

Laudatio for Philip Kitcher, professor and honorary doctor

29 January 2019, University of Humanistic Studies

Prof. dr. Joachim Duyndam

Dear professor doctor Philip Kitcher,

It is a great honor for me to explain to you and to everybody present at this solemn occasion why the University of Humanistic Studies has decided to bestow an honorary doctorate upon you.

I take it for granted that everybody accepts that your scientific and scholarly work is of the highest quality, a *conditio sine qua non* for an honorary degree. The University of Humanistic Studies, however, has more specific reasons for conferring it on you.

We are a university based on humanism. Indeed, we are the only independent humanistic university in the world, with government-funded undergraduate and graduate educational programs for the training and preparing of humanist chaplains. Next to this, we have an educational program on care ethics, and we are currently building new master courses on Citizenship and Democratic Professionalism, and on International Humanism. All these teachings are feed with research on humanism and humanist traditions, i.e. philosophical and ethical traditions, and multidisciplinary research, humanistically inspired, into themes such as human dignity and human rights, citizenship, meaning-in-life, aging well, care and care ethics, counseling and chaplaincy.

In conducting this research, we are very much inspired by your work. We've got acquainted with you since your excellent keynote at the Opening of the Academic Year ceremony in 2017. You are both an outstanding scholar and a leading humanist. An ideal combination, of which one would wish to have more. Let me sum up some qualities of your work that are particularly significant to us

1. You look beyond disciplinary borders. You draw results of scientific research into your dealing with philosophical questions. Like Aristotle did, and Kant, and many other philosophers in the past, whereas today many philosophers confine themselves to the smaller areas of mere conceptual analysis. Unlike you. For instance, you collaborate with primatologist Frans de Waal (who also received an honorary

doctorate from our university, ten years ago). Both Frans de Waal and you aim to extend morality beyond humans alone.

2. Which is, secondly, in accordance with your evolutionary view on ethics. You really detect progress in moral evolution, as you argued in your book *Life After Faith. The Case for Secular Humanism* (2014). Ethics is the result of cooperation, among humans but also among other animals. In this, you are not antagonistic toward religion. Religion has always had a function in community building, which is not only useful but essential to peaceful cooperation. However, in modernity we have surpassed the stage of submission to a divine authority in our ethical evolution. You do not eschew the fundamental questions and the big views, though without speculating away, and always faithful to scientific rigor.
3. A third quality of your work is that it is very topical and relevant to current matters, such as climate change. For example, together with the American physicist, author, and feminist Evelyn Fox Keller you wrote the book *The Seasons Alter. How to Save Our Planet in six Acts* (2017). All these issues and approaches mentioned are challenging contemporary humanism, and urge us to further academic research.
4. To conclude this laudatio, I want to point at a very fundamental notion in your work, on which you will also lecture tomorrow at the symposium with the other honorary doctors (The Art of Listening and Deaccelerating our Way of Life) – I mean the notion of responsiveness as a basic feature of nature, not only human nature but all living nature. In ethics, responsiveness is understood as responsibility. In my view on humanism, responsiveness is crucial to the development and realization of autonomy, a relative and relational autonomy that responds to the primary heteronomous conditions of vulnerability, adversity, and social and cultural pressure.

We look forward to continue and to further our research into humanistic studies, with you, on all these topical issues. Therefore, I am delighted to have the privilege of conferring this honorary doctorate in humanistic studies on you.