open place almost predestinated for them in the scheme. After the sciences of inert nature, comes biology, followed by anthropology. But the idea of a straightforwardly emergentist ontology is made ambiguous from the very start. Indeed, what is the proper place of anthropology in the scheme of the sciences, by reference to the sciences of the preceding layer(s)? From the start, it is said that there is a 'naturalistic' and a 'spiritualistic' anthropology. What do these expressions mean? That is to be understood in connection with the more general notions of a 'naturalistic and a spiritualistic mode of thought' (*beschouwingswijze*) in general.

Indeed, the relevant distinction is introduced in the chapter on man and his place in nature. The distinction is between two modes of thought, two ways of devising the concepts and propositions used and the explanations constructed in those sciences. Thus, there might be a way to build the humanities in a strictly naturalistic way, Beth says, and the question arises whether explanations of human behaviour can be adequate when the latter is considered as consisting of natural occurrences in physical time and space, to be investigated without recurring to notions other than those mentioned in the

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<sup>6</sup> Since, on the other hand, logical laws belong to one of these zones [1959a, 644], the situation is rather intricate, however.

<sup>7</sup> A certain justification for a restricted analogy with Husserl's enterprise of a "Wissenschaftskritik" (despite the considerable distance that separates Beth from phenomenology) is found in Beth's very interesting [1959b], where a relative distinction is defended between epistemic aims such as 'deepening of insight' and 'acquisition of new results'.

natural sciences of anorganic or organic matter (including the life sciences). The question is made acute by the existence of a spiritualistic mode of thought (*spiritualistische beschouwingwijze*), which recurs to very special supplementary resources, the "elucidations and explanations, given by the persons involved, of their behaviour".

Since the two approaches lead to seriously diverging results in the sciences of man, their compatibility is *prima facie* problematic. According to Beth's text, one of the consequences of excluding the spiritualistic viewpoint concerning human behaviour is the acceptance of determinism. Since this is a conclusion he wants to avoid (presumably because it is in conflict with the common sense view, including moral considerations), the exclusivity of the naturalistic conception ought to be denied, or so it is stated. (In Beth's view, determinism seems to imply fatalism at once.) The text dwells on this problem of determinism for a while; unfortunately, the copy of the manuscript is incomplete precisely in this part (p. 155-6).

Be that as it may, the option of a global spiritualistic monism, on the other hand, is scientifically unacceptable. If both exclusive naturalism and exclusive spiritualism are unacceptable, what are the remaining options? The dualistic description of man is also highly suspect, because there is no satisfactory account of the interaction to be postulated in order to explain the 'holistic' character of our experience of ourselves. So a different way must be found. Here we see the 'trick' Beth is going to use in a lot of contexts later on. Just as in quantum physics wave descriptions and particle descriptions are compatible in that they are complementary (Beth points to von Neumann's anticipation of quantum logic), so the naturalistic and the spiritualistic mode of thought have to be seen as complementary descriptions, or levels of description. And the problem of determinism is avoided on grounds, which are borrowed from quantum physics (but the detailed exposition of which is lacking in the text transmitted).

All in all, it seems to me that determinism is only part of the issue Beth addresses here. Otherwise if that were so, the reference to (quantum) physics would have sufficed to remove the problem of the two modes of thought concerning man (and would have provided no argument in favour of a non-naturalistic approach). Still, the problem of the two modes is taken seriously, and so is the argument in favour of a non-naturalistic conception of man.

Indeterminism is at least a necessary condition to vindicate that part of the common sense view of man Beth wants to vindicate : the view of man as a person, capable of reasoned deliberation and free action. For this purpose, the

double description' view he needs is a sophisticated version of the kantian one: the complementarity to be invoked is between a sustained (if nondeterministic) mode of explaining not involving *intentions*, and a mode of explaining where intentions play a crucial role.

Admittedly, this is an interpretation constructed to account for the incompleteness of the text as well as for the puzzling length of the detour on the alleged threat of determinism; but its plausibility is confirmed, I think, in two ways. First, Beth stressed the role of "the elucidations and explanations given by the persons involved". That this is the part of our common sense view Beth wants to save, is repeated later on:

In view of a better understanding of the spiritualist viewpoint, it seems to me that its starting point has been indicated by Plato once and for all: it is the exhortation to the fellow men to account (*logon didonai*) for the motives of their actions. The explanations one gets in this way constitute the empirical foundation for the further investigation [1944b, 158].

It is that part of our common sense view which says that man accounts for his actions in a reasonable way (so as to give not only rationalizations but also positive justifications of the course of his action), that Beth wants to vindicate. This is the part of the problem that has not been removed by the quantumtheoretical suspicions about determinism, but that can be removed by transferring complementarity from the context of quantum mechanics to the larger context of scientific viewpoints as such. Henceforth, the real threat -that intentional common sense talk would conflict with science can be removed. Furthermore, the quote makes clear that this version of spiritualism – because that's what it is - does not import irrationalism in science. A fragment, at least, of common sense can be used as a starting point for a science, which is therefore not a mere extension of the familiar sciences of nature, but which (or so one would hope) is not at odds with the latter either.

In the second place, the importance given to the issue of determinism under the guise of the complementarity of spiritualistic and naturalistic viewpoints, can be explained in another way. One of the problems Beth addresses in this very chapter, by means of his solution in terms of complementary levels of description, is the problem of mechanicism or vitalism in the philosophy of biology. Even if at the moment there are no conclusive grounds, Beth says, to refute vitalistic points of view, the problem which is really at stake as viewed by the participants of the discussion is the one of freedom versus determinism, which vitalists hope to answer by pointing to biological facts allegedly not to be explained mechanically. But then the *real* problem is not situated at the level of biology, but at the level, says Beth, of the

supposed consequences of biological determinism (heredity, evolution) for the image of man. But since the latter problem has been removed on the level of anthropological science, the problem of vitalism so to say disappears. Vitalism is superfluous :

the conceptions advocated above correspond completely to the need behind vitalism: the need to prevent that spiritualistic explanations given by man about his own behaviour would be unmasked as illusory [1944b, 157].

But what about the status of the 'spiritualistic' level of description itself, *i.e.* the descriptions and explanations given in intentional terms? The ontological status of the intentions involved remains in the dark. The question of the ontology of the object of *modes of thought* is left at this point. If that is so, it is perhaps because Beth sees that another question, leading beyond ontology, is more urgent in the context of the current discussion on the humanities: the question of method. To what extent is a difference in 'method' implied by the difference between naturalistic and spiritualistic viewpoints?

There is a certain ambiguity in the scattered utterances we find in Beth's texts concerning the question of method in the humanities. For example, in the Foreword of [1944a], and in the intellectual *c.v.* called "Een terugblik" [1960]<sup>8</sup>, the question of the peculiarity of methods in the humanities is touched upon. We have two utterances and, apparently, a certain tension among them.

On the one hand, several types of experience exist, irreducible to each other: among them a kind of

'understanding' of the utterances of our fellow men, which is of primordial importance for the humanities; this 'understanding' is *sui generis*, and it cannot be reduced to [or derived from] our self-knowledge on the basis of analogy [1960, 324].

On the other hand,

under the influence, apparently, first of German idealism and romanticism, and later also of modern irrationalism, philosophy has rather suddenly turned its back on the so-called exact sciences in order to align itself with the so-called sciences of the mind (*geesteswetenschappen*). There have been attempts to justify this turn by pointing to the distinction between a methodology for the exact sciences and another one for the humanities, and to the fact that the latter, of

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<sup>8</sup> The passage quoted refers to the same period 1942-50.

course, had to be applied in the case of philosophy as well. This distinction, however, is based on a misunderstanding, apparently brought about by the vagueness of the term 'method', which can denote the mode of thought as well as the argumentative mode of discourse, and also the characteristic scientific technique (*wetenschapstechniek*)... [it is not as if] the method of the humanities [would] have to be abandoned... indeed it is the same, and no different method, which is also applied in the other sciences [1944a, 7].

Clearly, 'method' is used in a wide sense covering three different notions: 'mode of thought' (viewpoint), 'scientific technique', and argumentative build-up. There is also a more narrow usage, restricting 'method' to the last of these notions. Putting together the pieces of the puzzle (without being able to quote all relevant passages here), we obtain the following picture.

(i) *Scientific technique(s)* talk is about, the (primarily extra-linguistic) procedures (*werkwijzen*) or standardized operations of discovery and testing which the scientist has at his disposal, and which are typical for his discipline.

The mathematician can do his job *without* recurring to factual data. The astronomer, the meteorologist, the economist are in need of the data borrowed from *observation* of the phenomena. The physicist, the chemist, the physiologist are capable to *influence* the course of the phenomena... The historian, as a rule, is not even capable of observing the facts which interest him. He only knows them on the basis of incomplete and often biased records..." [1944b, 280].

The plurality of *scientific techniques* is treated in the context of a classification of the sciences. Beth admits that, even in this respect, the importance of this principle of differentiation is relative. For instance, closely connected disciplines may be far removed from each other in techniques. The principle does allow for distinctions which are finer-grained than a rough opposition between natural science and humanities. Furthermore, the significance of a differentiation in terms of 'techniques', is in the possibility of demarcating the formal from the material sciences by means of the degree of independence of factual data [*ibid.*] (which is a point with interesting repercussions for the discussions about analyticity).

(ii) What about *method*, then, as mode of *discursive build-up*? Looking at the discussion in chapter 10 again, the major distinction made here is between descriptive and deductive (or explanatory) sciences. But this is again a relative distinction: each time, demarcations between descriptive and explanatory contexts of discourse have been subject to revision, as is shown by the example

of biology. All in all, the fact that argumentative modes hardly yield important differentiation principles among the sciences, is rather an indication for the fact that method, taken in this sense, is the place where one has to look for a form of *unity* among the sciences.

(iii) Puzzlement about the reference to a special kind of 'understanding' is removed with the realization that the latter is to be located on the level of the context of considerations belonging to *modes of thinking*, as in 'spiritualistic' accounts of man, rather than in the sphere of argumentative method. Understanding our fellow men is attributing beliefs and desires as attitudes they take towards what is expressed in their utterances and actions.<sup>9</sup>

What are the consequences for the discussion on method and for the specificity of the humanities? *Methodological unity* appears to be a counterweight to the *difference of modes of thought*, and so the true meaning of both is (a) in the statement that questions of method, of technique and of viewpoint are relatively independent from each other, and (b) in the attempt to find a balanced treatment accounting for both unity and diversity of science in the question of the identity of the humanities.

This distinction explains how it is possible that Beth can quote a philosophical anthropologist like E. Rothacker, presumably infected with 'irrationalism' in all other respects, with approval, when uniformity of method is at stake: "zwischen Naturwissenschaft und Geisteswissenschaften besteht von Haus aus kein Streit... es kann nicht genug unterstrichen werden, dass sie sehr weite Strecken allgemein gültiger logischer Verfahren gemeinsam haben" ([Rothacker 1926/1965], quoted in [1944b, 160]).

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<sup>9</sup> Another point worth mentioning is the following application of Beth's modes of thinking to the classification of the sciences (in chapter 10 of *Natuur en Geest*): "Among the material sciences I distinguish 1) sciences which apply only the naturalistic approach; 2) sciences which apply the naturalistic as well as the spiritualistic approach; 3) sciences which apply solely the spirirtualistic approach. The corresponding sciences are called respectively the natural, the anthropological and the spiritual sciences (humanities). This tripartition seems more satisfactory than the usual division in natural and spiritual sciences, because it takes into account the existence of an important group of sciences, where the naturalistic and the spiritualistic approaches are used one next to another" [1944b, 282]. So Beth anticipates a now classic repartition of sciences distinguishing humanities in the narrow sense from social and behavioural sciences.



In the same light, Beth criticizes authors like Treitschke, Harnack and Th. Litt. There follows an interesting discussion of Litt's analysis of the predicative structure of assertions in the humanities, which, according to the latter, cannot be read as a subsumption of the subject under the generality of a predicate, but rather as a singularization of the predicate relative to the indexical characteristics of the subject and the context of the utterance: when I say, 'X is ambitious', "es ist eben der gerade so und nicht anders qualifizierte Ehrgeiz gerade dieser bestimmten Person, der gemeint ist, nicht eine allgemeine Qualität 'Ehrgeiz', die ebenso gut wie an ihr auch an so und so vielen anderen 'Exemplaren' der gleichen Klasse festzustellen wäre" ([Litt 1941/1980], quoted in [1944b, 161]). Beth's response is characteristic:

It is indeed the case that in everyday life reasoning in the sense intended by Litt is not rare. One can hear a person A say, shortly one after another, things like 'that P is a conceited sort, he never opens his mouth', and 'this guy Q is a modest chap, he doesn't say a word'. Now if one mentions to A that there is something like a contradiction in his utterances, very probably his reply will be: 'Yes but P keeps his mouth in a conceited way, Q in a modest way'. But a suchlike answer, although to Litt it ought to be acceptable, and characteristic for the spiritualistic mode of thought, seems to me a practical saw, and entirely unacceptable in scientific discourse. And indeed, a much more satisfactory elucidation of A's initial assessment of P and Q is available: for example, A may have heard P, when questioned about his uncommunicativeness, giving an answer which clearly manifests his conceitedness; or he could have noticed, for instance, that P happens to be very communicative in more distinguished company, etc. If A is not capable of giving such an elucidation, it is wise not to draw any conclusion about the character of P or Q, and to be content with the conclusion that A seems to have a grief against P or a predilection for Q [1944b, 161].

Clearly, Beth wants to show that the aim of phenomenologists and philosophical anthropologists in epistemology, viz. to safeguard the specificity of the object (intentions) of the humanities, can be attained without sacrificing scientific method. But the polemics are not only inspired by what people then thought to be typically German views of 'understanding'; the sparring partners can be found closer at home as well. This section is immediately followed by another one about the 'objectivity of the humanities', containing a critical discussion of Pos' remarks on the preponderance of the subjective viewpoint in the humanities. In a marginal note belonging to the revision (presumably from 1960), Beth asks himself whether it would not be best to 'omit this section?' Probably one reason is that Pos had meanwhile changed his mind : in the article

"Over het betrekkelijk onderscheid tussen natuur- en cultuurwetenschappen" ("On the relative distinction between natural science and humanities") [Pos 1949] he declared the value judgements in the (ideal?) humanities to be objectively based. Be that as it may, it is altogether clear that to secure the 'objectivity of the humanities' is what Beth had already been doing all along. Yet a crucial difference remains.

Beth has said more than once that, although accepting the claim of a specificity of the humanities, he wanted to combat irrationalistic interpretations of that claim. One fear may have been of greater weight yet than the fear of importing various sorts of 'mysticism' (empathy, inexpressibility, ...) into science. There is the fear that partizanship, another form of particularism or subjectivism. But this fear is not dissolved by a rejection of subjectivism might sneak in: there is happy to be forms of partizanship, which are disguised in objectivism. Thus Beth's reaction to [Pos 1949] was immediate: "Eenheid der wetenschap" appeared in the same volume of *Algemeen Nederlands Tijdschrift voor Filosofie en Psychologie* [1949]. According to Pos, in the newly achieved phase of his thought, the value judgements ineradicable from the humanities were to be considered, if truly foundational, as objective (in a wider sense). This is something Beth could not possibly digest for at least two reasons: because of his early and generalized criticism of foundationalism (along with the rejection of the evidence postulate), and because

agreeing with Pos about the existence of a strong analogy between natural science and the humanities (an analogy arising from and culminating in a common aspiration towards objectivity), I could not possibly go along with him as he links the objectivity of the humanities to the objectivity of value awareness. The big difficulty, I think, is precisely that, on the contrary, objective value awareness can be coupled with a complete lack of objective insight, and conversely, so that one can strive to realize absolutely pure aims by absolutely unfit means, as well as absolutely reprehensible aims by very fit means [1949, 255].

This touches upon the role of ideology and the relation between science, philosophy and life. An ideology can voice a particular standpoint, but it is far more perverse and dangerous to science and philosophy when it presents itself as the manifestation of the objective super-standpoint. Reacting with a strong separation, not so much between *is* and *ought*, as between knowledge and action based on individual (value) awareness, Beth introduces a distinction which could at once impose a serious limitation on the role of judgements of value and relevance in his philosophy of the humanities:

It seems to me that a distinction between the unity of science and the unity of reason is in place... The unity of reason... as subordination of understanding and the will to an higher principle is a personal matter, dependent on character and education, and ultimately on a free decision of the will [1949, 255].

We will go into the intricacies of these questions in the final section. For the moment we have obtained the following picture. There is a unity of method (mode of argumentation, of discourse) among the humanities and other types of sciences, making the search for a separate *argumentative method* of *Verstehen* obsolete. In all sciences, there is an attempt at objectifiable and testable explanations; in some, they are about special objects, including intentional states. This does not mean that the motives involved by Dilthey and others in favour of such a special method were not to the point: after all the procedures of *Erklären* Dilthey had before him in his day were typically mechanical explanations, Beth says. Since we have come to know, however, that mechanical explanations are not the exclusive ways of explaining in the natural sciences, that problem also disappears, and Dilthey's *Verstehen* could be redescribed as "explaining in the wider sense" ([1944b, 159]; see also chapter 5, 127 ff).

Beyond the unity of method as mode of argumentation, there is the diversity of techniques, and foremost, of modes of thought: that is the whole purpose of the doctrine of the 'spiritualistic' complement to naturalized sciences of man. The purpose of the examples discussed with Litt and others, is to show that nothing is lost of the objectivity of the humanities once they are recognized to possess a viewpoint of their own. That is a position Beth can take because of the way he reformulates, in fact, Dilthey's program for psychology (which he explicitly calls 'spiritualistic'). Indeed, the notion of *Verstehen* can be conceived (and has been conceived), from the very start, in at least two ways: either *Verstehen* is drawn towards introspection and empathy (and then objectivity is lost); or else, it is stressed that the object of understanding must be tangible as a *manifested* intention, an utterance, an action, etc., which can be specified and treated as an element in a testable discourse.<sup>10</sup> Thus, the above quote about the

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<sup>10</sup> In order to see why Beth can call this way of proceeding a 'wider sense of explaining', we would have to go into Beth's own rather idiosyncratic but elaborate historical vision about explanation and types of explanation: behind it, there is an anthropologically minded epistemology distinguishing transcendental, cosmical and cosmo-transcendental varieties of the modes of thought (1944b, ch. 5). The reader of the published materials can have a glimpse of one aspect, namely the treatment of

intersubjective or public character of 'understanding' as opposed to an understanding of the other as derived from self-knowledge [1960] is tantamount, for Beth, to its objective character. (The motive of rejecting an absolutely originary self-knowledge is a constant element of Beth's critique of idealism (including the variety Pos once held), and extends to the philosophy of mathematics, where he rejects the interpretation of mathematical knowledge as self-knowledge of the mind [1959a, 643]).

Methodological monism and plurality of local techniques and modes of thought go together. The methodological unity on the one hand, the duality of levels of description (*i.e.* modes of thought) on the other, are by far the most important parameters in determining the place of the humanities within the scientific endeavour.

The 'unity of science' [1949] is a unity of explanation, description and interpretation. They all belong to one complex of 'modes of argumentation', present in all departments of science. In this respect, 'understanding' is just an aspect of the interpretation problems involved in the global hypothetico-deductive complex of all argumentative procedures. But this unity of method can be diversified according to more than one viewpoint towards the object: at one point of the ladder of realities it becomes inevitable to take into account intentions (propositional attitudes, as one would say today).

Of course, many points remain questionable, especially about the 'purification' of common sense Beth seems to recommend in order to uphold his combination of unity of method with the particularity of viewpoints (as with spiritualistic anthropology). First, is the correspondence or complementarity principle applicable if there is not even a warrant of the consistency between manifest and scientific-naturalist images of man? Next, is the manifest image of the world compatible with a far-reaching ascetism with respect to value judgements? For example, exactly in what way is the 'manifestation' of properties like 'conceitedness' in the Litt example objectifiable? The simple example chosen already seems to require a further analysis, and one can suspect that this would lead to the intricacies of hermeneutical interpretation supplementing explanation (even in the 'wider sense') once the examples grow

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causality in sociomorphic, cosmomorphic and other senses in [1955b]. These doctrines, however, go beyond the scope of this article.

Interesting problems are raised by the suspicion that the naturalistic viewpoint should be considered as a (scientific) type of the broader (anthropological) category of cosmical viewpoints (and types of explanation): if that is so, in what broader category is the spiritualistic viewpoint and types of explanation situated?

more complex. Finally, in the case of the point of view of the humanities scholar, Beth wants to have at the same time the advantage of spotting intentions, and the privilege of treating them from an external point of view. The viewpoint of the scholar, though departing from the manifest image, is not contaminated, according to his view, by its origin in the lifeworld nor by the latter's peculiar requirements of relevance. Beth's is a viewpoint which has to combine a number of benefits: while it is based on the experience of mutual comprehension of intentions by fellow men, in its scientific elaboration it is no less external than the naturalistic viewpoint, yet equally devoid of absolute claims. In terms of discussions familiar nowadays: Beth wants the humanities to adopt an intentional point of view without at the same time allowing for an internal point of view as well.<sup>11</sup>

### 3. Science, Culture, and Life

In an unpublished first draft of [1960], called "Selbstdarstellung" [1958], we read

In the period [1935-42], I came to attach much importance to scientific objectivity. I continued to reject *geisteswissenschaftliche* methodology and religiously or ideologically determined philosophy. Thus my early positivistic and neo-criticistic leanings were still noticeable...[In the period 1942-50,] abandoning the evidence postulate allowed me to retract my earlier dismissal of the *geisteswissenschaftliche* methodology and of a *levensbeschouwelijke wijsbegeerte* [1958, 3].

What is meant by the last expression, to be translated more or less as "a philosophy as concerned with conceptions of life"? Is it synonymous with a "religiously and ideologically determined philosophy" without further ado? That is what will concern us now. In what sense is Beth's distrust of ideology and of subjective importations in science and the humanities compatible with a role given to a philosophy of life? Could or should a reflection, philosophical and/or scientific, on science and culture, turn into a view which is a reflection on life or a reflection, relevant for life?

A first remark builds on Beth's rebuttal of Pos' introduction of objective value judgements in the sciences of culture. Is Beth denying the possibility of

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<sup>11</sup> For one account of the role an internal point of view could play in the humanities, see [Cortois, 1998], where the typical attitude of the humanities scholar is defined as the combination of an internal first-order point of view towards the object with an external second-order point of view applied to the former.

objective value awareness and value judgements altogether? Is the gulf between rational investigations of facts and assessments of values definitive and absolute? How, in that case, to respond to the threat of irrationality emanating from a sphere of values (and violations of values) uncriticizable in principle?

It seems that, on the contrary, in *Natuur en Geest*, what we have, is a completely different scheme. After the chapter on man, follows a chapter on ethics, a chapter on civilization, a chapter on society, and a chapter on science itself (as a manifestation of the interest in one of the absolute values, the interest in truth). The chapter on civilization is relevant for our purposes for its passages on linguistics and on... Nietzsche. The chapter on science has been quoted for its classification principles, and will occupy us shortly for some surprising features of the organization chart of the sciences it contains. The chapter on ethics could be termed a straightforward 'material value-ethics' (if we may use Scheler's term). Such an ethics relies on the objectivity of the sphere of values. But, in accordance with a remark made earlier, the prime purpose of Beth's theoretical ethics is to *explain* people's behaviour (according to the spiritualistic mode of thinking). There is a system of statements one can utter about objective hierarchies of values, and Beth sets at the task of developing the beginnings of such a system, with distinctions among relative (vital, family, social and personal) values and absolute values (truth, beauty and humanity). Thus, the role of these considerations, which in accordance with a 'spinozistic' ideal are dealt with as a kind of moral geometry, is limited (since, in Beth's view, the possibility of influencing people's awareness of values and, accordingly, people's actions is limited). But the main reason people are interested in ethics, and even in theoretical ethics, is their relevance for applied ethics and thus, indirectly, for life. Here, the closer one comes to real life, the more the decisive factors are matters of acceptance of values and of value hierarchies. So the import of science and its detached stance will be more and more restricted to observations concerning the observed relativity of value systems. The result is that the gulf between knowledge of values and acceptance of values is unbridgeable. Ultimately, acceptance is a matter of a decision of the will. Hence Beth's 'relativism' towards real value judgements, those that are important for life as well as for their role in the humanities (as in

the discussion with Pos); hence also, the need to eliminate them<sup>12</sup> as far as possible in the latter connection.<sup>13</sup>

Yet, the way Beth sees these matters is decisive for our problem of the relations between science, culture and life. Moreover, the relevance of philosophy for life is not treated in entirely negative terms. In the Ghent lectures of 1961, *Wijsbegeerte als wetenschap* [1961a], a new framework is offered for understanding the trichotomy of philosophical projects of today, a scheme that also constituted the starting point of [1957]. Two tasks are considered essential for any project of philosophy: the task of building a philosophy of science and the task of answering to the need for a philosophy of life. Already the fact that the impact of science on all aspects of culture is expected to go on ever increasing, suggests a plea for the necessity of combining the two aims of philosophy today. Besides, the fact is that people look for an orientation with respect to their personal dealings and persuasions in life, *i.e.*, with respect to elements which can never result from the application of general -let alone scientific- principles. Yet it is desirable to bring this orientation (*levensbeschouwing*) in contact with reflections carrying them beyond their individualized and idiosyncratic origins. This is the function of an elaboration of the mixture of personal experiences, reflections and opinions into a philosophy.

The way of responding to the twofold task set to philosophy leads to the three forms of contemporary philosophy we are already familiar with:

(i) *traditional systematic philosophy* [which] owes its still forceful position to two characteristics. First, it offers, in each of its systems, a close synthesis of philosophy of science and philosophy of life, ... Second, by far most of these systems organize the materials in a rigorous way, effectuated by well-tried scientific methods. The weak spot, however, of all traditional systems is situated in philosophy of science: it is the acceptance of the so-called *evidence prostrate*...

(ii) *Anthropologically oriented philosophy* is characterized by a new type of philosophizing which brings philosophy of life to the fore, breaking with the received forms of system-philosophy, and at the same time breaking the usual links with philosophy of science. Together with

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<sup>12</sup> That is to say, there is a need to eliminate them as objects of commitment, not as objects of study within the humanities.

<sup>13</sup> What Beth does not make clear is whether and how knowledge of values could be compared to insight into a realm of 'quasi-facts', the reality of which is ready-made and discoverable from the outside.

the latter link, [this kind of philosophy] loses direct contact with scientific practice as a whole. There remains a certain interaction with certain areas of science, to be sure, initially with biology and psychology, later mainly with psychiatry. At least as strong, however, are the ties with literature, art and politics. The anthropologically oriented philosophy takes on an increasingly irrational character, and will in the end appear unfit for its task, viz. to offer a basis for a life-orientation of the scientist.

(iii) scientific philosophy (de exact-wetenschappelijke wijsbegeerte)... [1961a, 4-5].

It is striking that anthropology as the contemporary philosophy of life, prone as it is to irrationalism, is assessed in terms of a task it is accredited with by Beth: to secure a basis for an orientation of life... for the scientist! This is certainly not 'the' task 'anthropological philosophy' sets itself. How can this sudden leap in Beth's reasoning be explained?

The fact is that Beth was looking primarily for a justification of practising philosophy in an 'exact-scientific' way. A scientific philosophy is indeed primarily a philosophy of science; not just any philosophy of science (the latter not being *ipso facto* scientific), but a rigorous way of practising philosophy of science. And 'exact philosophy', moreover, gives ample room for the most evolved of exact sciences. *But such a scientific philosophy would have to provide a philosophy of life as well*, so as to respond to the double call philosophy has always heard. But if scientific philosophy is to serve as a basis for a life-orientation as well, it has to apply scientific attitudes relevant for life to the questions of life.

Now, there appear to be two diverging tendencies in Beth's attitude with respect to this challenge. On the one hand, Beth seems to have attached considerable importance to this kind of 'scientific philosophy of life', if only as a strategic alternative for the influence of ideologically guided philosophies of life. On the other hand, Beth has grown more and more sceptical about the impact of general considerations, be they scientific, on something as idiosyncratic as the life of the individual (and of the community). For example, there is an inevitable (and at times dangerous) *décalage* among the rhythms of scientific change and the rhythms of societal institutions and moral insights. Moreover, Beth has his misgivings about the philosopher's ambition to combine the roles of a superior spectator of life with that of a guide to men's persuasions. So, to anticipate what we will find out in a moment, a philosophy of life which avoids the totalitarian temptation has to concentrate on those



aspects of life which constitute a sensible and urgent point of application for rational considerations (in order to counter dangers of wrong applications of products of reason as well as in order to counter attacks on reason as such). It is obvious that these points of application are not to be found in the areas of esthetic experience, personal morality and religion (where freedom of responsible individuals is the final instance). The areas where scientific philosophy finds its application are those domains of 'life practice' that form the object of what, in Beth's terminology, counts as *applied sciences*.

This is not a view Beth reached in one stage. In [1944b, 282] an intriguing scheme of the sciences is already found, which mentions, after the trias of 'pure sciences', a group of applied sciences, comprising the sciences of 'life practice': technical, medical, pedagogical and applied social sciences (social morality, law and applied economics). Inside applied science, but outside of 'life practice', there is the sphere of religion and of philosophy.

#### Pure sciences

##### Formal sciences

ontology / mathematics  
logic and formal theory of science

##### Material sciences

-natural sciences  
  -anorganic natural sciences  
  -organic natural sciences  
 -anthropological sciences  
  -psychological sciences  
  -sociological sciences  
    -history  
    -economics  
    -linguistics  
 -spiritual sciences  
  -ethics  
  -esthetics  
  -pure epistemology

Applied sciences

Life practice

- technical sciences
- medical sciences
- pedagogical sciences
- applied social sciences
  - social morality
  - law
  - applied economics
- virtue ethics
- technique of science
- music theory
- humanitarian morality

Religion

theology

Reflection

philosophy

I presume that, for Beth, philosophy, in its function of reflection on life, itself not being a moment of 'the practice of life', is to be considered a reflection on the applied sciences of the practice of life. And this very reflection should proceed as much as possible in a scientific way, that is: in close contact with the findings of the sciences, and by making use of either of three methods recognized as legitimate in a scientific philosophy (formal analysis, informal analysis, and historical analysis). Now, Beth's inaugural lecture [1946b] is more specific on the relevance of this scheme, and it shows how close, at that moment, Beth had come to logical empiricism in this respect:

... philosophy of life is not a pure but an applied science; it is not a disinterested search for truth; it purports to supply a vital human need. Such a philosophy of life, however, should not proceed to *answering* without further ado the life questions submitted to it, on pain of losing the scientific track at once. It shall have to start with a thorough and critical *check* of the very questions themselves, as the neo-positivists and the significists have argued on good grounds. Indeed, many of these questions appear to be pseudo-questions... The problems which remain after eliminating... pseudo-questions can be brought closer to their solution by means of scientific research... In a number of cases, a well-founded answer can be given in light of the present state of science. In other cases, a bold extrapolation of already acquired scientific insights will be required... In some cases, no basis is available for such an extrapolation; in such cases, a scientific attitude requires that one

suspend one's judgement. One would be ill-advised to see this as a recognition of the incapacity of science in view of responding to life's questions, or as a perspective opening a new domain for a speculative metaphysics [1946b, 13f].

What has remained of this scheme and of these bold utterances fifteen years later? The Ghent lectures add qualifications to this scheme and these views, but they omit something as well; or rather, they make explicit the not so obvious consequences of the scheme. What they seem to add, is the general recognition of the said intrinsic need to supply not a complete scientific conception of life, but the building blocks out of which the thinking person can devise such a conception for himself.

On the one hand, as a philosophy of science, philosophy has to clarify the foundations of the sciences; on the other hand, as a philosophy of life, it has to gather the materials for a view of life which is scientifically acceptable... in isolation from philosophy of science, philosophy of life will become alienated from science, and will thus no longer be able to give the building blocks for a scientifically acceptable view of life. By way of an example, I refer to the theory of values, which is as important for philosophy of science (because of its significance for the foundation of a number of sciences) as it is for philosophy of life...[1961a, I, 5 and 8].

But it appears that, in this connection, the task is to reflect on the activities of the scientist as such, and on the academic and his place in society.

The considerations [on what a conception of life is], are now applied to the special case of the academic as a practising scientist. Among the factors influencing his view of life, science [itself] is to be counted,... Of far greater importance, however, is the consideration that very special, and very high demands bear on the scientist's conception of life. It belongs to his task to develop permanently and autonomously new ideas, to judge new ideas, to apply new ideas... In order to be in a position to carry this responsibility, the scientist is in need, and much more so than other people, of a well thought-out conception of life, which is in harmony with his scientific insights [1961a, II, 3].

So, the addition of this focus on the life of the academic is at the same time a narrowing down of the scope of the scientific philosophy of life.

I [repeat] that philosophy has a double task; first, to clarify the foundations of the sciences, and second, to be a help to the academic in

the construction of a conception of life which satisfies the very special requirements he has to face [1961a, II, 7f].

The addressee of the scientific philosophy of life is the member of the universal academic community, the practising scientist:

Perhaps one will wonder why the philosophy of life postulated above should address itself exclusively to the practitioners of science, rather than to all people... I should like to stress again that the philosophy of life considered here should be dealing with a problem field which is peculiar to the scientist. To the extent that other people are faced with like problems, they can take advantage from the scientific philosophy of life. The problems that the scientist shares with all people should not be included in this philosophy, however... Yet, for the construction of his view of life, the scientist can make use of all the building blocks all other people have at their disposal. Nevertheless, there are symptoms indicating that a scientific philosophy of life could very well fill an existing need [1961a, II, 10].

In the last resort, the scientific philosophy of life is a philosophy of the life of the scientist. This, however, means that by following the logic of the scheme of a double-tracked philosophy, but afraid of letting each track follow its own course, Beth was caught into a dilemma: to remain, just as Husserl, within the view of the intellectual as a representative of mankind, -or else to narrow down drastically the scope of whatever it is a philosophy could have to say about the actualities of life and culture, including their transformations, their past, their present, their uncontrollable future. In order to equip a philosophy for that task, the univocal image of meaning as insight through scientific rationality would have to be abandoned, to be sure. Beth was a child of his time, in that he was moving on the shifting frontier between belief and loss of belief in the power of science to illuminate the whole of life. But the proper domain for a philosophy of critical rationalism, enlightened by a lucid criticism *avant la lettre* of foundationalism, is science, not life. We can no longer think of mankind as expecting enlightenment through a purification of its ways of reasoning; the many ways of meaning cannot be squeezed into the (either monological or dialogical) uniform of critical argumentative procedures. This irreducible plurality of spheres of life is recognized (or felt) by Beth, as is testified by his [1962] article on "Mathematics and Modern Art", and by his letters on esthetics to J. Kröner [1961b]: art loses its sense once it is unable to move us in more than intellectual ways. This recognition is also at the basis of Beth's distrust, precisely, of a wider philosophy of culture and life; a philosophy with a wider audience and wider in scope. Such a distrust should not have to be forced upon

him, had he chosen to take this very plurality as a topic to be thematized; the absence of such a thematization, in turn, can be explained: such a reflection would have obliged him to revise his judgement on the scope and the privilege of scientific philosophy over and above other forms of philosophy. Unable - because haunted by the ghost of irrationalism- to allow that much, Beth, indeed, could not recognize as legitimate a third way, a philosophy of symbolic practices as forms of life, escaping the trilemma of philosophical projects he was able to see; or, in other words, escaping the dilemma he himself ingeniously forced on the metaphysician as a seeker for initiation in a mystery removing all mysteries:

whoever experiences the mysterious in life, will have no need for a metaphysics confronting man with the mystery of being, without being capable of removing it; whoever does not experience the mysterious in life, will never be capable to be aware of it through a metaphysical consideration [1947, 115].

Whoever does experience the diversity of forms of life, will have no need for a scientific philosophy attempting in vain to reduce that diversity; whoever does not experience that diversity of meaning, will never be capable to become aware of it through scientific considerations.

In this way, we can make some sense – an unintended sense- of another bold, and beautiful, utterance, found in the Inaugural Lecture [1946b, 14]:

Those who expect the initiation in life's mysteries from theoretical reflection alone go astray. Such an initiation can only come from life itself, and theoretical reflection is only one aspect of it.

## **Appendix**

As to some historical aspects of the question of why a sober philosopher such as Beth should start dramatizing the 'crisis of reason', some further considerations and data (intended only as starting points for further lines of possible research) might be relevant. To be sure, the rhetorics of a (periodically recurring) generalized cultural crisis talk of the day should be taken into account (which is not meant in any prejudicial sense of the word). But Beth's arguments as to the positive and negative impact of science and technology were in general strictly down-to-earth [Doorman, 1972, 161 and 172f], even if they implied a certain pessimism. More to the point, the context is determined by the existence of a huge competition in Dutch philosophy, starting immediately after the war, in view of the redistribution of intellectual influence (chairs and domains) in the reconstruction of the academic philosophical

landscape. For Beth, one influence has been the critical exchange, once again, with H.J. Pos. This was a two-way traffic. For example, by incorporating Beth's remarks, the additions in the third edition [1947] of Pos' *Filosofie der wetenschappen* show a considerable growth in sophistication and relevance when compared to the [1940] text. This is certainly an example of the positive influence of a (nowadays rare) dialogue between a phenomenologically and metaphysically oriented thinker (with hegelian as well as neokantian leanings) and his more scientifically minded colleagues.<sup>14</sup> (It should be remembered, however, that Pos was himself a creative linguist, so that the remarks he was able to make about the humanities were much more specific and to the point than in other areas.) Now, later on, Pos, already predisposed towards a high degree of crisis-awareness, got disappointed with the turn all philosophical currents took in their mutual polemics (especially in the Netherlands?). He, who had already contributed to these selfsame polemics, published a challenging lecture, or rather a one-page tract "Het dal der naoorlogse filosofie" ("The vale of post-war philosophy") [Pos 1955], which provoked a vivid response by Beth. The *tertia via* (between logical and scientific philosophy and the traditional systematic philosophy), which Pos said philosophy and culture were urgently in need of, in view of the integration of man's experience of knowledge, sense and loss of sense, diverged highly from Beth's *tertia via*. Contrasting with Pos' previous article "Drie hoofdrichtingen van filosoferen" ("Three main directions of philosophizing") [1954], where the metaphysical, the ethical and the scientific tendency within philosophy were recognized as legitimate, each in their own place, the tone of [Pos 1955/1958] is negative: analytical and techno-scientific reason are merely narrowing down the wider perspectives of the mind. A new synthetic vision, based on the ethical awareness and the unbounded openness of a mind unable to encapsulate in any form of radical finitude, is the only perspective to be hoped for, -and then, only in the long run: before that, we have to go through the crisis all along. Beth hoped to systematically discuss this turn in Pos' views with its author, but Pos' death in September 1955 precluded the planned exchange [Derx 1994, 301ff]. Thus Beth's [1957] crisis talk as well as his own *tertia via* can be seen, among other things, as reactions to Pos' trichotomy of philosophical options.

Among other influences, explaining the need felt by an adherent of 'scientific philosophy' to position himself on the topic of the identity of philosophy and the relation between science and culture at large, we may mention the rise of the *Humanistisch verbond* immediately after the war, the

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<sup>14</sup> In this connection, one should read, for example Beth's letter [1964]. See also [1959b] for analogies and disanalogies with Husserl.

cultural authority of such figures in the Netherlands as J. Huizinga, etc. It is known that Beth resisted the latter's cultural diagnosis of the West as far too pessimistic.

The threats menacing us [if humanistic thought is not expanded beyond the West] are much more serious than the inner developmental disorders of the western cultural life, -about which an author such as J. Huizinga comments much too pessimistically [1946a, ms. p.5].

Nevertheless, there is a common hope and a common touch of universalism, which perhaps has to do also with, precisely, the case of humanism. Indeed, in 1946 Beth expressed his appraisal of the then very recently founded Dutch humanistic movement in an unpublished tract: here too, he mentions the need for a worldwide philosophy or value-consciousness, not unlike the one required by the *Humanistisch Verbond*. But the predominant ideology in the latter movement is socialist, in a sense open to mitigated as well as to radical interpretations (the latter represented by others H.J. Pos). This political tendency is *in globo* disliked by Beth, who also resists the consequent underrating of the difficulties awaiting a true universalization of values and insights required for the case of humanism. It is also naive, Beth suggests, to cultivate the fear for domination from the confessional side within the movement (reacting to that fear propounded, again, by Pos and others). Probably Beth (who presumably had not been offered a role in the newly founded humanist movement) should have liked to position himself on the intellectual forum among all these forces and counterforces, among which also counted the then recently deceased Huizinga.

In my view, the fall of the old metaphysics and the rise of foundational studies and philosophy of life inaugurate a new Enlightenment, more radical than the Enlightenment of two centuries ago, which remained knee-deep stuck into traditional metaphysics. The great success of the 18th century Enlightenment had to do with the contemporaneous expansion of the western civilization... Thanks to [its own internal] critique, western civilization got rid of its antiquated constituents, and in such a way that what is of truly universal meaning in it came to the fore... Let us notice in passing that the spread of stoic philosophy in Antiquity had been due to analogous circumstances. In the course of the decades to come, we can expect an analogous evolution on a yet much wider scale. We cannot foster the illusion that the awakening peoples of the East, who want to accommodate the western way of life, will take our traditional preferences or feelings of piety to heart... The only possibility of overcoming the Easterner's inner resistance against

adopting our spiritual goods... is situated in a critical consideration of our [own] cultural goods, and a reflection on their foundations by us Westerners. Such a critical consideration and the consequent purification of our own culture would eventually bring about that retrenchment, which Huizinga probably rightly considers to be necessary for its cure [1946b, 15].

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