

Commentary
Weltbilder and Theology
Das Weltbild der Zukunft
Karl Heim

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In summer 1904, 30-year-old Karl Heim wrote within a few weeks only a book which caused ambivalent reactions: *Das Weltbild der Zukunft* (*The World Picture of the Future*).¹ Whereas the inflated claim of the title irritated the academic world, students in Leipzig and Marburg formed circles in which the book was discussed vividly. Highly abstract lines of thought alternate with overflowing, vivid images. The whole opus is pervaded by an unequalled passion.

That time was the period of the battle for worldviews [*Weltanschauungen*], as many book titles around 1900 phrased it (Beuttler, 2006, pp. 36–51). It was the sharp confrontation, the irreconcilable contrast between science and theology, but also between science and philosophy, which did not seem to leave any room for constructive dialogue. *Das Weltbild der Zukunft* is the bold attempt of young Heim to constructively synthesize the «discussion between philosophy, science and theology» to obtain «the draft of a uniform world picture [*Weltbild*]» (W, p. 6), a demand hardly to be met. It is the attempt of a great synthesis to re-establish something like a uniform picture or image of the world after the collapse of the idealistic systems.² Heim attempts to bring together four central tendencies of modern thinking.

Firstly he takes up the effort of the Neo-Kantians A. Riehl and P. Natorp «to cleanse the lasting fundamental ideas of the Kantian system more and more thoroughly from all scholastic elements» – which means the abandonment of the assumption of the “thing in itself”; then *secondly*, the «disintegration of the Myth of the Ego», i.e. the dissolution of the concept of a substantial ego, by R. Avenarius’ and E. Mach’s empirio-criticism; *thirdly*, the breakup of atomistic

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¹ Heim, 1980², quoted hereafter as W.

² A detailed interpretation is given in Beuttler, 2006, pp. 52–104.

physics by W. Ostwald's energetics, and *finally*, the – despite all differences yet common – efforts of F.H.R. Frank, A. Ritschl, W. Herrmann or M. Kähler in their «search for a position of faith resting in itself only and independent of all metaphysics and of all philosophic arguments» (W, p. 6). Despite his criticism, Heim's basic concern is in agreement with theirs.

In terms of epistemology, the *first* tendency means not to approach reality metaphysically-speculatively but based on experience, as it is done both in everyday and in scientific realism. The *second* tendency causes Heim to abandon the notion of a substantial ego or object in favour of a relational ontology. For Heim, the principle of relativity is, ontologically and based on epistemology, the «world formula» which, *thirdly*, is confirmed by the tendency of modern physics. The *fourth* tendency, finally, leads to the conclusion that every relative relation is constituted by decisions which in themselves have an absolute, non-relative momentum – Heim calls it «will» – and which places faith as a non-relative decision in formal analogy to any world relations. The four tendencies foreshadows the line of thoughts of the book. After a critical disintegration of modern epistemology by empirio-critical epistemology, a relational epistemology and natural philosophy are built upon the principle of relativity. Time, space and matter have an analogical relational and «will-type» structure which is also characteristic for faith, whose certainty becomes imaginable on the basis of the formal analogy between the act of volition, space-time relations and religion.

Heim tries to achieve the synthesis of science, philosophy and religion by means of some kind of common denominator which he calls the «world formula» [*Weltformel*] or also, «as simple a formulation of the world's secret as possible» (W, p. 5). The «world formula» is not a mathematic formula for the natural powers such as have been searched for by the 20th century elementary particle physics. «World formula» rather stands for a kind of basic principle of reality. It replies to the question: What is reality and how can it be comprehended uniformly, i.e. on basis of an ultimate principle? For Heim, the ultimate principle for comprehension of the world is relation. In line with Neo-Kantian philosophy and energetic physics, Heim understands reality as non-substantial, but as relational.

Heim develops a logic of relations, which he also calls «relational logic», and in which he differentiates between various types of relations. The most important ones are the basic relation [*Grundverhältnis*] and the exchange relation [*Umtauschverhältnis*] (W, pp. 32–46). The exchange relation refers to the

interchangeability of the poles in a relation. Right and left, top and bottom can be exchanged by simply turning round. Rest and motion only exist in relation to each other and can be exchanged by changing one's location. The mutual interchangeability of the elements in the exchange relation is an expression of the relativity of reality. For Heim, the concept of relativity is the «basic philosophic principle» of relational logic.

The basic relation is a bit more complicated. It is the base-laying relation, the relation within the relation. It means that every relation can be regarded as a unity, and every unity as an element in a relation. The basic relation is the short formula for the relational character of reality. Every unity can become a relation by being split into two or by being understood as the element of a higher relation, and vice versa, every relation can be combined to a unity. The basic relation describes reality as a relational arrangement while at the same time structuring it hierarchically. A unity becomes a relation always on a lower level, and a relation becomes a unity always on a higher level. Thus an infinite net of relations of relative unities and unities of relations develops: «Our whole world, arranged as time flow and space pattern, is based on such a chain of primary decisions which branch out further and further like the successive generations in the genealogical tree of an age-old family» (W, p. 106).

Now, the point in Heim's relational logic is that a decision has to be made with regard to the alternatives possible in a relation, i.e. which side is to be defined as right or left, or what is to be defined as unity and what as relation. It is fundamental that only one of the two alternatives in an exchange relation can be realised, and a decision has to be made as to which one is realised. In the same way, a decision has to be made with regard to the alternatives offered by the basic relation. *In actu*, something can only be regarded as relation-unity or as the element of a relation. Reality is constituted such that always one of two alternatives has to be opted for. I can only stand either left or right of an object (decision in an exchange relation) etc., something can only be a relation or an element of another relation (decision in a basic relation). The either-or, which decides between the both-and alternatives, is the «world formula». As Heim phrases it:

The exchange relation in which relation and relational element stand to each other in the basic relation is the world formula. In order to constitute any kind of reality, the alternative contained in the *basic relation* must be decided upon. [As well,] the alternative contained in the *exchange relation* must be decided upon. (W, p. 104)

The coming into being of reality is always a decision between the alternatives possible in the basic relation and in the exchange relation. Reality thus has the nature of will taking decisions about all alternatives possible. The transition from the multitude of possibilities to the one decision realised, that is what reality is. It can be discussed whether and to what extent the deciding nature of reality is adequately described by «will». In any case, when the nature of reality is regarded as a sequence of decisions, the result is a new, non-deterministic world picture. The basic components of the world are not atoms and things (i.e. the isolated entities) which are arranged secondarily but the decisions themselves so that reality appears as a permanently re-assembling, living-creative arrangement of relations. «Thus a new world picture has developed. The dead, rigid wasteland has disappeared [...] consciousness and decision, consciousness and will are the powers upon which all reality is based» (Kalweit, 1908, p. 88). The world has the nature of consciousness, will and decision rather than of dead matter.³

The whole of reality is woven together from creative decisions, from the setting of relations, decisions with regard to the basic and the exchange relations contained in them. [...] Everything real is [...] a creator's footstep creating worlds out of nothing, the bold setting of the measure of all things, the decision on the world's centre. (W, pp. 105f.)

Among all the world's mysteries solved by the world formula – time, space, personality, will, natural law, matter⁴ – will is the central one. «Will» is «the principle creating the world» (W, p. 116). With this expression, Heim has changed the world formula from an abstract logic into a dynamic logic of actual relations. Reality is not composed of ontologically isolated and separated entities but of a net of relations. Reality is not made up of final entities, separate in themselves. There are no final facts. There is nothing which could not be divided again. There is nothing differentiated that could not be split up again into sub-divisions or relations: «In the whole world, wherever we look, we only have to do with relations and never with final facts which could not be unfolded again into relations. All units we talk about are latent, possible relations» (W,

³ Cf. the motto of W «Soul only is the universe» (pp. 3, 207), which originates from the Upanishads and doesn't mean the Platonic or Stoic soul of the universe, but the will-character of reality.

⁴ The Chapters of W are: World Formula, Time, Space, Personality, Will, Natural Law, The Energetic World Picture.

p. 116). Consequently, when all unities can be divided into relations again, reality is made up of relations rather than of unities. Reality is a continuum throughout. We never reach final borders or final elements. According to Heim, the world is built on every level continuously but never of discrete components. «Pure experience» shows the «strange intertwinement of unity and relation, the dividability of all unities into relations and the convertibility of all relations into unities. [...] So now the logic of unities, from whose point of view relations are formed only by isolable unities, is replaced by a logic of relations for which all unities are exclusively formed by relations» (Heim, 1905, p. 229).

Philosophically, Heim's world formula is the final abandonment of substance metaphysics in favour of a relational, dynamic ontology of relations, an approach which was developed by A.N. Whitehead's process philosophy twenty years later only. But also a basic thought of the theory of relativity is considered, i.e. the principle of relativity. This was not invented by Einstein in 1905, but it can be traced back to Galilei and was already known in the Middle Ages. It means that there is no absolute motion. In addition, quantum physics, which was developed by Planck from 1900 on, can – at least in the field theoretical phrasing used since the 1930s – be considered a confirmation of the world formula. The final components of matter are not hard particles, the atoms are not undivisible, the elementary particles can and have to be described as waves, i.e. as extended, dynamically acting entities. Most of all, Heim sees this dynamic comprehension of matter confirmed by the so-called energetics.

As per its founder and primary representative Wilhelm Ostwald, energetics claims to overcome 19th century scientific materialism physically (Ostwald, 1904); the mechanistic world picture which ascribes all phenomena of living or inanimate nature to the mechanics of the atoms is untenable. Ostwald declares the failure of all attempts to explain non-mechanical occurrences such as warmth, radiation, electricity etc. even in principle as mechanical. In all cases Du Bois-Reymond's "ignoramus" is applicable, but it only is so due to its wrong, mechanistic basis of explanation. If the mechanistic *Weltbild* falls, the "ignorabimus" falls as well (Ostwald, 1904, p. 229). Ostwald's alternative to the mechanistic *Weltbild* is the energetic one. According to the energetic *Weltbild*, not matter is the source of energy but vice-versa: energy only is real, matter is a mental construct «in order to depict the permanent in the flow of occurrences» (Ostwald, 1904, p. 234). The real thing is that which has an ef-

fect on us, that which can be experienced and felt. Consequently, it is energy which constitutes reality.

As energy always is transferred in energy differences, i.e. in relations, energetics is the prototype of a science of relative relations. Energetics pictures the relational character of reality in the empiric-physical theory. So: nowhere are there any firm, absolute components, but relations of relations. Reality is not, it happens, says Heim along with the physician James Jeans, and Whitehead might express it similarly. Reality is a dynamic process of the formation of relations.

If applied to all relations, this dynamic concept of reality also has consequences for the faith because faith can also be described as a relation. Heim sees a «formal analogy» (W, p. 268) between the religious and the natural philosophic concept of relation. Faith as a relation with God is a multiple relation; structurally and formally it is in accordance with the world formula. Faith has the double relational structure of decisions of reality or will. It is decision in the exchange relation and decision in the basic relation because faith on the one hand is something that realises itself as a relation; faith is never real other than in a relation, and namely in one concrete relation (one out of various possible relations): a relation of a specified person to a god or a supreme being and vice-versa. Faith, thus, is a «decision» in the exchange relation. It is also a decision in the basic relation. It is a relational element in a higher relation by integrating itself and resting in a higher, superior total will, the will of God. Faith is an element in the basic relation and at the same time an element in the exchange relation. Faith is the relation of two individual wills which can be described as a «personal trust relationship», and it finds its rest in a total will which is superordinate and which is basis for the world and basis for the faith.

In any case God is not a substantial entity that exists somehow for itself, but that exists in relation to us and we exist, in one way or the other, in relation to God. As Martin Luther says in his *Large Catechism*, upon which you set your heart is properly your god, belief or unbelief make a god. Just as one's relation is with God – either in a relation of faith or faithlessness, either of ignorance or devotion – such is his reality in relation to us. In one way or the other, this relation has to be decided about again and again. And to the believer, God is not only the object and vis-à-vis of faith, but also its subject, its author and foundation.

It is no longer possible to put God supra-naturalistically in a place in the other world, it is no longer possible, as Heim puts it pointedly, «to let God live

in the world's upper room or rear building» (W, p. 272). God is always in the world and related to us in the relations of the world. Neither is he simply transcendent nor simply immanent (Beuttler, 2010, pp. 512–550). Instead, the immanent transcendence of God is not a firm fact, it is no state, but it is the result of a decision, of a decision of will. This, again, does not mean a distant relationship, i.e. that man can somehow, in a pietistic sense, make a decision for God in his inner being, as isolated subject. No, this decision-making process is a relation of will powers in which man's will comes to an agreement with God's will, is quasi integrated in the higher will of God. The fact of being integrated excludes a neutral position. The meaning of God's transcendence and God's immanence, God's otherworldliness and this-worldliness, God's absence and presence, cannot be experienced theoretically from a spectator's point of view, but only in real life (Heim, 1931, p. 100).

The innovative potential of *Das Weltbild der Zukunft* can be abstracted and interpreted as follows: As all realms of reality – nature as well as logic and knowledge, and religion – are broken down into relational structures, there results a synthesis of natural science, philosophy and religion. It is the decisional and will character that characterises reality so that religion, in analogy to philosophy and natural sciences, is traced back to the world formula and the uniform world picture is built.

Belief and knowledge are united, even if it is formally and structurally only. It is not, as Walter Ruttenbeck interpreted, that «the antagonism of belief and knowledge has been fully bridged, [...] dissolved into a wonderful harmony» (Ruttenbeck, 1925, p. 10). But, from an epistemological point of view, faith is no longer in opposition to other ways of expression of the spirit. Faith is no longer an exception from other areas of life, neither culturally nor anthropologically. It is not located «in a province in one's mind» (F. Schleiermacher) but is implemented in one's whole life; it has no limited universe of discourse but refers to the whole of reality, and faith itself is something real, just like the world's happenings are real.

The formal similarity between religious life and natural processes can, of course, only be maintained under the assumption of a voluntaristic world picture, i.e. that the foundation of everything real is designed as acting, living and will-like. Neither in religious nor in other contexts is the human spirit thought of as an extramundane subjectivity, as a *res cogitans* isolated from the natural world, but as integrated into the happenings of the natural.

The philosophic consequence of the overall voluntaristic picture, which has its parallels with Schopenhauer, but most of all with the later F.W.J. Schelling and with the Swabian fathers F.C. Oetinger and M. Hahn, and also with J. Böhme, is that the rationalistic subject-object antagonism of reason and nature is undermined in its very beginning and is replaced by a theosophic world picture, if you like.

The issue is not a formal or even cultural imperialistic synthesis of philosophy, natural science and theology, but a synopsis of their particular fields of knowledge from the perspective of the unity of reality. Connecting with the Christian-speculative theosophy, Heim tries to create a «*Weltbild* of faith» which brings together man and nature, God and the world. It may seem quixotic and speculative to analyse according to relational logic and to insist on the will-character of all the world's processes. But it is the attempt of a «synopsis of the entire reality», which Heim himself justified as follows:

Only as long as thinking dares to understand the whole of the world on the basis of a principle is it directly practical and leads to life-shaping deeds. [...] As soon as we definitively give up the Hegel's bold attempt and content ourselves with mere seeing rather than with understanding, in the true sense of the word, i.e. as soon as we only think in order to unfold the world picture pertaining to a certain "attitude" – besides which there exist other equal world pictures –, we have escaped the danger which the ancient wise men were highly exposed to, i.e. the danger of "speculation", of thinking "constructively", of violating the facts [...] But we have waived the royal right of a thinking spirit that understands the world and that dictates life its laws. We have withdrawn from the fight with reality and have retired to a contemplative way of life. (Heim, 1926, p. 16)

Reality can no longer be comprehended theoretically from a «spectator's point of view», but results from an «action» in which we time and again redefine our position.

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Saved From Sacrifice: A Theology of the Cross " By S. Mark Heim. Ben Fulford - 2008 - Modern Theology 24 (2):311-313. Salvations: A More Pluralistic Hypothesis. Dr S. Mark Heim - 1994 - Modern Theology 10 (4):341-360. The Depth of the Riches: Trinity and Religious Ends. S. Mark Heim - 2001 - Modern Theology 17 (1):21-55. Der Evangelische Glaube Und Das Denken der Gegenwart. Karl Heim - 1934 - Furche-Verlag G. M. B. H. COMMENTARIES Ulrich Beuttler Weltbilder and Theology Commentary on Das Weltbild der Zukunft by Karl Heim Mirko Alagna The Matryoshka-Concept Commentary on On the Interpretation of Weltanschauung by Karl Mannheim Domenico Spinosa The Image-World Commentary on The Image-World by Susan Sontag 229. 239 247. Theological liberalism, a form of religious thought that establishes religious inquiry on the basis of a norm other than the authority of tradition. It was an important influence in Protestantism from about the mid-17th century through the 1920s. The defining trait of this liberalism is a will to. The German Albrecht Ritschl dominated liberal Protestant theology after Schleiermacher, and two other German theologians, Wilhelm Herrmann and Adolf von Harnack , were Ritschl's most prominent followers. Answer. Simply put, liberation theology is a movement that attempts to interpret Scripture through the plight of the poor. True followers of Jesus, according to liberation theology, must work toward a just society, bring about social and political change, and align themselves with the working class. Jesus, who was poor Himself, focused on the poor and downtrodden, and any legitimate church will give preference to those who have historically been marginalized or deprived of their rights. Weltbilder, Menschenbilder book. Read reviews from world's largest community for readers. Stehen Theologie und christlicher Glaube wirklich unvereinbar u... Start by marking "Weltbilder, Menschenbilder: Naturwissenschaft Und Theologie Im Dialog" as Want to Read: Want to Read saving; Want to Read. Currently Reading. Read. Weltbilder, Menschenbi by Roland Biewald. Other editions. Want to Read saving; Error rating book. Refresh and try again. Rate this book. Clear rating.