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## Sphere Sovereignty

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# Sphere Sovereignty

## **Abstract**

"This is the idea that different parts of creation have legitimately different rules, tasks, and duties, given them by God for the proper functioning of the world. "

Posting about Abraham Kuypers views on sphere sovereignty from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

[inallthings.org/sphere-sovereignty/](http://inallthings.org/sphere-sovereignty/)

## **Keywords**

In All Things, Abraham Kuyper, sphere sovereignty

## **Disciplines**

Christianity | Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion

## **Comments**

*In All Things* is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service](#) at Dordt College.

Read Abraham Kuyper's inaugural speech, "[Sphere Sovereignty](#)," given at the Free University in 1880.

# Sphere Sovereignty

 [allthings.org/sphere-sovereignty/](https://allthings.org/sphere-sovereignty/)

Neal DeRoo

This is the idea that different parts of creation have legitimately different rules, tasks, and duties, given them by God for the proper functioning of the world. One should not expect a school, for example, to function like or have the same goals as a bank, because each operates in a different 'sphere' that gives it a unique calling in creation.

While some use the notion of [modal aspects](#) to extend this notion of "sphere sovereignty" beyond the realm of institutions into the way that all things relate to each other, in general the notion of sphere sovereignty is used in terms of the relationships between different social institutions. It is useful in helping determine what unique role each institution is to play within society. This, in turn, helps us know both what things an institution should legitimately be involved with, and how, and what things an institution should not legitimately be involved with, or how it should not be involved with them.

Politically, the notion of sphere sovereignty is often invoked as a way of understanding the proper limits to the authority of the state or government. Determining its proper sphere of authority requires articulating what, precisely, the state is called to do that no other societal institution can do as well as the state. Kuyper seems to maintain that the unique roles of the state are to ensure that the rights of each citizen are upheld and to ensure that no one and nothing falls through the cracks between the distinct spheres. As such, the state becomes a sort of 'last line of defense' to protect those who have been failed by other institutions. It also functions to oversee those things that work across institutions (like transportation systems, for example, which serve businesses, schools, and recreational purposes, to name a few).

In such a view, the state can intervene in economic issues only when businesses (the primary drivers of the economic sphere) either fail to do so or when they invite them to do so. An example of the former may be to help those people whose jobs do not provide them with adequate care after retirement; and example of the latter might be the creation of a Securities and Exchange Commission so that businesses can be assured that all other businesses are operating on a fair and level playing field.

Note, however, that this puts the state in the position of service, serving both citizen and other institutions. It also entails that, though the state may have to intervene in certain situations, it should stop doing so once the institution responsible for that situation exercises properly its authority in that area again. To use the above example, this would mean that the government offers social security only as long as: a) the people require such a thing; and b) the business world fails to adequately provide for it.

Questions about the separation of church and state or whether the government or the church have primary

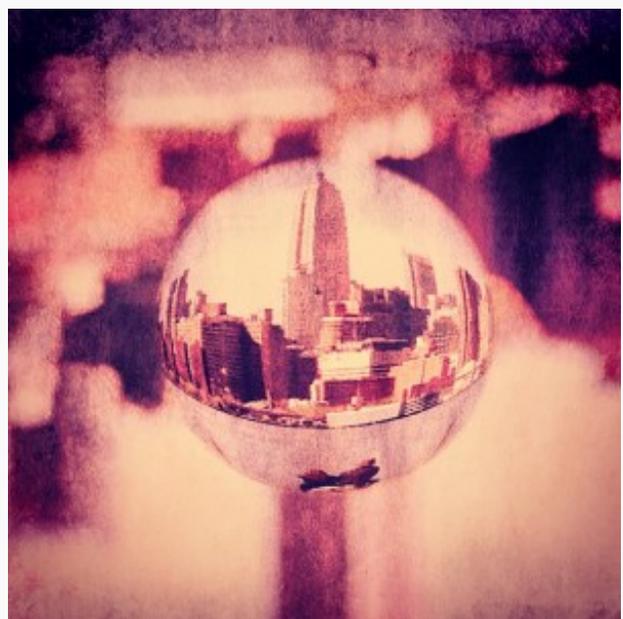


Photo by Christopher Lazo "Sphere Sovereignty"

responsibility for caring for the poor are, at their core, tied to some notion of sovereign and distinct spheres of institutional authority that must be carefully defined and guarded.

## **Dig Deeper**

Read Abraham Kuyper's inaugural speech, "[Sphere Sovereignty](#)," given at the Free University in 1880.

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