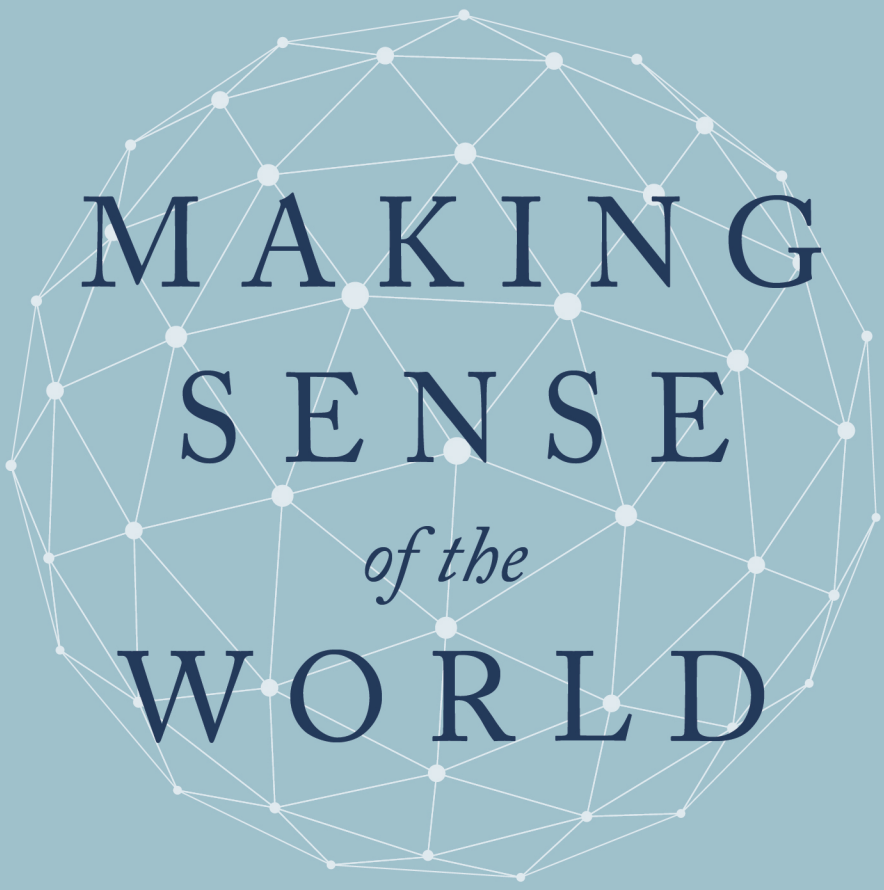
Foreword by John M. Frame



MAKING SENSE *of the* WORLD

How the Trinity Helps to Explain Reality

VERN S. POYTHRESS

MAKING SENSE *of the* WORLD

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How the Trinity Helps to Explain Reality

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Italics within Scripture quotations indicate emphasis added.

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To my wife, Diane

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Foreword

Back in the 1970s, a group of us started talking about God by using a somewhat unusual vocabulary. We were students, friends, and eventually colleagues in theological study, many of us at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. It occurred to several of us, about the same time, that the biblical doctrine of the Trinity had some implications that the church had not yet fully recognized.

The doctrine of the Trinity is that God is one being (for it is clear in the Bible that there is only one God), but that He is also three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is not very clear in Scripture what it means to say that one of these is a *person*. But the term does indicate some differentiation within God, so that the three persons, though one God, can sustain different relationships, transactions, and communications with one another, somewhat similar to the relationships that human beings sustain to one another. In that, we see one way in which God purposed to make human beings to be like himself, to be his image.

So the world and the people in it not only are creatures of God, but also reflect God's Trinitarian nature. And this fact illumines not only the nature of people, but the nature of everything else in the world. Our world is a Trinitarian world.

We settled on various kinds of vocabulary to expound this way of looking at God and the world. Perhaps our most distinctive term was *perspective*. In one sense, each member of the Trinity presents a unique perspective on the one God: each divine person is a differentiation in God, thus making it possible for the three persons to sustain different relationships with one another. But since God is really and truly One,

indeed the being who is more One than anything else in the universe, each person is ultimately a way of looking at—a perspective on—the whole of God. That way of speaking is terribly mysterious. As I said, we don't know precisely what a divine person is, or precisely how it differs from the other persons and from the whole divine being. But the word *perspective* seems to capture how we can speak of something that is not the whole, but a *way of seeing* the whole.

There are dangers in speaking this way. One danger is to compromise the oneness of God, so that we see him as a collection of independent parts. Another danger is in compromising the complexity of God, so that we see his persons, his differentiations, as unreal, and God as the abstract "pure being" of Greek philosophy, rather than, as in Scripture, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

At Westminster in the 1970s, I was the instructor of the class in which such vocabulary was introduced. But Vern Poythress, one of the students in the class, who held a PhD in mathematics from Harvard,[1] was by far the most creative of us in applying these ideas to the doctrine of the Trinity, and from there to a wide range of theological, philosophical, and practical issues. I need to stress here that our group was not focused on theoretical questions. We were at seminary to study the Bible together. We were just Christian people who loved God and loved Jesus Christ and who sought to make him known through sharing the gospel of his grace.[2] Perspectivalism was important, not merely as a solution to philosophical issues such as the relation of the one and the many,[3] but as a way of showing who

1. Vern was also a student of Kenneth L. Pike, the famous linguist who developed the tagmemic theory of communication.

2. Our group members were also students of Edmund P. Clowney, who showed us that the whole Bible was the gospel of Christ, and that therefore Christ could be found on every page of Scripture.

3. The students were also students of the famous apologist Cornelius Van Til, who sought to develop more consistently biblical ways of arguing Christian apologetics. One important theme of Van Til was the Trinity, which he often described as the eternal one-and-many. He deeply influenced the formulations that we perspectivalists were developing. Van Til was a philosopher as well as an apologist. But like the perspectivalists, he was primarily interested not in dialogue with philosophers but in preaching the gospel as Scripture gave it to us.

God was, three in one, and how nothing in the world made sense except as a creation of that Trinitarian God. So the Trinity is the foundation of evangelism, of preaching Christ.

The present volume, which summarizes the perspectival approach to gospel, Scripture, and God, is appropriately written by Vern Poythress. I have learned more about the Trinitarian nature of God from Vern than from any other source except Scripture itself. In this book, you will learn much about the Trinity as presented in Scripture, and you will learn the implications of its teaching for many areas of human life. You will learn how the doctrine of the Trinity can be seen everywhere—both in Scripture and in the God-created world. You will also see how the Trinity has been misunderstood, misapplied, and confused by thinkers who have missed, even distorted, the teaching of the Word. So Vern will explore the history of philosophy, to show how misunderstanding and sin can lead to error and worse.

A remarkable thing about Vern's account is that he starts with *beauty*. Beauty has often been banished to the periphery of our Christian thought and experience. But the Bible calls us to worship the Lord in the *beauty* of holiness. And the Trinity is not, as I mentioned, merely a theoretical concept. It overwhelms the heart and soul. You may be better motivated to read this book if you see it as a road to a beauty that you have never before known. Vern teaches that when you see God as Trinity, through many perspectives, you will see a richness of being, of goodness, indeed of glory, that motivates the deepest kind of discipleship. There will be philosophical argument here, but only in the interest of bringing readers to a rich knowledge of God, and of equipping us to communicate this wonderful vision to the whole world.

This book is the definitive formulation of Vern's understandings of various ways in which the Trinitarian God is reflected in all creation and in human thought. Unsurprisingly, this formulation is full of threefold distinctions: particle, wave, and field; stability, change, and relationship; things, events, and relations; divine authority, control, and presence. Vern will contrast the biblical understandings of these triads with the ideas of secular philosophers who try to reduce all perspectives to one

monoperspectival reality, such as Aristotle, Plato, and Kant. He will show how perspectivalism illumines the natural sciences, such as physics. And the book deals with the *ought* as well as the *is*, for perspectivalism also illumines the field of ethics, also central to God's world. So God has given us Ten Commandments to govern all of life.

Perspectivalism, then, illumines every aspect of human life because it illumines every aspect of God's reality. So it is a philosophy of life, but far more than that. It shows us not only how the nuts and bolts of creation fit together, but also how and why we keep going wrong. And it shows us where God's precious forgiveness in Jesus can be found. I commend this book to you as perhaps the most illuminating exposition of the Trinity that you will ever find, and therefore as a vision of God's beauty.

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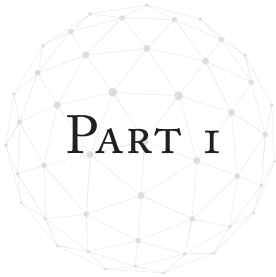

Part 1

A Summary of Biblical Teaching about the Beauty of God Displayed in the World

1

Why Is There Beauty in the World?

Why is there beauty in the world? Why is a flower beautiful? Why is a hummingbird beautiful? Why is light beautiful? And what is beauty? People dispute about it. Herman Bavinck associates beauty with "harmony, proportion, unity in diversity, organization, glow, glory, shining, fullness, perfection revealed."[1] All of them together make something beautiful—strangely attractive and splendid and wonderful.[2]

Is God beautiful? As we will see, the Bible indicates that beauty traces back to God. God is supremely beautiful. His beauty is reflected in the world he made and sustains. In this book we explore how. We find that in searching for the source for beauty, we encounter ultimate reality, the reality of God himself.

Some theologians, as far back as Augustine, have said that God is beautiful.[3] Others have cautioned against ascribing beauty to God, wanting to avoid a confusion between God and things in the world that are

1. Herman Bavinck, "Of Beauty and Aesthetics," in *Essays on Religion, Science and Society*, ed. John Bolt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 245–60 [256], cited in Robert S. Covolo, "Herman Bavinck's Theological Aesthetics: A Synchronic and Diachronic Analysis," *Bavinck Review* 2 (2011): 43–58 [55].

2. See David A. Covington, *A Redemptive Theology of Art: Restoring Godly Aesthetics to Doctrine and Culture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018).

3. Covolo, "Herman Bavinck's Theological Aesthetics," 44–45, 50.

beautiful. So which is it? God is distinct from every created thing; in addition, God's character is displayed in the things that he has made (Rom. 1:20). So the short answer is that created things that are beautiful reflect God but are not identical with God. Beauty in created things relates to God by "analogy, not identity."[4]

Beauty in the Tabernacle and the Priests, Reflecting God

Psalm 27:4 describes God as beautiful:

> One thing have I asked of the LORD,
> that will I seek after:
> that I may dwell in the house of the LORD
> all the days of my life,
> to gaze upon the *beauty* of the LORD
> and to inquire in his temple.

According to this psalm, the beauty of the Lord is displayed in "the house of the LORD," "his temple." We know from other parts of the Bible that the temple is a kind of small-scale version of the big dwelling place of God, which is the whole universe (1 Kings 8:27).[5] The whole universe also displays the beauty of its Maker (Pss. 19:1; 104:1–2).

In the same verse in Psalm 27, the psalmist notes that he *seeks* the presence of God; it is the "one thing" that he asks for:

> *One thing* have I asked of the LORD,
> that will I *seek after*:
> that I may dwell in the house of the LORD
> all the days of my life. (Ps. 27:4)

4. Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 2:254.

5. Meredith G. Kline, *Images of the Spirit* (repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1999), 37–38; Vern S. Poythress, *Theophany: A Biblical Theology of God's Appearing* (repr., Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2022), 229–30, 167–71.

In seeking communion with God, the psalmist is also seeking the beauty of God. We naturally seek beauty as something attractive. So Psalm 84:1–2 declares:

> How *lovely* is your dwelling place,
> O LORD of hosts!
> My soul *longs*, yes, faints
> for the courts of the LORD.

Let us consider the tabernacle of Moses, which was the predecessor for Solomon's temple. In Exodus 25–27, God instructs Moses about the building of the tabernacle. The tabernacle is supposed to be a tent dwelling with symbolic significance. It symbolizes that God dwells in the midst of his people Israel: "And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may *dwell in their midst*" (Ex. 25:8). The tabernacle displays beauty because it represents the splendor of God, who is the great King of the universe.

This splendor anticipates and foreshadows the greater splendor that belongs to Christ as the climactic revelation of God: the Bible speaks of "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). The preceding context in 2 Corinthians 3 explains the analogy and contrast between the glory of God revealed in Moses' time and the glory of the new covenant:

> For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation [through Moses], the ministry of righteousness [given to Paul in the new covenant] must far exceed it in glory. Indeed, in this case, what once had glory has come to have no glory at all, because of the glory that surpasses it. For if what was being brought to an end came with glory, much more will what is permanent have glory. (2 Cor. 3:9–11)

The Bible mentions the theme of beauty in other verses related to the tabernacle and God's presence. Exodus 28:2 speaks explicitly about the beauty of the special garments of the high priest Aaron: "And you shall

make holy garments for Aaron your brother, for *glory* and for *beauty*." Near the end of Exodus 28, similar words describe the garments of Aaron's sons, who are priests: "For Aaron's sons you shall make coats and sashes and caps. You shall make them for *glory* and *beauty*" (Ex. 28:40).

Beauty is paired with *glory*. They are overlapping themes. What is glorious is also beautiful. The same word *glory* describes God when he appears in splendor to the people of Israel:

> And in the morning you shall see the *glory* of the LORD. (Ex. 16:7)

> And behold, the *glory* of the LORD appeared in the cloud. (Ex. 16:10)

> The *glory* of the LORD dwelt on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days. And on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud. Now the appearance of the *glory* of the LORD was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel. (Ex. 24:16–17)

> Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the *glory* of the LORD filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the *glory* of the LORD filled the tabernacle. (Ex. 40:34–35)

The tabernacle itself is special precisely because of the presence of God in his glory:

> There I will meet with the people of Israel, and it shall be sanctified by my *glory*. (Ex. 29:43)

In addition, *holiness* goes together with *beauty*. Holiness starts with God, who is supremely holy and supremely glorious. God is "holy, holy, holy" (Isa. 6:3), that is, supremely holy. God appoints the people of Israel as a whole to be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex. 19:6). They are supposed to reflect his holiness. Among the people, God appoints Aaron

and his sons to a special level of holiness, to be priests for the holy nation (28:1). The tabernacle itself is to be God's holy dwelling place in the midst of Israel: it is a "sanctuary," that is, a holy place (25:8). Psalm 29:2 calls on the people to "worship the LORD in the *beauty* of holiness" (KJV). God himself is the source of this holiness. The tabernacle, like the later temple of Solomon, is a place where the worshiper can "gaze upon the *beauty* of the LORD" (Ps. 27:4). Psalm 96:6 recognizes the same truth:

> Splendor and majesty are before him;
> strength and *beauty* are in his *sanctuary*.

One of the central garments for Aaron is the "ephod," which is made out of the same materials as the tabernacle tent (Ex. 28:6; 26:1). It indicates that Aaron himself is a kind of replica of the tabernacle.[6] The plate on his forehead proclaims, "Holy to the LORD" (28:36–38). The jewels in Aaron's breastpiece are beautiful (vv. 17–20). The association of jewels with beauty and with the priesthood is evident from Isaiah 61:10, where the bridegroom and the bride adorn themselves for their wedding day:

> A bridegroom decks himself like a *priest with a beautiful headdress*,
> and . . . a bride adorns herself with her *jewels*.

God appears in jewel-like splendor to John in Revelation 4:3:

> And he who sat there had the appearance of *jasper and carnelian*, and around the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an *emerald*.

Revelation 4:1–11 introduces God as the Creator (v. 11) and Sustainer of all things. He is beautiful himself, with an appearance like jewels. He makes a world with beautiful things in it.

6. Kline, *Images of the Spirit*, 42–47.

> And out of the ground the LORD God made to spring up every tree that is *pleasant to the sight* and good for food [in the garden of Eden]. (Gen. 2:9)
>
> The name of the first [river] is the Pishon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Havilah, where there is *gold*. And the *gold* of that land is good; *bdellium* and *onyx* stone are there. (Gen. 2:11–12)

Ezekiel 31 compares Assyria to a beautiful cedar in Lebanon, about which it is said that "no tree in the garden of God was its equal in *beauty*" (v. 8). The verse shows that the garden of Eden was beautiful. The final garden city in Revelation 22:1–5 is also beautiful.

In sum, God is beautiful himself. He created a world reflecting his beauty. The tabernacle and the temple are symbolic reminders that display these truths.

When God created the world, it was "very good" (Gen. 1:31). It has since been marred by human sin (Rom. 8:19–20). But remnants of beauty still exist, reminding us of who made it.

We are naturally attracted to beauty. It has a fascination, and we wish that we could somehow be one with it or enter into it or enjoy it even more. This attraction is a subtle message reminding us of the attraction of God himself, and the satisfaction and joy that we can find only by knowing God and having communion with him ("that I may dwell in the house of the LORD," Ps. 27:4). One of the most beautiful things about the world is simply that it reflects and displays the character of the God who made it.

God and Creation

We need to take into account the relation between God and the world. The God of the Bible is absolutely sovereign. He created everything outside himself. Thus, there are two levels to reality: God (the Creator) and creation (the things that God created). (See fig. 1.1.)

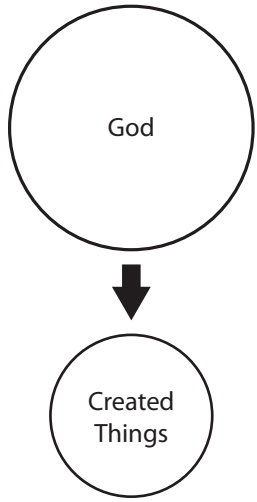

Fig. 1.1. Two Levels of Reality

The two levels are distinct. Creatures are not God, and God is not a creature. God's creation reveals his nature, so that human beings, even in their rebellion, do know God, as Romans 1:19–21 states:

> For what can be *known about God is plain* to them [human beings, even the unrighteous], because God has *shown it* to them. For his *invisible attributes*, namely, his *eternal power and divine nature*, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although *they knew God*, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

When people refuse to acknowledge the true God, they look for substitutes, in the form of idols. Romans 1 continues:

> Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for *images* resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

> Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the *creature* rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. (Rom. 1:22–25)

Beautiful things in the world reflect the beauty of God. But people can worship the beautiful things, *instead of* God. People who are fleeing from God detach beauty from its source in God. The ancient Egyptians considered the sun to be a god (Ra). Some men have a worshipful attitude toward a beautiful woman; some women have a worshipful attitude toward a handsome man.

Beauty, Harmony, and the Trinity

Beauty has a close relation to harmony. In music, the harmony in a chord can be beautiful. A tree or a human face that has a symmetry or harmony between its two sides often seems more beautiful than something with disharmony. But we should not oversimplify. In music, there can be both simple harmonies and complex harmonies. Both can have a beauty of their own. A musical piece may present a sequence in which a *disharmony* resolves into a harmony. God displays his beauty in both. Likewise, in the world that God made, there are simple beauties, such as the beauty of a single star in the night. There are complex beauties, such as the beauty of a landscape or a mountain vista.

Just as beauty has its ultimate source in God, so does harmony. God is in harmony with himself. He is consistent with himself. This harmony is marvelous, wonderful, and mysterious.

There is a related deep truth about God for us to consider. God is Trinitarian: he is one God and three persons. God is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Each person is fully God. The Bible teaches this truth, not in one place, but in many verses, when we put them together. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament affirm that there is only one true God (e.g., Deut. 6:4; Isa. 46:9; Mark 12:29; 1 Cor. 8:4, 6). The New

Testament indicates that this God exists as three persons, each of which is distinct from the other two (e.g., John 1:1; 14:16, 23; 15:26).[7]

Each person in the Trinity is fully in *harmony* with the other two persons. Jesus says, "I always do the things that are pleasing to him [the Father]" (John 8:29). The persons of the Trinity love each other, and love is a supreme form of harmony: "The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand" (3:35). The harmony among the persons of the Trinity is the ultimate beauty. The world reflects this beauty on its own level, the level of the creature.

In this book we explore how God's Trinitarian nature is reflected in various and fascinating ways in the structure and order of his creation. These reflections all display the beauty of God. David A. Covington explores how beauty itself belongs to a triad of perspectives: "beautiful glory," "true glory," and "powerful glory," all related to the broad theme of God's glory.[8] This triad he sees as closely related to form (corresponding to beauty), content, and purpose.[9]

Just as the one God eternally exists as three persons, so creation, in all its dimensions, reflects a corresponding unity-in-diversity. Consider, for example, God's knowledge and our knowledge. God's knowledge of all things is unified because there is only one God, but there is also diversity in his knowledge—the diversity of the individual *perspectives* of each member of the Trinity (Matt. 11:27). Their perspectives are *distinct* but not separable, since each person is fully God and since the persons indwell one another (coinherence).[10] Our human knowledge is similar but different. Our knowing involves using *multiple* perspectives to properly understand the objects of knowledge, but unlike God's perspectives, ours are limited, not comprehensive. We know in part; he alone knows fully. Only the sovereign, omniscient God has the *master* perspective.

7. For a fuller exposition, see John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2000); Vern S. Poythress, *Knowing and the Trinity: How Perspectives in Human Knowledge Imitate the Trinity* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2018), chap. 6.

8. Covington, *Redemptive Theology of Art*, 64.

9. Covington, 63.

10. *Coinherence* is one of several terms designating the fact that the persons of the Trinity dwell in each other (John 14:10–11; 17:21).

Because multiple *structures* are *inherent* in the world, we must use *multiple perspectives* to understand them. Thus, no one human perspective or analysis is ultimate. God has built in this multiplicity. The unity in one perspective is no more ultimate than the diversity expressed in several perspectives. Unity and diversity go together. They are in harmony. They reflect the beauty of God. Each points to the other, and neither is independent of the other. That is true in God. Subordinately, it is true in analyzing the world that God made. We can see beauty in the way in which we know: it is the beauty of harmony in multiple perspectives. This harmony seems all the more beautiful when we understand that it reflects the original beauty of God. Similarly, there is beauty in the world that God made. This beauty is displayed not only in individual objects, such as a single star, but in the way in which God has made the star and everything else with multiple perspectives and multiple aspects built into it.

For example, we can start with any attribute of God, such as his wisdom, and think about how it is displayed in the world. We are using the theme of wisdom as a perspective. We can notice that a single star is wisely made. We can notice that *we ourselves* are wisely made, with the capability of appreciating God's wisdom. We can also use God's power or his kindness or his goodness as a starting point for a perspective on the world. No one of our human perspectives has an exclusive claim to be a *master* perspective, which would give us the one, final, definitive analysis of reality.

We should address one concern right away. Does the idea of perspectives lead to relativism about truth? That is a common understanding of *perspectives* in our day. But it is the opposite of what we are saying. Rightly used, distinct perspectives are in harmony. For example, when we look at the same chair from different physical locations, each location provides a distinct perspective.[11] When we are in communion with God, human perspectives do give us access to the truth. The standard for truth is God himself, and his knowledge. Truth is not determined by what one of us would like to be true, but by God. Truth in God is absolute, not relative. Out of his fullness of knowledge, God gives knowledge to human beings.

11. Poythress, *Knowing and the Trinity*, chap. 2.

So human perspectives, when rightly used, do not keep us away from truth but are the various means by which God gives us access to what he knows in his absoluteness. Moreover, multiple perspectives, properly understood, are in harmony, and the truth that we access through multiple perspectives is harmonious. That is beautiful. We experience the beauty of God when we experience the harmony of perspectives. That is the opposite result from relativism, according to which your "truth" may be the opposite of my "truth." Because there is only one true God, the truths that he knows are in harmony. His truth is beautiful in its harmony.

Many of the multiple perspectives that we use to understand the world reflect the Trinity, the three-in-one harmony in God.[12] As we will see, everywhere we look in creation, we find reflections and signs of the Trinity. It is beautiful!

Analyzing a Grape

Let us illustrate with an example. We can use three perspectives to analyze something as common as a grape. At this point, we will use three perspectives first delineated by Kenneth L. Pike, using labels analogous to physics: the particle perspective, the wave perspective, and the field perspective.[13] Each of the three perspectives focuses primarily on *one* aspect of the grape.

First, we can treat the grape as a *particle*, as a kind of distinct entity. It is a stable "thing" over time, contrasting with other grapes and with other kinds of fruit. Second, we can treat the grape as a *wave*. Just as a wave changes as it moves along, a grape changes over time. It may grow old or shriveled or have juice leak out onto a plate or a countertop. Third, we can treat the grape as a *field*, made up of relations. How does the grape look from this field perspective? The grape has relations to other objects around it in space, and relations to other varieties of grapes. There are also internal spatial relations

12. Poythress, *Knowing and the Trinity*.

13. Kenneth L. Pike, *Linguistic Concepts: An Introduction to Tagmemics* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), chaps. 3–5; Vern S. Poythress, *Redeeming Philosophy: A God-Centered Approach to the Big Questions* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 143–44.

between distinct parts of the grape. If the grape has seeds, the seeds have spatial relations to the other seeds in the same grape, and spatial relations to the flesh of the grape around the seeds, and relations to the skin of the grape.

Altogether, we have three distinct views or perspectives on the same grape: a particle perspective, a wave perspective, and a field perspective. Another way to state this is that we can see the grape as a static entity, as a developing entity, and as an entity related to other entities and to itself. (See fig. 1.2.)

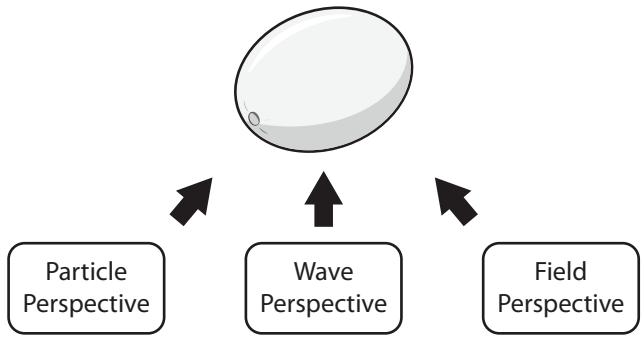

Fig. 1.2. Three Perspectives on a Grape

These three perspectives interlock and interpenetrate. Each perspective exists in conjunction with the other two; no perspective exists independently from the other two. For example, the wave perspective focuses on the developments and changes in the grape over time. But for that to be, the grape must have some stability through time. The particle perspective, which focuses on stability, is in the background. And when we consider the grape, we always do so within a larger context of relationships, including the relation between the grape and those who are observing. So the field perspective, which focuses on relationships, is there in the background.

If we take all three perspectives together, they reflect the Trinity. We will confirm this reflection later on. The same holds true not only for grapes, but for every other object that God has created in his world, whether dogs or galaxies or atoms or DNA inside the nucleus of a cell—all things in creation reflect and reveal their *Trinitarian* Creator.

The grape is what it is because it is part of God's comprehensive plan for his creation. The Bible teaches that from eternity past, God has planned the whole course of history (e.g., Isa. 46:9–11) and that God "works all things according to the counsel of his will" (Eph. 1:11b) even down to the minutest events (Prov. 16:33). Jesus reminds us of the Father's care in Matthew 10:29–31:

> Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.

God takes care of each sparrow and each hair.

Likewise, God takes care of each grape. God planned that this grape should exist. His plan shows his *authority* over the grape. He brought it into existence, and he sustains it by his power, his *control*. God is everywhere *present* in the world (e.g., Jer. 23:24), without being limited by the world. Therefore, the grape, like everything else in creation, displays God's authority, power, and presence (cf. Rom. 1:19–21)—three complementary divine attributes. God displays his lordship over the world, revealing his authority, his control, and his presence.

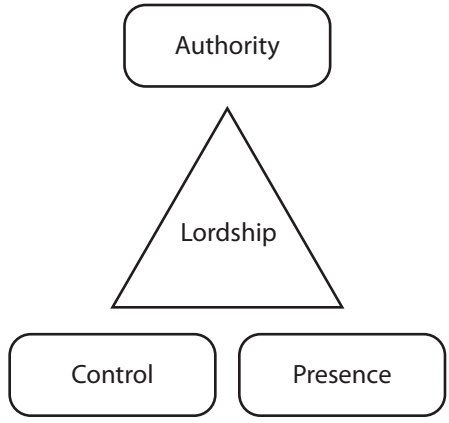

Fig. 1.3. Themes of God's Lordship

As we will see, these three themes reflect the three persons in the Trinity. In this way, the grape displays on the level of the creature the magnificence and beauty of the Trinity, God in three persons. The source of creaturely beauty is found in God himself—God is beautiful, supremely beautiful. To find the source for beauty is also to find ultimate reality, the reality of God.

As we become increasingly aware of how magnificently God displays his character in creation, it should encourage each of us personally. It should also be an incentive to pray that others would come to see his character and to "worship the Father in spirit and truth" (John 4:23), through Jesus Christ, the "one mediator between God and men" (1 Tim. 2:5).

Various Philosophical Views of Ultimate Reality

A Trinitarian answer about beauty is also an answer about the nature of ultimate reality. God is the ultimate reality, and God is beautiful. This is a different answer from all other answers found in the history of Western philosophy. Philosophers have asked themselves what is the nature of ultimate reality, the deepest kind of structure in the world. This quest has also been a search for the source of the beauty and truth that we experience in the world.

Consider some examples. The Greek philosopher Thales (c. 624–546 B.C.) said, "All is water." Thales was saying that the ultimate structure of reality was water. Water was the source and final explanation for everything else, including beauty and truth. The Greek philosopher Democritus (c. 460–370 B.C.) said that everything was composed of the tiniest bits of matter, *atoms*, which cannot be decomposed or destroyed. According to his picture, atoms were ultimate. Aristotle (384–322 B.C.) said that reality consisted in *substances*, that is, individual things such as dogs and oak trees, and that each substance was composed of form and matter together. These are all claims about the ultimate structure of reality. Ultimate reality is the last thing back, which is the source of the things we see, and is the source of beauty and truth. But if the last thing back is water, or atoms, why should there be beauty at all? Is it just a cosmic accident, or just a random reaction by human beings, not actually corresponding to anything out in the world?

Does the Bible have a distinctive answer to the question about ultimate reality and the origin of beauty? It is God who is the ultimate reality. It is God who is the source of beauty. And this God is three persons. He is the source for the whole created world. He is the source for beauty and truth and goodness.

Plato (c. 428–347 B.C.) thought that abstract *forms*, such as the form of the good, the form of justice, and the form of beauty, were foundational. Visible things in the world that exhibited goodness or justice or beauty derived from these forms, and reflected the forms. (But he had plural forms, not one personal triune God who was the source of all the world.)

Many modern people who embrace *materialist naturalism* have a view similar to Democritus and the old Greek atomists. According to their analysis, the ultimate structure of the world is in its smallest physical constituents —its atoms (or, in contemporary physics, the elementary particles).

Empiricists think that the world is composed not of substances but of sense experiences.

Pantheists think that everything is God.

There are other views as well. Which of these views is true?

The study of the ultimate structure of reality is closely related to what has been called *metaphysics*.[14] The word *metaphysics* has been used in a number of ways in the history of philosophy. We do not need to get into a dispute about the meaning of the word. For our purposes, all we need to say is that in this book we are going to explore the question of the ultimate structure of reality. That is one of the questions that philosophers have addressed under the topic of metaphysics. At the same time, we are studying beauty. The beauty of the world is one display of the ultimate reality of God, who is beautiful.

14. See Peter van Inwagen and Meghan Sullivan, "Metaphysics," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Spring 2020), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2020/entries/metaphysics/>. The older metaphysics of Aristotle proposed to study "being as such." This study is now called *ontology*. *Metaphysics* is now a somewhat larger and more diffuse field (van Inwagen and Sullivan, § 1). For the most part, in this book we are focusing on the subdivision of metaphysics called *ontology* (akin to van Inwagen and Sullivan, § 2). But the boundaries between these subfields are somewhat fluid.

How would you go about studying the ultimate nature of reality? How could you confidently decide which of the philosophers' proposals is true? Even if you came upon some supposed "ultimate structure," how could you know that it was *ultimate*?[15] We can also ask key questions about beauty. Is beauty "real"? Or is it just a human projection out into the world? Is "beauty in the eye of the beholder"? It is true that people differ from one another in what they find beautiful. But if there is no beauty "out there," it seems that it is merely a human invention, a happenstance. And that degrades both its significance and the fascination that we find in it.

The Distinctiveness of the Christian Faith

The Christian faith provides an answer that is different from any proposed by secular philosophers. Often, however, we fail to appreciate how different the Christian faith is from secular worldviews. Frequently over the centuries, Christianity has been corrupted by Christian attempts to adopt, adapt, and accommodate pagan philosophies, especially Plato's and Aristotle's. Some Christians have attempted to adopt Plato and Aristotle as whole systems, with some modifications, while others have attempted to adopt smaller pieces of their systems. More recently, Immanuel Kant and his successors have exerted an adverse influence on Christianity.

Adopting smaller pieces can seem attractive. Plato and Aristotle and many other philosophers in the Western tradition seem to offer helpful insights about the world. So the question becomes this: how might we adopt these positive insights without also including any errors or failings?[16]

15. See van Inwagen and Sullivan, § 5, for a discussion of current philosophical opinions about whether metaphysics is possible.

16. See also Poythress, *Redeeming Philosophy*; Vern S. Poythress, *The Mystery of the Trinity: A Trinitarian Approach to the Attributes of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2020); Poythress, *Knowing and the Trinity*; Vern S. Poythress, *Symphonic Theology: The Validity of Multiple Perspectives in Theology* (repr., Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2001); Vern S. Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word: Language—A God-Centered Approach* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), esp. app. D.

Contrast with Systems in the History of Western Philosophy

It is helpful to contrast what the Bible teaches with what has been taught in various Western philosophical systems. Readers who are interested in a penetrating study of these contrasts are encouraged to consult John Frame's book *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology*.[17] In addition, we have devoted Appendix A of this book to a survey of several of those philosophical systems. Our focus in the body of this book, however, is on a positive examination of the Bible and its implications for appreciating the beauty in the world. In this examination, we are also examining the ultimate structure of the world—metaphysics.

Key Terms

Aristotle
beauty
creature
Democritus
diversity
empiricist
field perspective
form
glory
harmony
holiness
Kant, Immanuel
materialist naturalism
matter
metaphysics
pantheist
particle perspective
perspective
Pike, Kenneth L.
priest
relativism
substance
tabernacle
Thales
Trinity
ultimate reality
unity
unity-in-diversity
wave perspective

17. John M. Frame, *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2015).

Study Questions

1. What is beauty? Where does it come from? Why are we fascinated by it?
2. What does the Bible say about the relation of God to beauty?
3. What are the two levels of reality?
4. How do human beings know God?
5. How is beauty related to harmony?
6. What does harmony have to do with the Trinity?
7. Why are perspectives important?
8. What are the difficulties in trying to interact with the Western tradition of philosophy?

For Further Reading

Frame, John M. *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2015. Pp. 8–11, 14–36, 46–85.

Poythress, Vern S. *Theophany: A Biblical Theology of God's Appearing*. Reprint, Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2022. Chap. 21.

Prayer

Thank you, our Father and Creator, that you are beautiful. Enable us to gaze on your beauty in Christ, and to appreciate the beauty in the world that you made.

2

Summarizing Aspects of the Bible's Teaching

At this point, in order to better appreciate the relation of the beauty of God to the beauty of the world, let us remind ourselves of some fundamental truths that the Bible teaches us about God, ourselves, and the world.

A Brief Summary of Truths from the Bible

The paragraphs that follow briefly summarize what the Bible says about what exists. The verses that are cited as examples should be understood in the wider context of the whole Bible. Although extensive arguments could be presented, showing how the Bible implies various truths, the goal here is to present a simple summary.[1]

1. In more detail, my own understanding of the Bible is that its teaching is well summarized in Reformed theology. There are many disputes between different groups on theological issues, and we cannot take space to discuss them in the context of this book. A good one-volume summary of Reformed theology can be found in Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996). Berkhof has also provided simpler summaries in Louis Berkhof, *Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979); Louis Berkhof, *Manual of Christian Doctrine* (London: Banner of Truth, 1997); Louis Berkhof, *Summary of Christian Doctrine for Senior Classes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947). Herman Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003–8), offers a more extensive theology. Also of importance is Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970). The Westminster

Truths about What Exists

Here are eleven truths about God and what exists.

- God always exists.
- He is the ultimate reality.
- He is the ultimate beauty.
- He is truth and is the standard for truth.
- He is good and is the standard for goodness.
- He is personal.
- He has personal purposes.
- He created human beings who can have personal fellowship with him.
- He created everything else in the cosmos (Gen. 1).
- He displays his glory and beauty in the things that he has made.
- He has a personal plan for each individual thing.

The created world did not always exist. It was brought into existence by God (Gen. 1:1; 1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:15–17). God did not *need* to create the world (Acts 17:25). But he nevertheless decided to create it so that it would display his glory—the primary purpose for all created things (Rev. 21:23). And as we have seen, glory is closely connected with beauty (Ex. 28:2, 40). We might say that God created the world to display his beauty. We might also say that he created the world to display his character. His character is beautiful, good, all-powerful, and everywhere present. We could extend the list of his attributes.

The things that God made, he made according to his design and his plan (Isa. 46:9–11; Eph. 1:11). These created things are continuously dependent on him (Acts 17:28) and continuously governed by him for his own purposes. God sustains, governs, and directs the entire cosmos, from the macro to the micro levels, and is everywhere present in it.

Confession of Faith and the Westminster Larger and Shorter Catechisms (https://www.pcaac.org/bco/westminster-confession/) are the doctrinal standards at Westminster Theological Seminary, where I teach.

So once God made the world, there are two levels of existence, not one. There is God, and then there is everything that God has made and over which he rules.

The unique eternal existence of God implies that God is in a deep sense more fundamental than any creature. He is deeper in that he is the origin of glory and beauty and truth. This fundamental feature about God tells us about ultimate reality—that is, metaphysics. It is an aspect of what we may begin to call *Christian metaphysics*. It differs from the metaphysical offerings in ancient Greek philosophy and modern secular philosophy. This fundamental feature about God also tells us about beauty. Beauty exists on two levels, namely, the level of the Creator, God himself, and the level of the creature, namely, creaturely things that are beautiful. Beauty in the creature reflects and reminds us of the supreme beauty of the Creator—if we are willing to be reminded, rather than suppressing the truth to evade the presence of God (Rom. 1:18–23).

Because God created and sustains absolutely everything that exists, everything displays his power and his glory—his beauty. This display is more obvious with things in the world that are obviously beautiful in outward appearance. But it is also true of things that are ugly. We do not like to have ants crawling into our kitchen and getting into our food. But if we actually watch the ants and study them, we find that they are awesomely made. They are wonderful creatures. They are beautiful, in their own way, because when we study them, we see the harmony and wisdom that has gone into making them. We appreciate the beauty of God, who made them. The same goes for earthworms and wasps and many other creatures that many of us want out of our sight.

The Trinity

The next step in considering the beauty of God is to understand in greater detail what the Bible says about God. The two basic truths are that there is only one true God (Gen. 1; Deut. 4:35; 6:4; Mark 12:29; 1 Cor. 8:6) and that he exists eternally as a Trinity. God is three persons: the Father is God; the Son is God; the Spirit is God. The Father is not the Son; the

Father is not the Spirit; and the Son is not the Spirit (John 1:1; 14:16, 23; 15:26).[2] (See fig. 2.1.)

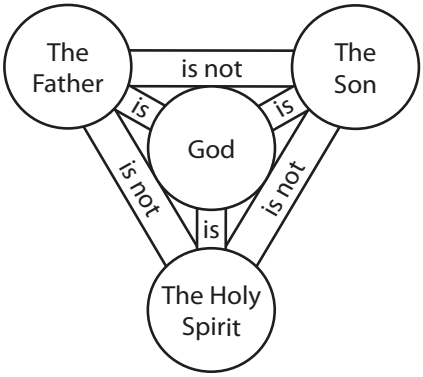

Fig. 2.1. The Trinity[3]

Over the centuries, theologians have developed technical terms to help summarize this doctrine in a biblically faithful way. We have the terms *substance* and *essence*, customarily used to designate the unity of God. And we have the term *person* (and sometimes *subsistence*) to designate the Father, the Son, and the Spirit in their distinctiveness and plurality. We can summarize the doctrine of the Trinity by saying that God is one substance and three persons. The terms are not magical. They are labels that point to the full teaching of the Bible. Their meanings need not be equated, and indeed should not be equated, with any particular element in ancient Greek philosophy.[4]

2. Vern S. Poythress, *Knowing and the Trinity: How Perspectives in Human Knowledge Imitate the Trinity* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2018), chap. 6.

3. ©CC0 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Shield-Trinity-Scutum-Fidei-English.png. A diagram similar to this one, called the "Shield of the Trinity," can be found in a number of places, such as J. Hampton Keathley III, "The Trinity (Triunity) of God," May 18, 2004, https://bible.org/article/trinity-triunity-god, accessed February 20, 2017. It appears in Cotton Faustina manuscript B.VII, folio 42v, from about 1210 A.D. (British Library; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:PetrusPictaviensis_CottonFaustinaBVII-folio42v_ScutumFidei_early13thc.jpg, accessed January 20, 2020).

4. Vern S. Poythress, *The Mystery of the Trinity: A Trinitarian Approach to the Attributes of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2020), chap. 24.

Coinherence

The Bible also teaches that each of the three persons of the Trinity dwells in the other two. "You, Father, are *in* me [Jesus], and I *in* you" (John 17:21). This indwelling of the persons goes by several names, one of which is *coinherence*. Each person *coinheres* with the others. Each person is *distinct* from the others, but they are not *separable*. No person of the Trinity exists without the presence of the others. We know each person of the Trinity in the context of knowledge of the other two. In our communion with any one person, we have communion with all three persons.

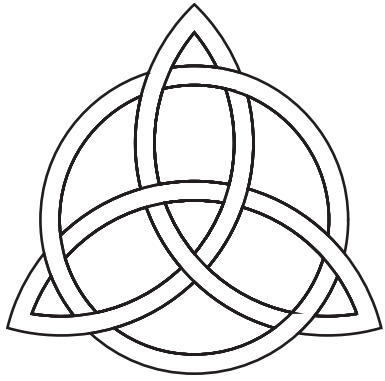

Fig. 2.2. The Triquetra

Coinherence shows us the harmony in God. It is beautiful. Coinherence is also closely related to the love of God. The persons of the Trinity love each other, and their love expresses intimacy.

This coinherence or mutual indwelling is unique to God. Distinct creatures, such as two apples, are typically not only distinct but spatially separable.

Truths and Knowledge

The distinction between two levels of existence leads to an analogous distinction in two levels of *knowledge*. The first level of knowledge

is the level of God the Creator. God knows himself completely, and he knows the world completely, during all the course of its history (1 John 3:20). God has a plan for all things and for all events, from the greatest to the least:

> Remember the former things of old;
> for I am God, and there is no other;
> I am God, and there is none like me,
> declaring the end from the beginning
> and from ancient times things not yet done,
> saying, "My counsel shall stand,
> and I will accomplish all my purpose,"
> calling a bird of prey from the east,
> the man of my counsel from a far country.
> I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass;
> I have purposed, and I will do it. (Isa. 46:9–11)

> Who has spoken and it came to pass,
> unless the Lord has commanded it?
> Is it not from the mouth of the Most High
> that good and bad come? (Lam. 3:37–38)

> But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. (Matt. 10:30)

> In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will. (Eph. 1:11)

The truths about the world are truths that God knows, truths that accord with his plan. God's plan is unchanging and comprehensive. It specifies everything that occurs at every point in time. The unchangeability of God's plan, and consequently the unchangeability of truth, is consistent with all kinds of changes taking place in the world.

The second level is the level of human knowledge.[5] God gives knowledge to human beings: "He who teaches man *knowledge*—the LORD—knows the thoughts of man, that they are but a breath" (Ps. 94:10–11). Human beings can know truth. But our knowledge and access to truth are derivative. Our knowledge is a reflection and imitation of that of God, whose knowledge is original and is the standard for truth (John 3:33; Rom. 3:4).

God's knowledge is beautiful. He knows himself in his beauty. Consequently, human knowledge has a derivative beauty. If we can avoid envy, we admire and are attracted to someone who has knowledge that we do not.

This distinction between levels of knowledge has implications for our knowledge of God. The Trinity is a mystery. God fully understands himself, but we as finite creatures do not. We can and do know him, but our knowledge is not comprehensive in the way that God's is.

The nature of human knowledge also has implications for the nature of reality. These implications will be examined in subsequent chapters (see especially chapter 5).

Ethics

The two levels of existence also imply two levels for dealing with ethical questions. God is the absolute standard for moral good and evil. Human beings have a conscience and reflect some knowledge of God's standards (Rom. 1:32). But our knowledge of moral standards is derivative. Moreover, when Adam first rebelled against God, his knowledge and the knowledge of his descendants were corrupted. We continue to have a sense of right and wrong, but it is now distorted, so that sometimes people call good evil and evil good (Isa. 5:20). When we truly understand God, we see that God's ways, his prescriptions for living, are both good and beautiful. He is beautiful in himself, and he displays his beauty in the wisdom and harmony of the instructions that he gives us about moral standards.

5. We could also mention angelic and demonic knowledge, but we leave them to one side; they are still forms of creaturely knowledge.

The Bible

We need also to reckon with the Bible as a prime source for knowledge. The Bible is the word of God, God's own speech. It was originally delivered to people over a long course of time in a series of sixty-six books.[6] God intends for us to trust what he says (Matt. 4:4). The Bible serves as our guide for life, for understanding God, and for understanding the world (Ps. 119:105). We can learn many truths about the world that are not directly stated in the Bible. But God intends for us to receive those truths in the context of what he says to us verbally in the Bible.[7]

Salvation

The Bible has a unique message of salvation. Ever since Adam violated God's commandment and fell into sin, the human race has been enmeshed in sin and alienated from God. Christ is the one way by which our sins may be forgiven and we may be reconciled to God. He is therefore the way back to gazing on the beauty of the Lord (Ps. 27:4). There is no other way: "No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6; see Acts 4:12). By trusting in Christ, we receive eternal life (John 3:16; 20:31). This unique role of Christ has implications for our understanding of reality. It is through Christ that we renew our knowledge of God, and through renewed knowledge of God that we are able to have renewal in our knowledge of everything else. We have renewed access to beauty—the beauty of God.

Building on that brief summary of the Bible's teaching, we now turn to consider further implications about the nature of reality.

6. The number of books depends on how we do the counting. Do we group together 1 and 2 Samuel and count them as one book, in the way that Jews traditionally did? Similarly with 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, and some other cases. See Westminster Confession of Faith 1.2.

7. For a detailed defense of this view of the Bible, see, for example, Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, ed. John J. Hughes, rev. and enhanced ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2023); John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2010).

Key Terms

coinherence
create
essence
ethics
levels of existence
person (of the Trinity)
subsistence
substance
ultimate reality
unchangeability

Study Questions

1. How does one summarize the doctrine of the Trinity?
2. How do we know that this doctrine is true?
3. What is coinherence?
4. What are the two levels of knowledge?
5. Can we fully understand the Trinity? Why or why not?

For Further Reading

Frame, John M. *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2015. Pp. 19–23.

Poythress, Vern S. *The Mystery of the Trinity: A Trinitarian Approach to the Attributes of God*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2020. Pp. 81–89.

Prayer

Our Lord, we pray that we would take to heart the basic teachings of the Bible, and grow in our skill in fitting all our knowledge into the framework that you have given us.

3

Learning the Nature of the World through Genesis 1

The most obvious way to learn the nature of the world is to read the Bible and see what it says about reality. As we have indicated, reading the Bible leads to the conclusion that there is one God who is three persons. And we learn that God has created the world, which is continuously dependent on him.

The Kinds of Creatures

The Bible has much to teach us about the second metaphysical level —creaturely existence—and Genesis 1–2 is a good starting point.

According to Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." After this initial act of creation,[1] God acted in complicated ways that brought about a creation order that is divided into three major spatial regions: the heaven above, the earth beneath, and the water under the earth (the seas; Ex. 20:4; see also Gen. 1:10).[2] Within each of these regions God creates creatures of many kinds: the plants (day 3), the

1. Vern S. Poythress, *Interpreting Eden: A Guide to Faithfully Reading and Understanding Genesis 1–3* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), app. A. Another interpretation considers Genesis 1:1 to be a summary of 1:2–31, rather than the initial act of creation.

2. Some interpreters have objected that this division is "primitive." But it is an obvious division in what we see as human observers. Vern S. Poythress, *Inerrancy and Worldview: Answering Modern Challenges to the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 34–40.

heavenly lights (day 4), the sea creatures (day 5), the flying creatures (day 5), the land animals (day 6), and finally mankind (day 6). (See table 3.1.)

Regions	Creatures
Heaven (air)	Flying creatures
Sea (water)	Sea creatures
Dry land	Land creatures, including mankind

Table 3.1. Kinds of Creatures

By following what God says in Genesis 1, we are doing Christian metaphysics. We are discovering the nature of the world. God tells us some of the things that exist. He tells us something about how they are structured. They exist and live in the three regions, and they interact with each other. For example, mankind and animals eat vegetation (Gen. 1:29–30). God does not tell us all he knows; he provides us with a synopsis —a basic beginning.

We are at the same time exploring the beauty of the world. It is beautiful that God has made order in the world, and has made creatures that fit harmoniously into the regions that God marked out, each with its distinctive flavor. For example, sea creatures live naturally in harmony with their watery environment. They flourish on the kind of food that is actually available in the sea. Many of them have means of moving around that work in a watery environment. Most of them get oxygen for survival from the surrounding water, rather than from the air. Complex harmonies inside each individual creature enable it to survive. Complex harmonies with the environment, that is, the sea and the other creatures in it, contribute to the life of each creature and the whole assembly of creatures. It is beautiful in its harmony.

This basic beginning contrasts with some non-Christian philosophical approaches to beauty and to metaphysics. One approach, monism, says that all is one. According to monism, the ordinary distinctions that we notice between different kinds of creatures, including the distinctions mentioned in Genesis 1, either are illusory or are somehow overcome or relativized by

the deeper "oneness" of all things. Monism denies that created things are truly distinct from one another. It also denies that God as Creator is distinct from his creatures. Monism is hostile to the beauty of God. If all is one, with no distinctions, there is no distinction between beauty and ugliness.

The descriptions in Genesis 1 also clash with philosophical empiricism, which claims that the world ultimately consists in sense experience: sight, hearing, taste, touch, and smell. In reality, God made things that are "out there." God's rule over his creation *precedes* the human sensations with which we interact with his world. Empiricism is also hostile to beauty because it implies that beauty is merely in the eye of the beholder. Allegedly, it is a secondary effect of a combination of sensations.

Unity and Diversity

We earlier observed that God as Trinity is one God and three persons. He has unity (one God) and diversity (three persons). The created world, on its own distinct level, also displays unity and diversity. It reflects the unity and diversity in God. The beauty of God is closely related to the harmony among the three persons. This harmony involves both unity and diversity. The persons are thoroughly in harmony because each person is fully God. At the same time, harmony is an expression of the relation between two persons; it is not a simple unity with no diversity. Beauty always involves both unity (the commonality in a harmony) and diversity (the distinction between two or more things between which the harmony exists).

Consider the trees. Each kind of tree, such as the oak tree, has the unity of being one kind of tree and the diversity of many trees belonging to that kind. Likewise for dogs. Each dog is distinct from every other dog, so that there is a diversity in dogs. Each dog belongs to the same single species, the species of dogs (*Canis familiaris*). So there is unity among all dogs as instances of one kind. Human beings exist as one kind, one race, descended from Adam. At the same time, they are diverse. Eve is distinct from Adam, and each of their descendants, beginning with Cain, is a distinct creature. Human beings exhibit diversity. (See fig. 3.1.)

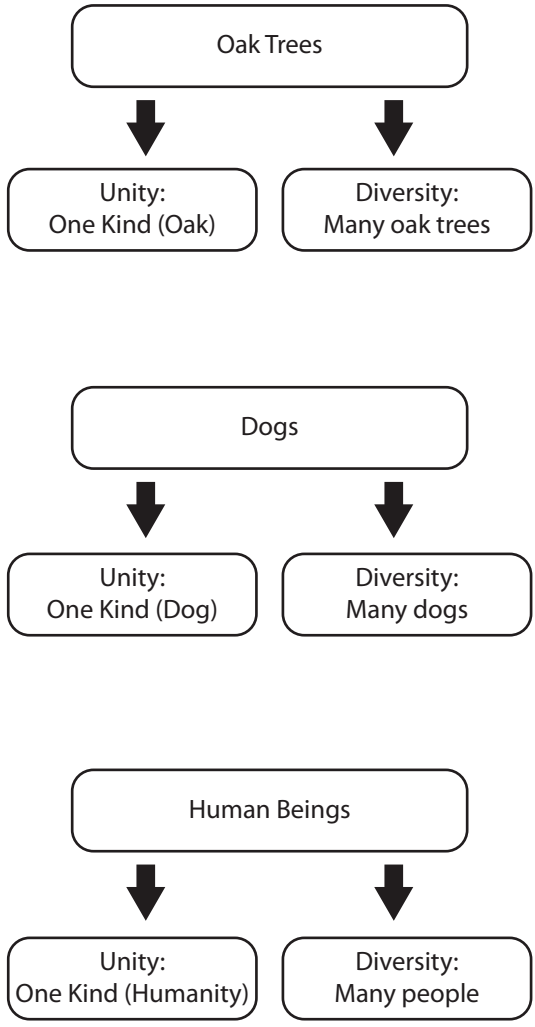

Fig. 3.1. Unity and Diversity in the Created Order

The unity and diversity express an order, a harmony, and a beauty.

Unity and diversity also come to expression in a broader way. Each of the three main spatial regions—heaven, earth, and water—is distinct from the two other regions. So there is diversity in the three main regions. At the same time, there is unity, because each region is one in which creatures may exist. The plants created on the third day have unity and

diversity. They are all plants, and have a unity in belonging together with all the other plants. At the same time, they belong to diverse kinds. The heavenly lights created on the fourth day also have unity and diversity. They are all lights. At the same time, they are lights of diverse kinds, with diverse functions and diverse motions in the heavens. Each has a distinct "glory" or beauty: "There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory" (1 Cor. 15:41).

The unity and diversity in the created order reflect on the level of creation the original unity and diversity in God himself.

Use of Ordinary Language

Genesis 1 uses ordinary language, not technical scientific terminology, to describe the world. God's use of ordinary language is appropriate, since he addresses people in all cultures, including those without a knowledge of modern sciences.[3] God's use of ordinary language neither affirms nor denies the possibility of technically analyzing creation. Because he is the omniscient Creator, God knows the entire history of the world beforehand. He knows all the scientific discoveries that human beings will make, under his providential guidance. But these are not the focus of Genesis 1.

Scientific discoveries do not negate the value of ordinary observation. This world of ordinary observation is important because God gives it to us in our human experience. We who are human are important in God's sight. God designed the world to display his own glory, but also for human benefit. His glory is beautiful *for us*. These benefits come to expression in ordinary human experience. The empiricists, then, were not wrong to notice and to emphasize sense experience, but they were wrong when they saw sense experience as a *foundation*, rather than one aspect of God's order of creation. Moreover, human experience is richer than sensation.

3. Vern S. Poythress, *Redeeming Science: A God-Centered Approach* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 92–98; Poythress, *Interpreting Eden*, chap. 5.

We hear sounds (auditory sense), but we also hear words and sentences and *people* who are communicating to us.

Consider another example. The description of sea creatures in Genesis 1:20–22 classifies all the sea creatures together. This classification differs from the modern biological classification. For example, in biology dolphins and whales, which are sea creatures, belong in the same taxonomic group with land mammals (*Mammalia*). Other sea creatures, such as crabs, lobsters, and shrimp, belong in the same group with land arthropods (*Arthropoda*). Most vertebrate fishes belong to the superclass *Osteichthyes* ("bony fish").

Does this mean that we should conclude that the biblical classification is "inaccurate"? No, it is just a different *kind* of classification. It is an ordinary-language classification for ordinary purposes, not a technical scientific classification for scientific purposes. Genesis 1 classifies animals by habitat. It does not enter into details, such as the fact that some creatures (for example, most amphibians) spend part of their life in the water and part on land.

Similarly, the flying creatures[4] in Genesis 1:20–22 are grouped together by the common feature of flying. Modern biological classification differentiates bats, as mammals (*Mammalia*), from birds (*Aves*), and birds are distinguished from flying insects (*Arthropoda*). (See fig. 3.2.)

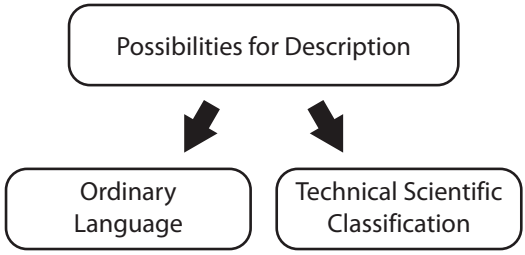

Fig. 3.2. Ordinary Language and Technical Scientific Classification

4. The ESV of Genesis 1:20 uses the word *birds*, but adds the note: "Or *flying things*; see Leviticus 11:19–20." Leviticus 11:13 uses the same broad Hebrew word (עוף) as Genesis 1:20 does in introducing the whole realm of flying things.

How did we come to know about God and the created order described in Genesis 1? We came to know by reading the Bible. Because the Bible is God's word, we can have confidence in what it says. We avoid the crisis of skepticism that arises in some contemporary circles. For example, a form of postmodern contextualism says that all knowledge is limited to a linguistic, social, and cultural *context*. So it concludes that no one can know for sure what might be true outside his own context; no one can know universal truth. Denying God as a transcendent source of knowledge leads to skepticism.[5]

God designed the whole Bible, not just Genesis 1, to play a fundamental role in our lives. It should have *primacy* in our thinking about the world, to be the authority *above* all other authorities. In a broader sense, then, the whole Bible—the entirety of its message—*is* the metaphysics of God for human beings. As many have observed, it does not mean that the Bible is a textbook for chemistry. It does mean that, in its generalities and in its details, the Bible functions as the foundational statement into which all our knowledge should be fitted. This foundational statement affirms, among other things, that we should admire the displays of beauty in the world.

> A doe let loose
> . . . bears *beautiful* fawns. (Gen. 49:21)
>
> His holy mountain, *beautiful* in elevation,
> is the joy of all the earth. (Ps. 48:1–2)
>
> He has made everything *beautiful* in its time. (Eccl. 3:11)
>
> The Lord once called you "a green olive tree, *beautiful* with good fruit." (Jer. 11:16)

5. Vern S. Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word: Language—A God-Centered Approach* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), apps. A, B.

Beauty is one aspect of the world, and an important one, both because it gives us joy and because it reflects the beauty of God.

The Bible is given to us for our nourishment (Ps. 19:7–11; 1 Peter 2:2). It is for our hope and encouragement:

> For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the *encouragement* of the Scriptures we might have *hope*. (Rom. 15:4)

The Bible is a practical book. But might there be a divinely created *deeper* and more fundamental metaphysical level, one that we could never access with our creaturely *knowledge*? Or could there be a deeper metaphysical level that we could eventually access by scientific discovery, but only after extensive toil and reflection? Would there be additional beauties to be discovered at this deeper level?

Remaining Mysteries

The answer that the Bible itself provides to those questions is complicated. There are several things to observe. First, by revealing himself, God has revealed the deepest beauty. His beauty is truly the deepest reality. We know that he is one God and three persons. We do not know God comprehensively, in the way that only he himself knows. But we do know him truly, through Christ (John 17:3). We must not underestimate that knowledge. We should not consider it inferior to or a mere addendum to details in scientific knowledge that human beings have uncovered in the course of history.

Second, God himself charges human beings with the task of filling the earth and subduing it (Gen. 1:28). God the Ruler of all things made human beings to be his subordinate rulers and to rule over the world around them. (See fig. 3.3.)

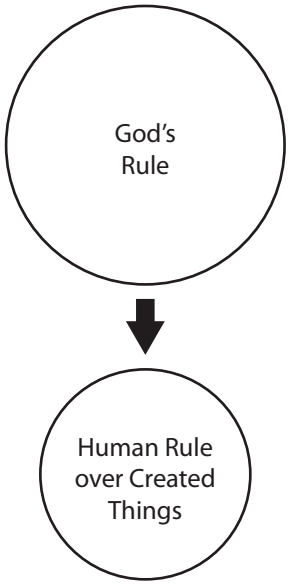

Fig. 3.3. God's Rule and Human Rule

Our rule includes an intellectual aspect. Adam engaged in naming the animals in Genesis 2:19–20. Thus, he began a system of intellectual classification. Human beings are supposed to learn not only from listening to what God says in the words he addresses to them, but also from studying the world that God has put around them. Genesis 1:28 commands, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." This mandate encompasses all the developments in the sciences, both now and in the future.[6] All that development fits within the fundamental picture of reality that God has given us in Genesis 1.

Third, the Bible indicates that many mysteries remain about the things that God has created:

> It is the glory of God to conceal things,
> but the glory of kings is to search things out. (Prov. 25:2)

6. Poythress, *Redeeming Science*, chap. 11.

God speaks to us to inform us about our role in his world. He also speaks to create new things, for example, "Let there be light" (Gen. 1:3). In this case, those particular words happen to be recorded in Genesis. But there are many *other* words that God utters in governing the world that are not recorded:

> He [God] sends out his *command* to the earth;
> his *word* runs swiftly.
> . . . . . .
> He sends out his *word*, and melts them [snow and ice];
> he makes his wind blow and the waters flow. (Ps. 147:15, 18)

God's unrecorded words remind us that mystery remains in our knowledge of him and in our knowledge of the world. Genesis 1:28–30 indicates that we are supposed to explore the world further. As an example, consider the exploration of astronomy. Over time, God gave human beings knowledge and skill to produce increasingly powerful and penetrating telescopes. Many a youngster has been attracted to astronomy by seeing the *beauty* of the heavens—not just the stars visible to the naked eye, but pictures from telescopes.[7] We now know that God made billions of galaxies, many of them with startling beauty. We can see them now in photographs made through telescopes. They were there all the time, but the Bible does not directly mention them because it focuses on things that people can experience without extra technology.

The importance of God's word in governing the world invites us to devote a separate chapter specifically to the word of God.

Key Terms

create	scientific language
diversity	skepticism
monism	unity
ordinary language	word of God

7. Explorers may delight themselves with a large compendium of astronomical photographs available at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, https://images.nasa.gov/.

Study Questions

1. What is distinctive about Genesis 1, in comparison with other philosophical views?
2. What is the importance of unity and diversity in the world?
3. What is the relation of scientific developments to the task that God assigned to mankind in Genesis 1:28–30?
4. What is the distinction between ordinary language and technical scientific language, and why is it important for interpreting Genesis 1 and interpreting science?
5. How does the Bible serve to overcome skepticism?
6. What role does God's speech have in instructing us and in ruling the world?

For Further Reading

Poythress, Vern S. *Interpreting Eden: A Guide to Faithfully Reading and Understanding Genesis 1–3*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019. Chap. 8.

———. *Redeeming Science: A God-Centered Approach*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006. Chaps. 1–3.

Prayer

Thank you, our God and Creator, that you have created so many specific kinds of things to enjoy. Thank you for unity and diversity. Thank you that you reflect who you are in what you have given us. Thank you for redeeming us in Christ so that we may grow to appreciate your goodness.

Part 2

Ways to Analyze the World

We analyze the world by using the theme of the word of God, the theme of the knowledge of God, the theme of the rule of God, the theme of the manifestation of God, and the theme of the attributes of God.

4

The Word of God

Passages such as Genesis 1 and Psalm 147:15, 18 teach the importance of God's speech. These and related passages show that God creates and governs the world by speaking.[1] In fact, God accomplishes his cosmic rule—his rule over all creation—through his spoken word. For example, we read that "he [the Son] upholds the universe by the *word* of his power" (Heb. 1:3), which emphasizes the importance of the *word*. Psalm 33:6 and Lamentations 3:37–38 confirm the centrality of God's speech:

> By the *word* of the Lord the heavens were made,
> and by the *breath of his mouth* all their host. (Ps. 33:6)

> Who has spoken and it came to pass,
> unless the Lord has *commanded* it?
> Is it not from the *mouth* of the Most High
> that good and bad come? (Lam. 3:37–38)

God affirms and employs many *secondary* causes, such as angels, human beings, and natural forces. But his word of command lies behind these secondary causes.

1. The Bible indicates that the word of God has several forms. (1) The most basic is the eternal Word, the second person of the Trinity: "In the beginning was the Word" (John 1:1). (2) God speaks words to create and govern the universe: "Let there be light" (Gen. 1:3). (3) God speaks to individuals: "the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision" (Gen. 15:1). (4) God speaks to prophets, who pass on his message orally (Isa. 6:9). (5) God commissions writers to write the books in the canon of Scripture (Rev. 1:11). See John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2010).

God's Speech Governing the World

In Genesis 1, God sovereignly commands the world, and it obeys; the world does not command God. Because God's words are more fundamental than the world, the word of God is foundational to and shapes the basic metaphysical structure of the world. God speaks to govern the world, and this spoken word is comprehensive in its scope. It specifies and determines everything in the world.[2]

> Remember this and stand firm,
> recall it to mind, you transgressors,
> remember the former things of old;
> for I am God, and there is no other;
> I am God, and there is none like me,
> *declaring* the end from the beginning
> and from ancient times things not yet done,
> *saying*, "My counsel shall stand,
> and I will accomplish all my purpose,"
> *calling* a bird of prey from the east,
> the man of my counsel from a far country.
> I have *spoken*, and I will bring it to pass;
> I have purposed, and I will do it. (Isa. 46:8–11)

> Who has *spoken* and it came to pass,
> unless the Lord has *commanded* it?
> Is it not from the *mouth* of the Most High
> that good and bad come? (Lam. 3:37–38)

> In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works *all things* according to the *counsel of his will*. (Eph. 1:11)

2. See Pierce Taylor Hibbs, *The Speaking Trinity & His Worded World: Why Language Is at the Center of Everything* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2018).

According to John 1:1–3, this governing word of God in turn has its foundation in the eternal Word, the Word who "was God":

> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. *All things were made through him*, and without him was not any thing made that was made.

The Trinitarian Foundation of the Word of God

The word of God has a close relationship to the Trinity. According to John 1:1, "the Word" exists eternally. Whose Word is he? The Word of God—specifically, God the Father. The implication is that God speaks the Word eternally. John 1 goes on to indicate that this eternal Word is the second person of the Trinity, the Son of God, who became incarnate (v. 14). From other passages we learn that the Spirit of God is like the breath of God, going with the word to bring it to its destination (Ezek. 37).[3] Thus, the eternal speech of God is Trinitarian in structure: the Father is the speaker; the Son is the Word; and the Holy Spirit is the breath. Each person of the Trinity is involved in this speech in his own distinctive way. (See fig. 4.1.)

When God speaks to create light (Gen. 1:3) or to govern the world, all three members of the Trinity are involved. This divine speaking is therefore Trinitarian in nature; it imitates the Trinitarian structure associated with the eternal Word. John 1:1–3 confirms the relationship between God's eternal speech and his speech to create the world by linking the eternal Word, mentioned in verse 1, to God's works of creation in verse 3: "All things were made through him [through the Word]." In God's work of creating the world, the differentiation between the Father and the Son is confirmed in 1 Corinthians 8:6. This verse indicates that all things are "from" the Father and "through" the Son. The words addressing the created

3. Vern S. Poythress, *Knowing and the Trinity: How Perspectives in Human Knowledge Imitate the Trinity* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2018), chap. 8.

world are from the Father, who utters them. They come through the Son, who is the Word uttered, in the sense of John 1:1.

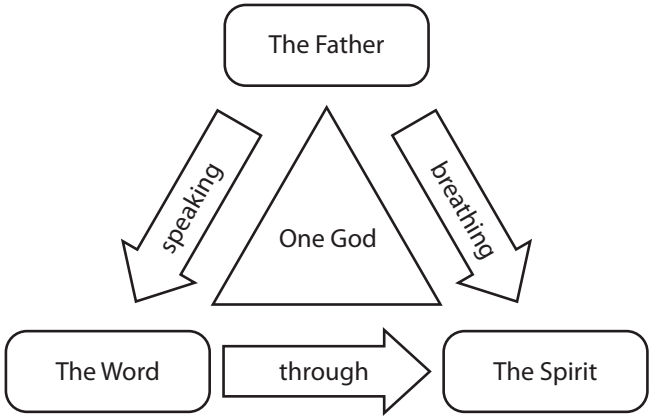

Fig. 4.1. God's Speech as Trinitarian

As a result, the words governing the world are spoken by the Father; the words come through the Word; and the words come by the breath of the Holy Spirit. The words have Trinitarian structure in this sense. (See table 4.1.)

Persons of the Trinity:	**the Father**	**the Son**	**the Holy Spirit**
Speaking eternally:	the speaker	the Word	the breath
Speaking to govern the world:	the speaker	particular words, specifying things about the world	the breath of God, carrying the word to its destination, and causing things in the world to conform to God's specification

Table 4.1. Speech Reflecting the Trinity

We can arrive at the same conclusion by a second route. God is present in his word to bring it to fruition:

> So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;
> it shall not return to me empty,
> but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
> and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it. (Isa. 55:11)

Because of the coinherence of the persons of the Trinity, all three persons are present in God's speech; God's speech directed toward the world is Trinitarian. Since God speaks in harmony with who he is, the speech will have the same fundamental differentiation of persons that we saw in the eternal word. God the Father speaks through the Son, the Word. The words spoken are borne along by the breath of the Holy Spirit.

The result is to create beauty in the world. As we have seen, beauty begins with God. He is intrinsically beautiful. His beauty is expressed in the harmony among the persons of the Trinity. This harmony comes to expression when God speaks eternally. The Father, the speaker, is in harmony with the speech, who is the Word (God the Son). He is also in harmony with the breath (the Spirit) whom he sends out. This same harmony exists when God speaks to the world, such as in the command, "Let there be light" (Gen. 1:3).

Trinitarian Speech

Let us now consider this particular case in which God speaks, the command "Let there be light" (Gen. 1:3). Similar commands are found in the rest of Genesis 1. Because God is Trinitarian and because when God acts all three members of the Trinity act, every word that God utters or command that he gives is Trinitarian. God's speech harmonizes with and reflects who he is. It follows, then, that the command "Let there be light" (v. 3) expresses the Trinitarian pattern. God the Father speaks the light into existence, according to his eternal plan, which includes

within it a plan for light. God the Son is manifested in the word that goes out. This word *distinguishes* the light as a distinct thing. We see the distinction vividly in Genesis 1:4, where the light is contrasted with the darkness.

The presence of the Holy Spirit is explicitly mentioned in Genesis 1:2. This verse suggests that the Holy Spirit is continually present throughout the works that God accomplishes in creation. And indeed, God's breathing life into Adam in Genesis 2:7 has thematic connections with Ezekiel 37, which represents the Spirit as like a life-giving breath. Through the Spirit, God gives life (Ps. 104:29–30), just as through the Spirit he raised Christ and gave him resurrection life (Rom. 8:11).

We may infer, then, that the Holy Spirit is immediately present in God's works of creation in Genesis 1 to apply the word spoken by the Father through the Son. For example, the Spirit brings light into existence and gives it its distinguishing and abiding properties in accordance with the Father's design communicated through the Son. Thus, the light displays the harmony among the persons of the Trinity. The light displays the intent of the speaker (the Father), the articulate expression of the words (corresponding to the Son), and the impress of the breath of God, bringing the light into existence. This harmony is beautiful.

The Trinitarian work of God continues as he governs the world by his providence. He is the primary cause, working together with secondary causes in the world. Every instance of light is a response to the word of the Father, through the Son, in the power and breath of the Holy Spirit. It is a beautiful harmony. At the same time, light is produced by secondary causes—the sun or a light bulb.

We cannot, of course, directly hear what God says in ruling over light, day by day. But we understand that God is at work through his word. To experience light is also to see the working out of God's specific plan for light. It is to see the effectiveness of God's spoken word. And it is to see the presence of God in the light.

All of God's works manifest three aspects of his sovereignty. They display God's plan, his power, and his presence. These three aspects correspond roughly to three attributes of God. The plan corresponds to God's

authority; the power to his control, his omnipotence; and his presence to his omnipresence.[4]

These three aspects belong to one God. They are not separable. In fact, they mutually imply one another and presuppose one another. They are in harmony. The effectiveness of God's word is the expression of his plan. God has the authority to speak, and his authority backs up his actions. God's plan and his authority become present to us in the things that he does. His presence reveals his authority and his power. When God is present, he is naturally present in his authority and his power. When God acts in power, he expresses his authority, and he is present in his works of power. In sum, all three aspects—authority, power, and presence—belong together. Where one is present, they are all there together.

Earlier we mentioned the doctrine of *coinherence*. The persons of the Trinity "coinhere," which means that each person indwells the others (John 10:38; 14:9–11; 17:21). This coinherence is reflected in a derivative kind of "indwelling" of God in his word. The plan indwells the words, which indwell the breath sending the words. This indwelling is also reflected in a kind of indwelling of the three attributes of God: authority, power, and presence. These three attributes reflect the mystery of the three persons of the Trinity. The Father is naturally associated with the authority of God. The Son, who executes the plan of the Father, is naturally associated with the power of God. And the Spirit, as the person immediately present in creation (Gen. 1:2), is naturally associated with the presence of God. This triad, consisting of authority, power, and presence, has been explained and used for decades by John Frame.[5] The three aspects are three aspects of God's *lordship*, which he displays in his relation to the world. Frame's preferred label for the second aspect is *control* rather than *power*. (See fig. 4.2.)

4. Note the use of the triad of authority, control, and presence as a triad of lordship in John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1987); John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2000). I am applying Frame's triad to the specific case of light.

5. John M. Frame, "A Primer on Perspectivalism (Revised 2008)," https://frame-poythress.org/a-primer-on-perspectivalism-revised-2008/; Poythress, *Knowing and the Trinity*, chap. 14.

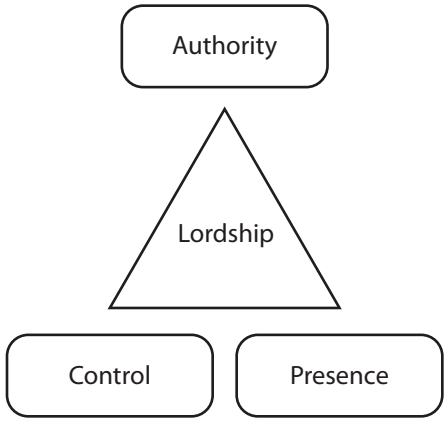

Fig 4.2. Three Aspects in God's Lordship

As a result, God in his actions in the world expresses himself with Trinitarian unity and diversity. This expression is beautiful and harmonious.

We must be careful here. We should not oversimplify. Each person of the Trinity has all the attributes of God. The Father is God. The Father is authoritative, omnipotent, and omnipresent. Likewise, the Son is authoritative, omnipotent, and omnipresent. The Holy Spirit is authoritative, omnipotent, and omnipresent. So if we associate one attribute with a particular person of the Trinity, it is by way of *preeminence*, not by exclusion.[6] The Father preeminently represents the authority of God. But the Son and the Spirit, as God, also have the same authority. Similarly, the Son preeminently represents the power of God. But the Father and the Spirit have the same power. To summarize some of the ways in which the Trinity is reflected in God's acts, we may add another row to the earlier table 4.1. (See table 4.2.)

6. John Owen states: "When I assign anything as *peculiar* wherein we distinctly hold communion with any person [of the Trinity], I do not exclude the other persons from communion with the soul in the very same thing. Only this, I say, *principally*, in such a way, and by the way of eminency." John Owen, *Communion with the Triune God*, ed. Kelly M. Kapic and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 105 (italics original).

Persons of the Trinity:	the Father	the Son	the Holy Spirit
Speaking:	the speaker	the Word	the breath
Lordship:	authority	control	presence

Table 4.2. Add a Triad for Aspects of God's Lordship

So we can see that light manifests God's orderly plan. Light illuminates things and is present to our eyes. These aspects of light reflect God's nature in our creaturely experience. They reflect his authority, his control, and his presence. All three aspects are present together. We can say that they indwell one another.

The Pattern of Identity, Difference, and Context

We may note briefly a further beautiful ordering of light, an ordering that has Trinitarian roots.[7] First, when God created light in Genesis 1:3, he created it with its own distinctive properties. Light contrasts with "darkness" (Gen. 1:4) and always everywhere has the same properties. This *unity* of light's properties—its *identity*—reflects at a creaturely level the unity and identity of God, who is always and everywhere the same.

Second, God designed and defined different kinds of lights, as we see vividly in the works of the fourth day of creation (Gen. 1:14–19). God created "the greater light" (the sun), "the lesser light" (the moon), and the stars (v. 16). Thus, there is *diversity* among the distinct light-giving bodies, as confirmed in 1 Corinthians 15:41: "There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory." This diversity in creation reflects an original pattern—an archetype. There is an inner diversity in God: he is Trinitarian —Father, Son, and Spirit. This diversity finds special expression in the

7. Poythress, *Knowing and the Trinity*, app. F; Vern S. Poythress, "Reforming Ontology and Logic in the Light of the Trinity: An Application of Van Til's Idea of Analogy," *Westminster Theological Journal* 57, no. 1 (Spring 1995): 187–219.

Son, who is the Word. As the Word, he creatively defines the ways that different things *vary* from one another and calls them to be what they are.

Third, God sovereignly defines the relationship of each thing in the universe to all other things; he defines each thing's *context*. Light, for example, functions in the context of all other created things as their illuminator.[8]

In sum, God specified three mutually related aspects when he created all things: (1) the unity and identity of each thing; (2) the diversity of things; and (3) their context, existence, and function in relation to other things —to God himself and to the things that God has made. The conventional terminology for talking about these three aspects is given by Kenneth L. Pike: (1) *contrast* (including unique identity), (2) *variation* (diversity), and (3) *distribution* (how each created thing fits into an environment —thus, context).[9] This triad can be applied not only to solid objects in the world, but to linguistic and social units. A similar thematization of unity, movement, and relation can be found in some of the discussions of "Trinitarian ontology."[10] These three aspects—contrast, variation, and distribution—belong together. We cannot have any one of them without having the others in the background. (See fig. 4.3.)

These three aspects reflect the three persons of the Trinity.[11] The unity of a created thing, which also implies its *contrast* with other created things, is a reflection of the unity of God, which is preeminently expressed in the

8. Vern S. Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word: Language—A God-Centered Approach* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 154–59; Pierce Taylor Hibbs, *The Trinity, Language, and Human Behavior: A Reformed Exposition of the Language Theory of Kenneth L. Pike* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2018), chap. 4; Hibbs, *Speaking Trinity*, 50–54.

9. Kenneth L. Pike, *Linguistic Concepts: An Introduction to Tagmemics* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), pt. 2. It should be noted that Pike acknowledges a Trinitarian original for this threefold pattern: Hibbs, *The Trinity, Language, and Human Behavior*; Vern S. Poythress, "Multiperspectivalism and the Reformed Faith," in *Speaking the Truth in Love: The Theology of John M. Frame*, ed. John J. Hughes (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009), 173–200, also https://frame-poythress.org/multiperspectivalism-and-the-reformed-faith/; Poythress, "Reforming Ontology and Logic in the Light of the Trinity."

10. Peter Leithart, "Trinitarian Ontology," Theopolis Institute, July 29, 2019, https://theopolisinstitute.com/leithart_post/trinitarian-ontology/; Giulio Maspero, "Life as Relation: Classical Metaphysics and Trinitarian Ontology," *Theological Research* 2, no. 1 (2014): 31–52; Jesmond Micallef, Giulio Maspero, and Piero Coda, *Trinitarian Ontology: The Concept of the Person for John D. Zizioulas* (Toulouse, France: Domuni, 2020).

11. Poythress, "Reforming Ontology and Logic in the Light of the Trinity"; Poythress, *Knowing and the Trinity*, app. F.

person of the Father. The *variations* in created things preeminently reflect God the Son, who as the Word expresses distinctions. The *distribution* in created things is an expression of their relation to other things in the environment. This relationality in things preeminently reflects the Holy Spirit, whose presence in the world expresses the relation of the world to God. We may add this triad of contrast, variation, and distribution to the earlier list of triads that reflect the Trinity. (See table 4.3.)

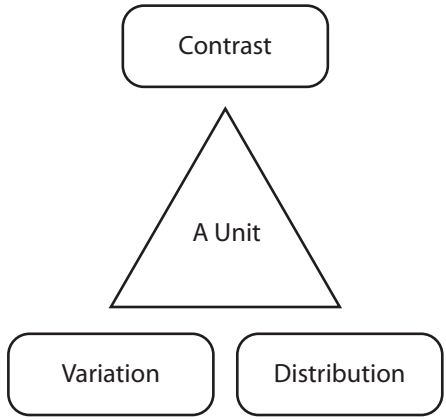

Fig. 4.3. Contrast, Variation, and Distribution

Persons of the Trinity:	the Father	the Son	the Holy Spirit
Speaking:	the speaker	the Word	the breath
Lordship:	authority	control	presence
Aspects of a Unit:	contrast	variation	distribution

Table 4.3. Add a Triad for Aspects of a Unit

We saw a related triad of perspectives earlier, in discussing the particle, wave, and field perspectives on a grape (chapter 1).[12] The particle perspective naturally focuses on the contrastive aspect of a given thing; the

12. On the relation of particle, wave, and field to contrast, variation, and distribution,

wave perspective focuses on variation; and the field perspective focuses on distribution. (See fig. 4.4.)

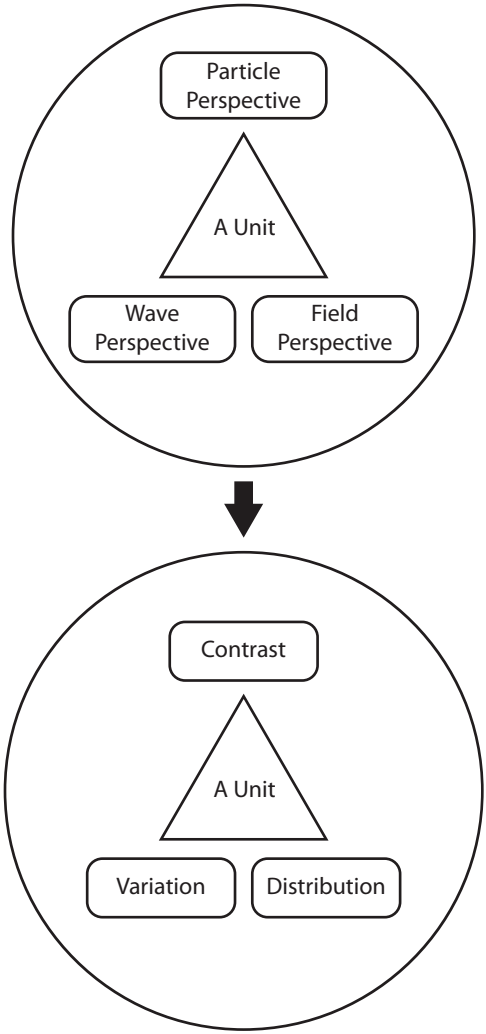

Fig. 4.4. Particle, Wave, and Field

see Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word*, 154–55; Poythress, *Knowing and the Trinity*, apps. D, F.

We may add the triad consisting in the particle perspective, the wave perspective, and the field perspective. (See table 4.4.)

Persons of the Trinity:	**the Father**	**the Son**	**the Holy Spirit**
Speaking:	the speaker	the Word	the breath
Lordship:	authority	control	presence
Aspects of a Unit:	contrast	variation	distribution
Particle-Wave-Field:	particle perspective	wave perspective	field perspective

Table 4.4. Add a Triad for Particle, Wave, and Field

A Reflection of Coinherence in Pike's Aspects

As before, the coinherence of the persons of the Trinity is reflected in the derivative indwelling of the aspects of "meaning" in created things. As an example, let us consider a single grape. This grape has a unity through time, which also means that there will be variation over time concerning details about it—it may grow larger or smaller; its skin may change color or shrivel; its sugar content may vary. Despite this variation over time, our grape remains identifiable as the *same* grape and not another; variation presupposes a *unity* in the thing that varies. You can imagine someone saying, "Look, our grape is larger today, and its skin is more of a purple color." That person would be talking about variation over time in the same grape. Conversely, the unity of a thing over time leads to our being aware that there is variation over time. The unity of a thing cannot be understood apart from our knowledge of its variation within itself (e.g., our grape's color changes; it grows larger).

Finally, our grape does not exist apart from all other things; it exists in a context—the context of other grapes. The use of the idea of context presupposes the unity of the grape; it presupposes that our grape can be distinguished from other grapes. We can say, for example, "Look, our grape is rounder than its neighbors and a darker shade of red." Moreover,

just as the identity of our grape can vary over time, so can its context. At one point, our grape is one grape within a larger cluster that is attached to a vine. Then the cluster is cut off and is no longer attached. And then our grape can be plucked and isolated from its cluster.

We may state these truths in another way. Each created thing has meaning assigned to it according to God's plan. This meaning includes contrast (identity), variation, and distribution (context). These three aspects of a thing's meaning belong together; to separate them would change the meaning of the thing in question from what God intended to something else. These three aspects coinhere in each thing's meaning and so reflect the original coinherence of their Creator: the three persons of the Trinity. This harmonious coinherence is beautiful. God displays his beauty.

A Mistake in Plato and Aristotle

We may contrast this Trinitarian understanding of meaning with what happens in Plato and Aristotle. Plato's forms, Aristotle's categories, and Aristotle's essences are conceived of as having identity, but no variation or distribution. Plato subordinates the diversity and context of things in the world to the unity of their respective forms—for example, "treeness" or "grapeness."[13] In contrast to Plato, Aristotle locates forms not in an abstract world of forms, but in *substances*—concrete things such as specific trees or specific grapes. At the same time, Aristotle subordinates the diversity and context of things in the world to the unity of their respective essences. In both Plato and Aristotle, contextual relations are an afterthought.[14] Both systems address the relationship of general classes (forms) to particular things (embodiments of the forms). But in both cases the form is

13. Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word*, app. D.

14. Aristotle does acknowledge relations using his category "relative" (category iv); but it is subordinate to the category "substance" (category i) in which a relative has to inhere. Other kinds of relations are implicit in the categories, such as "where" (category v), "when" (category vi), "having" (category viii), "acting upon" (category ix), and "a being affected" (category x). See Christopher Shields, "Aristotle," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Fall 2020), § 6; Vern S. Poythress, *The Mystery of the Trinity: A Trinitarian Approach to the Attributes of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2020), chap. 21.

more fundamental than the thing itself. According to Plato and Aristotle, individual things exist because the forms are embodied in matter, matter that in itself is not knowable. This approach contrasts with a Christian Trinitarian approach. We affirm that the particulars are knowable and that the unity of a general class (e.g., grapes) has no innate priority to the diversity of its particular instances (e.g., "our grape" above, other grapes in that grape's cluster). On the level of the reality of God, the unity of God is not "prior" to the diversity of persons in God. Both are always there. Unity and diversity are in harmony—first of all in God, but then also in a created thing such as a grape.

An Illustration Using an Analogy

We may further illustrate the difference between Plato's and Aristotle's view on the one hand, and a biblically based view on the other hand. Consider the word *light*. God used the word in Genesis 1:3 to specify what he brought into existence. This word has a range of meaning (diversity, variation). It can designate created, visible light, as it does in verse 3. But it may also designate God: "God is *light*, and in him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). The two "lights" are not the same. The Creator (God as light) is not the creature (created light that we see). At the same time, the two are analogous. If they were not analogous in some way, there would be no point in using the same word in both contexts. The word and its meaning have a *unity* that contrasts with other words and their meanings. There is also *variation* in meaning between the two uses of *light*, and we discern these variations (particular meanings) by paying attention to the *context* (distribution) in which the word is used.

Aristotle recognized the existence of analogical uses of language, but he wanted to reduce such uses to a more fundamental level, that of literal use. If we try to follow a similar path, we might postulate that the use of *light* for created light is the "literal" use. The use of *light* with respect to God, however, cannot be reduced to such a literal use, since God is not a creature. There remains mystery. In addition, because God exists prior to his creatures, the fact that God is light (1 John 1:5) is in the end more

fundamental than the reality of created light. It is not possible to dissolve this analogy in a way that eliminates mystery.

It may seem natural to many people to start with the use of *light* in the sense of "created light." It might be argued that what is visible and more immediately accessible is the starting point for knowing meaning in language. We start by using words such as *light* to label visible things, and then as language develops, we extend the meaning metaphorically. We say, for example, that "God is light" (1 John 1:5).

This reasoning is appealing because it seems to represent the natural way that we learn. But it is easy, in our fallen situation, to bring in an unjustified assumption. We may falsely assume that God is not present in the world. So we may falsely assume that created light is "merely" light, that its meaning has nothing initially to do with God, and that only later does human creativity make it become a symbol for God.

But God made the light! He made it to display his glory, and he is present in it—though not in a manner that abolishes the Creator-creature distinction, the distinction between himself and the light that he has created. There is no such thing as light that does *not* display the presence of the Creator. But if so, even our very first experiences with light include an encounter with our Creator. Created light is not "merely" created light, as though we could completely ignore how the light testifies to and reminds us of our Creator. The trouble is, we *do* forget. But that is an aspect of our fleeing God and trying to forget our responsibility and the call to be thankful and to worship him (Rom. 1:18–23).

We infer, then, that even our first experiences of light, as well as all our experiences after that, include an experience of the presence of God. We know God as the uncreated light who gives us visible, created light.

Light is only one illustration of what is involved in the meanings of words. We cannot eliminate God from meaning.[15] The history of Western philosophy, with few exceptions, includes the starting assumption that we can just have meanings at first, independent of the mystery of God's presence. And then later on, depending on which philosopher we read,

15. Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word*, esp. chaps. 2–10, 33.

the philosopher may at some point bring in a discussion of God. He may or may not think that there is a God, but the God he denies or the God he seeks has already been turned into a God at a distance, a God who at the start was not acknowledged as firmly displaying his character in what he made (Rom. 1:18–23).

Let us praise God that he has given us a world and languages and thought in which he displays his greatness. He has given us light. He has given us grapes. He displays his own glory in the things that he has made.

Key Terms

Aristotle
authority
breath
coinherence
context
contrast
control
distribution
field perspective
harmony
identity
light
particle perspective
Pike, Kenneth L.
Plato
presence
speaker
speech
Trinity
variation
wave perspective
word of God

Study Questions

1. What is the Trinitarian structure belonging to God's speech governing the world?
2. What is the Trinitarian structure of God's eternal speech?
3. What are the three aspects of lordship, as explained by John Frame? In what way do these three help us to understand God's ways with the world?
4. What triad does Kenneth Pike use in discussing the unity and diversity of things? How does this triad display beauty?
5. What does it look like to apply Pike's triad of contrast, variation,

and distribution to analyzing a particular created thing such as a grape? (Pick something *other than* a grape to do the application.)

For Further Reading

Pike, Kenneth L. *Linguistic Concepts: An Introduction to Tagmemics* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), chaps. 3–8.

Poythress, Vern S. *Knowing and the Trinity: How Perspectives in Human Knowledge Imitate the Trinity* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2018), chap. 7, apps. D, F.

Prayer

Thank you, our Father and Governor of the universe, for speaking to govern the world, and for putting many beauties in the world. Open our eyes to see your glory in your speaking.

5

The Knowledge of God

We may take a second path for developing a Christian view of beauty by considering the knowledge of God.

God's Comprehensive Knowledge

God knows everything; he plans everything; and his knowledge exists prior to the world itself. God's knowledge is chronologically prior because he knows everything from before the foundation of the world (Isa. 46:9–10). And God's knowledge is "ontologically" prior, we might say, because his knowledge leads to the existence of the world, rather than being causally dependent on the world—it is not as though he had to inform himself, based on looking out at a world about which he allegedly had imperfect knowledge.

Because we are human beings and not God, we do not know everything that God knows, nor do we know the world and the things in it in the same way that God does. We are made in God's image, and his knowledge is the standard for our knowledge.

So what is God's knowledge like? We can know something about God because he has told us. He has told us that he is one God, which means that his knowledge is unified. He has also told us that he is three persons. In particular, Matthew 11:27 records Christ as asserting:

> All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

The Father knows the Son. This knowledge is clearly foundational for any kind of knowledge about which we might reflect. This divine knowledge is eternal knowledge. The Father knows the Son eternally. Since the Son is God, in knowing the Son the Father knows all things. Likewise, the Son knows all things in knowing the Father. The knowledge mentioned in this verse is not a mere knowledge of facts. God does know all facts. But in this verse, his knowledge is personal knowledge. The Father knows *the Son*, not simply facts about the Son.

Matthew 11:27 makes no explicit mention of the Holy Spirit. But by the doctrine of coinherence, we infer that the Holy Spirit is present and active in divine knowledge. This presence is confirmed by his presence in all human knowledge: "But it is the spirit in man, the *breath* of the Almighty, that makes him understand" (Job 32:8). We may also see the Spirit's participation in divine knowledge more directly, in 1 Corinthians 2:10: "For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God." This language about searching affirms that the knowledge that the Holy Spirit possesses is personal knowledge that is comprehensive. It includes all "the depths of God." In the context of 1 Corinthians 2, the Spirit's comprehensive knowledge offers the secure basis for the derivative knowledge of divine things that is given to Paul and his fellow proclaimers of the gospel (vv. 12–13). The Spirit is also necessary for ordinary Christians to have spiritual knowledge (vv. 14–16).

There is a mysterious aspect to the interpersonal knowledge that each person of the Trinity has of the other two persons. The Father, in knowing the Son (Matt. 11:27), knows *personally*. In knowing, he knows *as the Father*, as a distinct person. The object of his knowledge is the Son. There is a personal differentiation in the knowledge. At the same time, the knowledge is unified, because there is only one God, who knows all things. Unity in knowledge is expressed by the fact that the Father knows one unified person, namely, the Son. Differentiation is expressed in the personal difference between the Father's person and his knowledge of the Son, on the one hand, and the Son's person and his knowledge of the Father, on the other. These are explicitly differentiated in Matthew 11:27. Likewise, the Spirit is explicitly differentiated from the "depths of God"

by the key clause in 1 Corinthians 2:10. It informs us that he "searches" the depths of God.

Three Aspects in God's Knowledge

We may distinguish three aspects in God's knowledge. First, there is *unity* in knowledge, corresponding to the unity of God, who is one God. Unity is also expressed in the unity of a single distinct person, such as the person of the Father. Second, there is *diversity* of knowledge, corresponding to the distinction between the Son and the Father, and corresponding to the distinction between the Son and the Spirit. Third, there is a *Trinitarian context* of all knowledge. We might say that the mode in which the Father knows the Son and the Son knows the Father is the mode of the context of the Holy Spirit, who searches the depths of God. The knowledge that the Father has of the Son is always and in all ways in relation to the third person. When we affirm that the Father knows the Son, in this description the third person, the Spirit, is neither the knower (the Father) nor the known (the Son), but is present in and with them. In the mystery of an eternal activity, he actively searches. It is important to affirm that the Holy Spirit is a distinct person. He is not an impersonal process; he is intimately involved in the entire activity of divine knowing, as he "searches everything, even the depths of God" (1 Cor. 2:10). Similarly, all three persons are present and are involved when any one of the divine persons knows another of the divine persons.

We see here three aspects of knowledge. These three are similar to what we found in the preceding chapter, when we looked at the word of God. The three aspects are *unity*, *diversity*, and *context*. Or, to change the terms, we have *contrast* (related to unity), *variation* (related to diversity), and *distribution* (related to context). As we saw in the preceding chapter, these three aspects are coinherent. We cannot have one without the others. If we have one aspect, we find in examining this aspect more closely that the other two aspects are also present. Each aspect is not separable from the two others.

We may also appeal to another truth about God. Classical formulations about the doctrine of God have said that God is "simple." The word

simple in this context has a special meaning. It does not mean that God is easy to understand. It means that he is not composed of parts. The three persons of the Trinity are not "parts" of God. Rather, each is fully God. We can *distinguish* the persons of the Trinity from one another, but we cannot *separate* them, as if we could imagine one person in isolation from the other two. Similarly, the attributes of God, such as his wisdom, his power, and his holiness, are not separable. God's attributes presuppose and imply one another; they are correlative; we cannot have one attribute without having all of them.

We may further reflect on an implication of the doctrine of divine simplicity, or else the doctrine of coinherence of the persons of the Trinity. These two doctrines—simplicity and coinherence—are correlative. Both affirm the unity of God. This unity is more than an externally imposed or superficial unity. No knowledge by any of the persons of the Trinity can be separated from the knowledge of the other persons. As an inference from simplicity, we conclude that the principle of unity applies not only to the knowledge of God as a holistic knowledge of all things, but to particular things that God knows. His knowledge of particular facts is not separable into pieces.

God's Knowledge of the Word Tongue

What do we have in mind? God knows the Son. That is holistic. God also knows about every detail of the life of David: "You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar" (Ps. 139:2). He knows each word that David will speak: "Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O Lord, you *know* it altogether" (v. 4). One such word is *tongue*, in this very verse.[1] Let us take this word as an example.

As an inference from simplicity, God's knowledge is not separable into pieces. In particular, God's knowledge of the word *tongue* is not separable from the Father's knowing the Son. We conclude that God's knowledge of

1. Technically, the English expression "on my tongue" translates one Hebrew word, composed of three morphemes. God also knows the Hebrew morpheme for *tongue*.

tongue has the fundamental features that belong to Trinitarian knowledge. It is unified knowledge. There is diversity and distinction in knowledge. The Father knows the word *tongue* distinctively. The Son knows the word *tongue* distinctively, in a mode distinct from the Father. Moreover, the distinctions extend, as it were, "inside" the word *tongue*. David's employment in Psalm 139:4 is only one instance. The word can be used not only to designate the physical organ inside the mouth (Job 41:1), but in more extended ways. In Psalm 139:4, David considers the role of the tongue and its movements in producing words that come from his mouth. The words are not material objects that are physically in or on his tongue, but the word *tongue* metonymically[2] represents what David himself is just about to say, using his tongue and other organs. There are *distinctive* uses of the word *tongue*; we may say that they are *variations* in the use of the word *tongue*. At the same time, it is the same word in all these uses. David's use in verse 4 appears in the context of these other uses, and in the context of the other verses in Psalm 139.

The archetypal context for all of the Father's knowledge is the context of the Holy Spirit; the Spirit is searching the depths of God. But by the doctrine of simplicity, this context is not separable from the context of God's knowledge of the word *tongue* in Psalm 139:4. And the context includes God's knowledge of *other* instances of the same word, and of other words that God through David has assembled around verse 4.

In sum, we have arrived at a confirmation of what we earlier observed by starting with the reality of God's speaking. God's speaking is a Trinitarian speaking, and leads naturally to our becoming aware of Trinitarian structure that forms the world that he has created. Likewise, reflection on the Trinitarian structure of God's knowledge leads to our becoming aware of the Trinitarian structure of his knowledge of particular items of knowledge, whether those items are words such as *tongue* or things in the world—for example, he knows when a sparrow falls to the ground (Matt. 10:29).

2. *Metonymy* is "a figure of speech consisting of the use of the name of one thing for that of another of which it is an attribute or with which it is associated." Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v. "metonymy," accessed December 21, 2022, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/metonymy.

God's knowledge of himself is harmonious, in unity and diversity. It is beautiful. God's knowledge of the word *tongue* is also harmonious, in unity and diversity. It is beautiful. Praise the Lord!

Human Knowledge as Reflective

As previously stated, human beings are made in God's image. One implication of this is that human knowledge reflects God's knowledge, albeit on a creaturely level. And this implies, for example, that our knowledge of the word *tongue* is characterized by unity, diversity, and context.

This unity-in-diversity affects our understanding of the *limits* of human knowledge in more ways than one. To begin with, we can see implications regarding how we understand unity and diversity in human knowing. There is unity, or we might say commonality, in how all human beings with a knowledge of English understand the word *tongue*. But there is also diversity, because each human knower brings his unique background to the act of knowing. Each human being in his uniqueness offers a unique context for the knowledge that he has. Each human being has his own unique physical tongue, which is distinct from everyone else's tongue. As a result of commonality, any one human being can potentially sum up the knowledge possessed by everyone else on a given topic or thing, something that we find done in unabridged dictionaries and in major encyclopedias. As a result of diversity, such a summary can never be exhaustive in detail. It can never be absolutely masterful, in the way that God's knowledge is.

We may also observe that there is both unity and diversity when we consider human knowledge in comparison with God's knowledge. Genuine human knowledge always harmonizes with divine knowledge, which is its standard. That harmony affirms the unity of knowledge. The distinction between God and human beings implies diversity of knowledge. The result again is that human knowledge is not masterfully complete.

There is a beauty in human knowledge. Human knowledge that is genuine knowledge is always in harmony with God's knowledge. This harmony is already a beauty belonging to our knowledge. Our knowledge, as including unity and diversity, has unity and diversity in harmony. It is beautiful.

The Deficiencies of Platonic and Aristotelian Views of Knowledge

We may now observe a deficiency in Platonic and Aristotelian views of knowledge. In both philosophies, knowledge is knowledge of universals, not particulars. It is knowledge of the *form* of the thing—to use the technical term that Plato and Aristotle employ. According to these philosophies, we might know what a human being is ("a rational animal"). But we cannot know an individual human being in his uniqueness, because that uniqueness is not captured and fully displayed by the knowable form.

In a certain respect, these philosophies prioritize the unity of knowledge over its diversity. For them, this unity is what makes a thing knowable. But a Trinitarian approach to knowledge does not prioritize its unity; unity of knowledge is always a unity-in-diversity.

One may wonder whether that sort of philosophical defect leads to epistemological disappointment. Prioritizing the unity of knowledge tempts us to think that we can achieve a *masterful* knowledge of things. When we become disappointed because that turns out not to be the case, our quest for knowledge may move to the opposite extreme: skepticism, in which we think that we cannot know truth at all because we cannot know it masterfully.

Key Terms

coinherence
context
contrast
distribution
diversity
harmony
simple
unity
variation

Study Questions

1. How are the persons of the Trinity involved distinctively in divine knowledge?

2. How do unity and diversity belong to divine knowledge?
3. Can you illustrate unity and diversity in knowledge, using another word besides *tongue* (discussed above)?
4. How do Plato and Aristotle show deficiency in their views of knowledge?

For Further Reading

Frame, John M. *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2015. Pp. 63–77.

Prayer

We praise you, God our Father, that your knowledge is deep and comprehensive. Thank you for giving us knowledge that is real. Thank you that your beauty is displayed in your knowledge.

6

The Rule of God

In this chapter, we will consider how God's *rule* over the world (his lordship) reveals more about the Trinity and about the nature of the world.

Relations to the Themes of God's Speech and His Knowledge

The theme of God's rule is closely related to the themes in the preceding two chapters: the theme of God's speech and the theme of God's knowledge. God rules the world by speaking: "he [the Son] upholds the universe by the *word* of his power" (Heb. 1:3). Thus, the theme of ruling can be used to look at the same realities that we explored in discussing the speech of God. God rules the world on the basis of his knowledge of his plan and his knowledge of the world. So in looking at God's knowledge, we have also indirectly touched on the meaning of God's rule over the world.

Comprehensive Rule

God's rule over the world is comprehensive. Earlier we saw that God's plan encompasses all events in history and that his plan is expressed in his speech. God's comprehensive rule encompasses not only the large-scale purposes in history, but every little event.

> The lot is cast into the lap,
> but its every decision is from the Lord. (Prov. 16:33)

> Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows. (Matt. 10:29–31)

The Bible affirms the universality of God's control over the world and all the events in it:[1]

> The LORD has established his throne in the heavens,
> and his kingdom rules over *all*. (Ps. 103:19)

> In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works *all things* according to the counsel of his will. (Eph. 1:11)

God is completely good, and all his acts are morally good. His governance of sinful acts of human beings, such as the crucifixion of Christ, takes place for his own good purposes of salvation (Acts 2:23; 4:25–28). Within God's comprehensive plan, human beings make free choices and are morally responsible. There is much that is mysterious here. We must leave a fuller discussion to other books.

Trinitarian Rule

God's rule is Trinitarian. Because all of God's works are the works of the one true God, they are the works of all three persons of the Trinity. Yet we can still see a differentiation. God the Father is preeminent in *planning* the works. God the Son is preeminent in the *execution* or *accomplishment* of the works. We can see this principle especially illustrated by the Son's role in salvation. The Father *sent* the Son into the world (John 10:36;

1. For a detailed exposition, see Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1932), chaps. 4–5; John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2000), chap. 14. On the issue of human responsibility and the problem of evil, see chaps. 8–9.

Gal. 4:4; 1 John 4:10, 14). God the Holy Spirit is preeminent in *application*—carrying out the implications of the works in intimate contact with their objects.[2] (See fig. 6.1.)

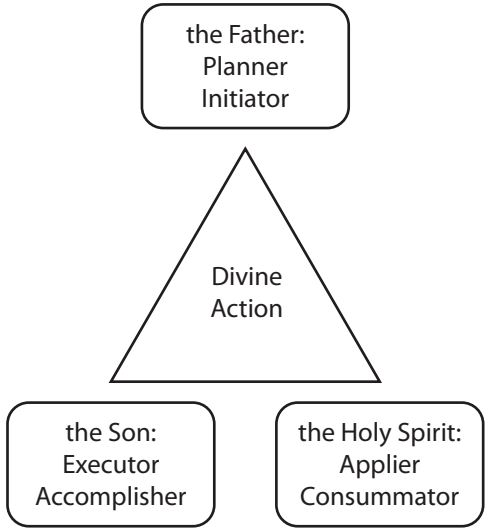

Fig. 6.1. Trinitarian Action

Thus, every created thing and every event involving created things is a product of Trinitarian action. This action is the action of the one God. It is also differentiated action, in which each person is a distinct participant with a distinct role. (See fig. 6.2.)

A grape—or any other created thing—is a *planned* thing, according to the purposes of God the Father. A grape is a *crafted* thing, according to the execution of God's plan through God the Son. A grape is a *continual recipient* of the immediate work of God, through God the Holy Spirit. (See fig. 6.3.)

We can accordingly add a line to our table, to indicate the interaction of planning, execution, and application. (See table 6.1.)

2. Vern S. Poythress, *Knowing and the Trinity: How Perspectives in Human Knowledge Imitate the Trinity* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2018), 83–90.

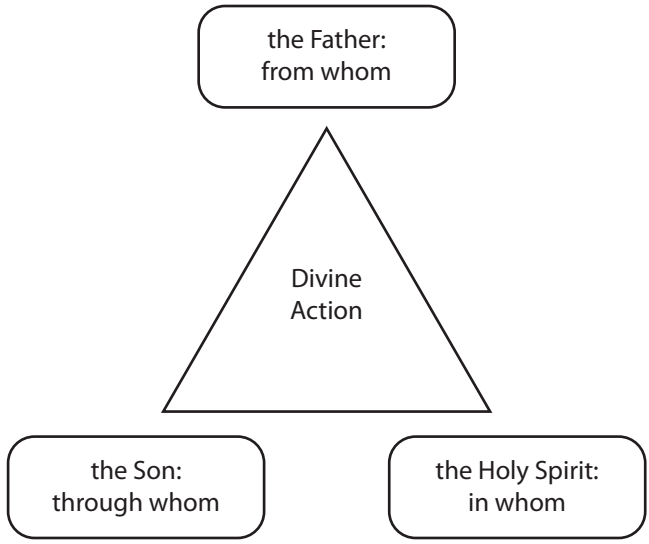

Fig. 6.2. Trinitarian Action according to Modes

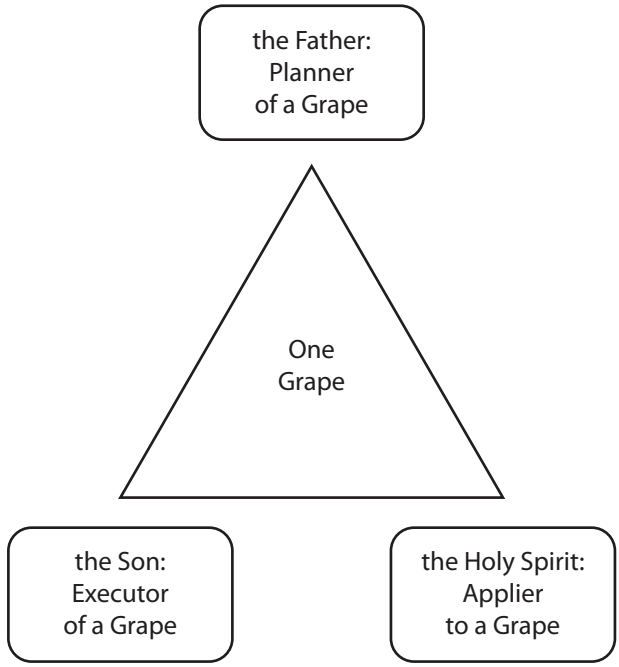

Fig. 6.3. A Grape as Planned, Crafted, and Worked

Persons of the Trinity:	the Father	the Son	the Holy Spirit
Speaking:	the speaker	the Word	the breath
Lordship:	authority	control	presence
Aspects of a Unit:	contrast	variation	distribution
Particle-Wave-Field:	particle perspective	wave perspective	field perspective
Divine Action:	planning	executing	applying

Table 6.1. Add Divine Action

The Impress of Divine Action

What difference does it make? God's differentiated action produces differentiated results. The beauty of God himself is displayed in his actions. Since God is harmonious, his actions are harmonious—and with harmony comes beauty.

As we have noted, God the Father is preeminently the planner, and God's plan is unchangeable. The stability of his plan is the foundation for the stability of the things that he created in accordance with his plan.

Consider an apple tree, for example. God is unchangeable, but the tree changes over time, while remaining *the same* tree. It is, however, identifiable at any point in time as distinct from the other trees, grasses, worms, and soil around it, and this sameness is a reflection of the constancy of God's plan.

We have also said that God the Son is preeminently the executor of God's plan. The execution takes place in time and space. Through the Son, God the Father actually makes the tree. It did not exist before, and now it does. The plan always existed, but the tree itself did not exist until the Father through the Son brought it into existence through a specific event. Ever since it began to exist, the Father through the Son continually sustains that tree.

We affirm, then, that the *dynamic developments* taking place in the world have their origin in God. God himself does not change in his

character, but he brings dynamic developments into the world through the Son.[3] This dynamic development means that the apple tree varies in its shape, form, and size throughout the course of its existence. It is subject to *variation*. The ultimate foundation for this variation is found in God's plan and the divine activity that results from it. More specifically, the activity of God with respect to the world has a foundation in God's *inner* activity, so to speak. His inner activity is that of thinking and speaking and loving among the persons of the Trinity. The prime case of God's inner activity is the eternal *begetting* of the Son by the Father. Stated differently, the Father *generates* the Son. The Nicene Creed puts it this way:

> We believe . . . in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, begotten from the Father before all ages, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made; of the same essence as the Father. Through him all things were made.

The divine begetting of the Son by the Father is mysterious. It is not an act in time; God the Son is not a creature, but God. This eternal inner activity of the Father's begetting the Son is the foundation for the Father's acting in time through the Son to govern the world.[4]

What about the Holy Spirit? Because of coinherence, we affirm that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are each involved in each of the works of God. And yet, as in other cases, there may still be a subtle differentiation. One person may be preeminent in some one aspect of the work of the one God. The Spirit, according to Genesis 1:2, manifests the immediate presence of God: "And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters." When Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist, the Holy Spirit was "descending on him like a dove" (Mark 1:10). This descent signifies the presence of God, in the person of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit came

3. Vern S. Poythress, *The Mystery of the Trinity: A Trinitarian Approach to the Attributes of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2020), chap. 39. The Father, the Son, and the Spirit are each unchangeable—the Son with respect to his divine nature. Once the Son is incarnate, he experiences changes with respect to his human nature, just as we do.

4. Poythress, chap. 39.

to empower Jesus for the public ministry that he was soon to undertake (vv. 14–15; cf. Luke 4:14).

Especially in the case of Genesis 1:2, the presence of the Holy Spirit suggests a broader principle. The Spirit is present immediately in all the work of creation, through the remaining verses of Genesis 1. But from there we can infer even more broadly that the Spirit is present throughout the world in God's works of *providence*—his sustaining, governing, and directing the entire cosmos—as well as in the initial works of creation in Genesis 1–2:

> Where shall I go from your Spirit?
> Or where shall I flee from your *presence*? (Ps. 139:7)

The Holy Spirit thus expresses preeminently the reality of God's ongoing relation to the world that he has created. The things that exist do not exist on their own. They do not subsist in themselves, as though on an independent foundation. They are continuously dependent on God; they are continuously related to God, as God sustains them by means of the Holy Spirit. Christianity is a theistic, not a deistic, religion. It may be said, not only of human beings but of all creatures whatsoever, "In him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). Each created thing exists and develops in *relation* to God. It has a relation to God, and this relation to God is not merely an afterthought, but always belongs to each thing. Each thing sustains a relation to the one God, who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But through his immediate presence, the Holy Spirit preeminently expresses God's relationship to created things.

We can now summarize what it means to be a creature. All creatures exist in dependence on God's eternal plan. They are dependent on the continuous power of God that results in dynamic development and variation in creation. They are dependent on a sustaining relation to God. Thus, there are three aspects to being a creature: *stability*, according to the plan of God; *dynamic development and variation*, according to the power of God; and a *relationship to God*, according to the presence of God. These three aspects manifest, respectively, the preeminence of the

Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in the rich rule of God over the world. It is beautiful. (See fig. 6.4.)

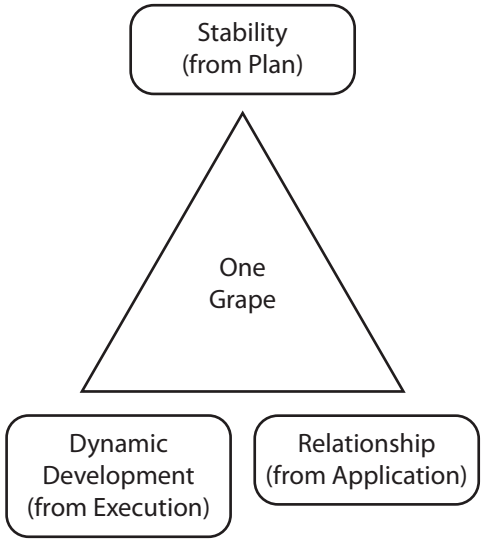

Fig. 6.4. Stability, Change, and Relationship

We can add one more line to our growing table (though it is similar to the line with Particle-Wave-Field). (See table 6.2.)

Persons of the Trinity:	**the Father**	**the Son**	**the Holy Spirit**
Speaking:	the speaker	the Word	the breath
Lordship:	authority	control	presence
Aspects of a Unit:	contrast	variation	distribution
Particle-Wave-Field:	particle perspective	wave perspective	field perspective
Divine Action:	planning	executing	applying
Stability and Dynamics:	stability	dynamics	relationship

Table 6.2. Add Stability, Change, and Relationship

Each creature's "being" comprises all three aspects—stability, dynamics, and relationship—not just one. We may use our apple tree as an example. It has stability, due to the stability of God, preeminently manifested in the Father's plan. It undergoes change, due to the activity and power of God, preeminently expressed in the executive work of God the Son. It has a relation to God, preeminently expressed in the presence of the Holy Spirit. We may also say that it has a relation to other created things around it. Its relation to other things is established by the fact that each thing has a relation to God. God in his relation to things specifies their relation to each other.

In sum, there are three aspects to the apple tree's being: stability, change, and relationship. These three aspects are closely related to a triad of "views" or perspectives employed by Kenneth L. Pike. The three views that Pike employs are the particle view, the wave view, and the field view.[5] Pike picked up the terminology from twentieth-century physics, but adapted it for his own use. The particle or static view focuses on the stability of each thing in the world and treats them as discrete "particles." The wave or dynamic view focuses on how things change and treats them as being in a state of flux. The field or relational view focuses on relations among things and treats them as part of a network of relations. We can consider an apple tree by using any one of these three views. (See fig. 6.5.)

As usual, the three views display a derivative kind of coinherence. The particle view sees the particles moving, and thus includes a wave aspect. The particle view sees the particles in relation to other particles, and so includes a field aspect. The wave view focuses on changes, but the endpoints of the changes have to be measured by something stable. Change is always change against a background of something that does not change. And any two phases of change are seen in relation to each other. Finally, the field view considers relations, but the relations are relations between particle-like items. And the field view has to consider relations that themselves undergo change. So the wave view, which focuses on change, is closely related to the field view, which focuses on relations.

5. Kenneth L. Pike, *Linguistic Concepts: An Introduction to Tagmemics* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), chaps. 3–5.

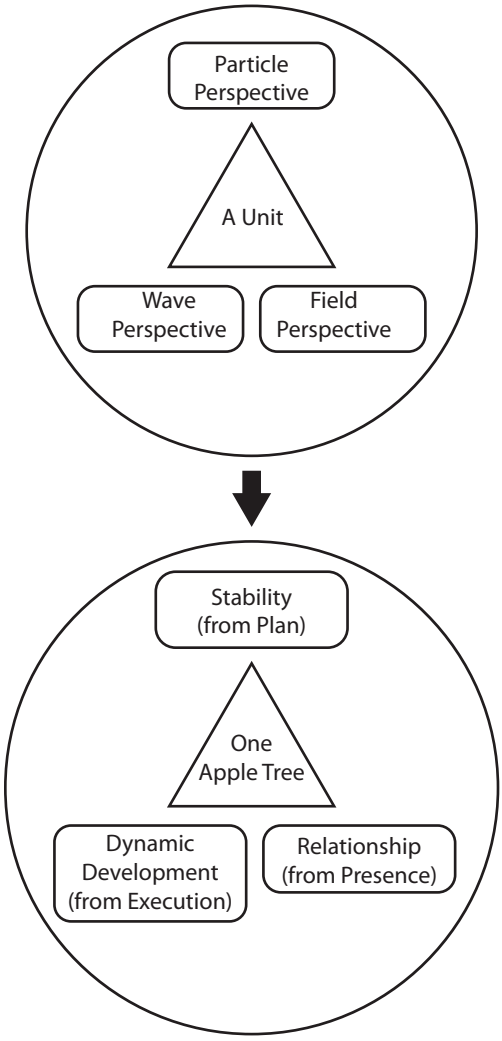

Fig. 6.5. Particle-Wave-Field Applied to an Apple Tree

Key Terms

accomplishment
application
field perspective
particle perspective
planning
rule
wave perspective

Study Questions

1. How is an examination of God's rule over the world similar to and different from perspectives that focus on his speech or his knowledge?
2. How are the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit distinctively involved in God's rule?
3. What does it mean to consider an apple tree or a grape from three perspectives: the particle perspective, the wave perspective, and the field perspective? How does the apple tree or grape reflect the beauty of the Trinity?

For Further Reading

Pike, Kenneth L. *Linguistic Concepts: An Introduction to Tagmemics*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982. Chaps. 3–5.

Poythress, Vern S. *Knowing and the Trinity: How Perspectives in Human Knowledge Imitate the Trinity*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2018. Pp. 83–87.

Prayer

Dear Lord, thank you for being our Lord and ruling the whole world for your glory and for our blessing. Thank you for who you are, and that you display your glory in your works.

7

Divine Manifestation

Now let us consider a fourth way to understand the beauty of the created world. In this fourth approach, we begin with the revelation that the eternal Son is the eternal image of the Father: "He [the beloved Son] is the image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15). Hebrews 1:3 indicates the same thing in somewhat different terms: "He [the Son] is the radiance of the glory of God and *the exact imprint* of his nature." In both verses, the Son corresponds to the Father. He manifests and reflects him. He is the image of the Father.

Thus, this fourth route starts with the idea of a pattern and its image. The pattern is God the Father, and the image is God the Son. The original pattern is the *archetype*, whose reflection is called an *ectype*. In God's case, the ectype of the Father is found in the Son. This structure is the ultimate foundation for all other instances in which we can find an archetype and an ectype.

When we look carefully at Colossians 1:15, we can see that the structure that it describes confirms what we found in one of the previous approaches, in which we started with the knowledge of God. For one thing, we find that the verse underlines the unity that is in God. The Son has the same nature as the Father, to use the language of Hebrews 1:3. The image is the image of the original, and it matches the original. At the same time, the image is *distinct* from the original. There is, in fact, an order that the two verses suggest. The original pattern is original in relation to the image, which reflects it. Similarly, the Son is the Son of

the Father, who begets him. This "begetting" or generation of the Son is eternal. It is known in theology as the *eternal generation of the Son*. The Word is the speech of God, who speaks him. Each of these three formulations is one way of talking about the doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son.[1]

In the context of imaging, the Holy Spirit preeminently expresses the relation between the Archetype and the Image.[2] To understand this, let us consider several Old Testament theophanies[3]—appearances of God whereby he manifests his glory. In some of these appearances, God appears in a human form. For example, in Ezekiel 1, the central figure in verse 26 has "a human appearance." This appearance is a foreshadowing of the coming of Jesus Christ in his incarnation. In fact, in Revelation 1:12–16, some of the visionary features of Christ correspond to Ezekiel 1. In Ezekiel 1, this human appearance is "the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD" (v. 28). The term "likeness" is clearly similar to what we find in the New Testament, where Christ is the *image* of God. The appearance is an appearance of glory or splendor. This glory is closely associated with the Holy Spirit in 1 Peter 4:14 and elsewhere (Isa. 63:11–12).[4] The glory of God is the glory of the Father and also the reflection of that glory in the Son. It is a common glory, and the theme of glory is associated with the Holy Spirit (1 Peter 4:14).[5]

The Created Image

We now have to consider how this Trinitarian structure might impact the nature of created things. For this purpose, we begin with the creation of mankind. Genesis 1:26–27 states that man is made in the *image* of God:

1. Vern S. Poythress, *Knowing and the Trinity: How Perspectives in Human Knowledge Imitate the Trinity* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2018), chap. 24.

2. Poythress, chaps. 8, 11.

3. Vern S. Poythress, *Theophany: A Biblical Theology of God's Appearing* (repr., Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2022).

4. Meredith M. Kline, "The Holy Spirit as Covenant Witness," ThM thesis, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1972.

5. Kline.

"Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.' . . . So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." Genesis 1 was written long before Colossians 1:15 and Hebrews 1:3 revealed that the Son is the image. But the truth about the Son is the truth even before it is revealed. We may infer, then, that the Son is the image of the Father even before creation. This image is the pattern in turn for the imaging relation that God brings into existence with the creation of human beings. In other words, human beings are ectypal images. The archetypal pattern is the Father. The Son is the ectype of this pattern. But his status as image is archetypal in relation to the creation of mankind. Human beings are ectypal images of the Son. And the process in which God creates a human being is an ectype of the eternal generation of the Son, as image. As usual, it is important to underline that the Bible maintains a distinction between the Creator and the creature. The eternal Father and Son and Spirit are the Creator. Adam is a creature, made in the image of God.

Human beings are one and many. They share a common human nature. This commonality is a reflection of the truth that the Son shares the nature of God with the Father. In addition, each human being is distinct from the others. Each human being exists in relation to the others, and in relation to God who made him.

So there are these fundamental features: the unity, the diversity, and the relationality of human beings. These three do not exist in isolation from one another. The unity means that each human being is human. But to be human includes being distinct from other human beings. And it includes existing in relation to other human beings. Likewise, being human includes being distinct from God and being in relation to God. Conversely, being a distinct and contrastive human being includes being a human being in one's own unity, and being in relation. These three aspects of our creaturely being are inseparably woven together. This inseparability, naturally, imitates on the level of the creature the inseparability and coinherence of the persons of the Trinity. (This result is a confirmation of what we have already observed with the triad of contrast, variation, and distribution.) This imitation in creation is one

more instance in which the beauty of God is reflected in the beauties of the creaturely world.

Other Creatures

Human beings uniquely have the image of God, in contrast to plants and animals. Genesis 1 indicates that plants and animals are made according to their kinds and that they reproduce according to their kinds. The human race is a distinct "kind." But humanity is defined not merely in relation to Adam as a prototype, but in relation to God as the archetype.

Plants and animals nevertheless have a tantalizing affinity with human beings in at least one respect—they reproduce. And when they reproduce, they produce offspring like themselves—they produce offspring "each according to its kind" (Gen. 1:11–12; see also vv. 21, 24–25). Human beings reproduce by producing new images of God: "When Adam had lived 130 years, he fathered a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth" (5:3).

It is easy to see that in this respect, plants and animals reflect some of the features of the human race. And as we have seen, the human race reflects on a creaturely level some of the "structure" that belongs to the Trinity. This is beautiful. Consider horses. There is a unity not only to each individual horse, but to the collectivity of horses as a "kind." There is both unity and diversity. And there is relationality. The three aspects belong inseparably together. Rocks and stars do not reproduce in the way that plants and animals do. But in a diminished way, they too have their "kinds." Unity, diversity, and relationality are woven into the fabric of everything in God's creation.

Key Terms

archetype
coinherence
diversity
ectype
eternal generation of the Son
image
relationality
theophany
unity

Study Questions

1. What is the relation between the Trinity and the teaching that man is made in the image of God?
2. What does it mean to be an archetype? An ectype?
3. How is the Trinity displayed in the archetype-ectype relation?
4. How is beauty associated with the idea of imaging?

For Further Reading

Poythress, Vern S. *Knowing and the Trinity: How Perspectives in Human Knowledge Imitate the Trinity*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2018. Pp. 71–75.

———. *Theophany: A Biblical Theology of God's Appearing*. Reprint, Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2022. Chaps. 1–2.

Prayer

Dear Lord, we praise you for showing yourself and your beauty in the world. We praise you for the original reflection of your beauty in the person of the Son.

8

The Attributes of God

Finally, we may explore how we can see the beauty of the Trinity reflected in the world by considering the attributes of God, especially his simplicity.

The word *simple* has a special technical meaning when it is used to describe God. It does not mean that it is easy for us to understand God; it means that God is not composed of parts. For God to be simple means that he has no parts. God is not only *one* God, but his unity cannot be decomposed into parts. For example, a motor can be taken apart into components. A sheet of paper can be cut into two parts. God cannot be decomposed in this way.

Coherence of Attributes

What are the implications of God's simplicity for our understanding of God's attributes, such as his wisdom, omnipotence, and holiness? God's attributes are not parts. God's attributes cannot be broken into pieces. All his attributes are inseparable from one another.[1]

Over the centuries, theologians have wrestled with how we deal with the ultimate nature of the attributes. How do we understand the

1. "The simplicity of God . . . is his incommunicable attribute by which the divine nature is conceived by us not only as free from all composition and division, but also as incapable of composition and divisibility." Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1992), 1.191, III.vii.3.

relationship of the attributes to one another? If there is no distinction at all between two attributes, not even a distinction in meaning, then we cannot know what any of the attributes mean, which would threaten to undermine our knowledge of God. On the other hand, suppose that we strongly distinguish the attributes, to the point of separation. Suppose that we consider the attribute of eternity. God is eternal. Eternity is not something that we can understand as existing independently of all other attributes, as if it preceded God himself, and then someone—a super-God?—decided to make a God who was eternal. No, eternity belongs to God with all his other attributes. So the relationship of the attributes to one another is a mystery.[2]

Attributes Belonging to One Another

We may still say some positive things about the relations among attributes. As an example, consider God's eternity. God's eternity does not describe only a part of him—for he has no parts. It describes *all* of him. So it describes all his attributes. God's goodness is eternal. God's omnipotence is eternal. God's unchangeability is eternal. God's love is eternal. And so on. The same can be said concerning any other attribute. So God's eternity is good and omnipotent and unchangeable and loving.

We may, then, infer that each attribute of God is *beautiful*, because God is beautiful. Beauty is an attribute of God, along with all the other attributes. So when God displays one attribute in some work within the created world, he displays them all. Not every attribute may be on display so obviously. But they are all there intrinsically, because God is there. Not just a part of him is there, not just some of him, because he has no parts.

For example, what attributes of God are on display when he speaks to the Israelites at Mount Sinai (Ex. 19–20)? Certainly his power is on display; his holiness is on display because he forbids the Israelites to come

2. Vern S. Poythress, *The Mystery of the Trinity: A Trinitarian Approach to the Attributes of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2020), chap. 43.

up the mountain (19:10–15). His ability to speak is on display because he does speak, and delivers the Ten Commandments (20:1–17). Is God's kindness also on display? It must be, because his power, his holiness, and his speech are themselves kind. And God *is* kind to speak to the Israelites at all. He has given them a special privilege by revealing his law to them. As Psalm 147:20 observes:

> He has not dealt thus with any *other nation*;
> they do not know his *rules*.

Is God's love on display? Yes, since in another context he explicitly affirms that he loves Israel:

> For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD *set his love* on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the LORD *loves* you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. (Deut. 7:6–8)

But we have to think about and reflect on the descriptions in Exodus 19–20 before we see God's kindness and love there.

Do we see God's eternity when he speaks at Mount Sinai? The speech is a one-time speech. But it reveals a God who is *always* righteous, and whose rules will continue through the subsequent generations.

Once we realize that each attribute belongs to all the others, we may affirm that each attribute is beautiful. God's beauty may be on display more obviously in some events than in others, but it is always there.

We may put it another way by saying that each attribute is found *in* each other attribute, when we look carefully. The attributes are coinherent, in a manner that resembles the coinherence of the persons of the Trinity.

Beauty inheres in God's power, and his eternity, and his kindness. It is no wonder that when we see God as he is, we are attracted to him. Because of our sinfulness, we should also be afraid, as Isaiah was, until he received God's forgiveness:

> And I said: "Woe is me! For I am *lost*; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!"
>
> Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your *guilt* is taken away, and your *sin* atoned for." (Isa. 6:5–7)

The Trinity and Attributes

Do we see the Trinity in God's attributes? This question is difficult. God's attributes have been on display ever since the creation of the world (Rom. 1:20). God has been three persons all along, when he created the world and ever since. But the clearest *revelation* and *display* of the distinction of the three persons comes only in the New Testament. There we learn that each person is fully God. We can affirm, then, that all the attributes belong to all three persons. We may also affirm that the distinction of the persons belongs to each attribute—because the attributes are inseparable from the persons, according to the principle that God is simple.

Just as one attribute may be more obviously on display in a particular event, such as God's appearance at Mount Sinai, so also one attribute of God may sometimes be associated more preeminently with one person of the Trinity. God's *authority* is associated with God the Father.[3] The Father, as the source of the plan of the world, is preeminent in authority.

3. Note, however, that Jesus declares in Matthew 28:18, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." All three persons in the Trinity have full divine authority. The source of the "giving" in verse 18 is God the Father, who gives to the Son in his role as Messiah and as the last Adam.

God the Father sends the Son into the world (John 3:34; 4:34; etc.). This implies that the Father has a plan and the Son carries it out. God's *control* is associated with God the Son, who executes the plan of God and in that execution exerts control over the world (4:34; 17:4; etc.). God's *presence* is associated with God the Holy Spirit, who expresses the presence of God during the time of creation (Gen. 1:2) and in the time of redemption, as he dwells in our hearts (John 14:17; Rom. 8:9). The attributes of authority, control, and presence are introduced by John Frame as three major attributes describing God's lordship.[4]

All three attributes—authority, control, and presence—belong to the one God, and therefore to each of the persons of the Trinity. Nevertheless, we can also observe differentiation. This observation suggests that we should think of the distinction between two attributes as being analogous to or reflective of the distinction between two persons of the Trinity. Consequently, we have unity in all the attributes, based on the unity of the one God that the attributes describe; we also have diversity between any two attributes, based on the diversity of persons.

We can explain the diversity of God's attributes another way. God is absolute. He has no needs. Therefore, he has no need of anything outside himself to manifest the diversity of his attributes to us. Since the diversity we experience needs no ultimate source outside God, it is a diversity that comes from God and that reflects God. That is, it reflects diversity that is already *in God*. We must only be careful to affirm that this diversity is not a diversity of parts (which would contradict simplicity). It is a diversity of persons. It is incomprehensible.

Finally, the diversity of God with respect to his own descriptions of himself is the archetype for the diversity with respect to his descriptions of the world and the diversity of his plan for each thing in the world. The diversity in his plan is reflected in the diversity of the things and events and relations in the world. Therefore, the world reflects the structure of the Trinity, both the unity of God and the diversity of persons.

4. See John M. Frame, "A Primer on Perspectivalism (Revised 2008)," https://frame-poythress.org/a-primer-on-perspectivalism-revised-2008/; John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2000), chaps. 3–6.

The world also reflects the coinherence of the persons. Specifically, the coinherence of the persons of the Trinity is reflected in the coinherence of the attributes of God. The attributes are inseparable. Each is a perspective on God, and therefore also (by simplicity) a perspective on all the attributes of God. The coinherence of the attributes is also manifested in the unity and coherence of God's plan. This plan results in the diversity of things and events in the world. The things in the world display the attributes of God, according to Romans 1:18–23. These attributes are displayed in their unity and diversity.

In sum, the original harmony and beauty are found in the unity and diversity of God himself. He is one God and three persons. This harmony and beauty are reflected in the harmony and beauty in the attributes of God. The attributes have unity and diversity. The attributes of God are displayed in the things that he has made (Rom. 1:20). The attributes of God are beautiful. The world is beautiful by reflecting God's attributes.

For many people, the idea of beauty is most closely associated with relatively permanent visual displays. So a picture or a landscape or a person is beautiful. The passages in the Bible associated with the beauty of God mention beauty in connection with the permanent structure of the temple (Ps. 27:4) or the permanent clothes made for the high priest and his sons (Ex. 28:2, 40). A passing event or an idea or a proverb or a piece of literature is less likely to be described as beautiful, but rather as awesome or splendid or glorious or wonderful. What is beautiful in the sphere of visible things is analogous to what is awesome and splendid in other spheres. God is beautiful and splendid and awesome. The three are closely related and equivalent. The world and what is in it are awesome and splendid, reflecting and displaying the splendor of God. And this splendor, as we have seen, has its basis in the splendor of the Trinity, the harmony and coinherence of unity and diversity in God himself.

After encountering God at Bethel, Jacob exclaims, "How *awesome* is this place!" (Gen. 28:17). And immediately afterward, he makes an association with the theme of the house of God: "This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." Psalm 66:3 proclaims, "How *awesome* are your deeds!"

Beauty and the Trinity

We can see the display of beauty in the world in still another way, first explored by David A. Covington. Covington noticed that one of the primary ways in which the Bible itself describes the display of God in the world is by using the term *glory*. Already in chapter 1 we saw a number of instances in which "the glory of the LORD" appears to the Israelites (Ex. 16:7; 24:16–17; 40:34–35; Lev. 9:23; Num. 14:10; 16:19, 42; 1 Kings 8:11). God may appear in a bright cloud (Ex. 16:10; 34:5; Ezek. 1:4). Moses specifically asks God, "Please show me your *glory*" (Ex. 33:18). Covington observes that glory is associated with three different attributes of God: truth, power, and beauty.[5] These three attributes are closely related to the triad mentioned earlier in this chapter, the triad of authority, control, and presence. God's authority, associated with God the Father, is the authority of *truth*. God's control, associated with God the Son, is exercised in *power*. And God's presence, associated with God the Holy Spirit, is associated with his visible displays in the world, which manifest *beauty*. In this context, beauty is associated especially with the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is especially active in bringing us into the presence of God. In Genesis 1:2, it is the Holy Spirit who represents the presence of God in the world, as he "was hovering over the face of the waters." The tabernacle and the priesthood that God sets up in Exodus 25–40 give Israel access to the presence of God.[6] It is fitting that both the tabernacle itself and the priests should be beautiful. It is no wonder, then, that when God commissions Bezalel to make the beautiful objects associated with the tabernacle, God says, "I have filled him with *the Spirit of God*, with ability

5. David A. Covington, *A Redemptive Theology of Art: Restoring Godly Aesthetics to Doctrine and Culture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 64.

6. The Old Testament speaks of three main offices that ought to maintain and deepen human communion with God: prophets, kings, and priests. All three are fulfilled in Christ. In the Old Testament, there are some overlaps in their functions. But roughly speaking, prophets speak the word of God, expressing *truth*; kings rule in accord with the law of God, expressing *power*; and priests provide access to the presence of God, expressing presence and *beauty*. See Vern S. Poythress, *Knowing and the Trinity: How Perspectives in Human Knowledge Imitate the Trinity* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2018), chap. 15.

and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship, to devise artistic designs" (Ex. 31:3–4).

We have said that the Trinity in its unity and harmony is beautiful. It is also true that beauty as one attribute of God fits coherently and harmoniously with the Trinity, and especially with the work of the Holy Spirit.

Key Terms

attribute
authority
coinherence
control
diversity
presence
simple
unity

Study Questions

1. What is meant by the *simplicity* of God?
2. What does simplicity imply about the attributes of God?
3. Why is it important that no attribute of God is more ultimate than God himself?
4. Is there a fruitful analogy to help us understand the unity and the diversity in the attributes of God?

For Further Reading

Poythress, Vern S. *The Mystery of the Trinity: A Trinitarian Approach to the Attributes of God*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2020. Chaps. 9, 43.

Prayer

Dear God and Father, thank you for who you are. Thank you for the wonder of your attributes. We pray that we would grow in understanding you through what you say about your attributes. You are the great, the mighty, and the awesome God (Neh. 9:32)! Holy and awesome is your name (Ps. 111:9)!

9

Summarizing Approaches to Beauty and Metaphysics

What have we gained by our discussion so far? We have briefly considered five distinct approaches to understanding the origin of beauty. At the same time, the origin of beauty also discloses the fundamental nature of reality and being—metaphysics. These five are an approach through the word of God (chap. 4), an approach through the knowledge of God (chap. 5), an approach through the rule of God (chap. 6), an approach through the manifestations of God (chap. 7), and an approach through the attributes of God (chap. 8).

The Relation between Approaches

All these approaches to beauty may be viewed as implications of one another. In particular, the doctrine of simplicity implies the simplicity of God's word, his speech. It implies the simplicity of his knowledge. It implies the simplicity of his patterns (as archetypes and ectypes). And of course, it implies the simplicity of his attributes.

The *multiplicity* of approaches to beauty also derives from God. The Bible supplies three main analogies for explicating distinctive relations among the persons of the Trinity. These three are the analogy with

communication, the analogy with a family, and the analogy with reflections.[1] (See fig. 9.1.)

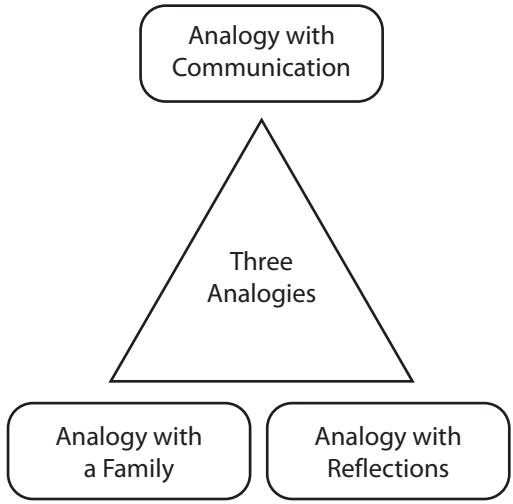

Fig. 9.1. Three Analogies for the Trinity

The analogy with communication is the analogy used when the Bible describes the second person of the Trinity as the Word (John 1:1; Rev. 19:13). The analogy with a family is used in describing the first person of the Trinity as the Father and the second person as the Son (John 1:14, 34, etc.). The analogy with reflections is used when the second person is described as the image of God (Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3).

These three lead, respectively, to three successive explanations of beauty. The approach through the word of God clearly stems from the analogy with communication. The approach through the knowledge of God is similar, because knowledge is expressed in the word. The approach through the rule of God stems from the analogy with a family. The language of Father and Son in the Bible often appears in the context in which the Father sends the Son, and the Son carries out the mission of the Father

1. Vern S. Poythress, *Knowing and the Trinity: How Perspectives in Human Knowledge Imitate the Trinity* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2018), chap. 8.

(John 5:19–20; 12:49–50; etc.). It is closely related to the idea of the Son's executing the plan of the Father.

The approach through the manifestations of God clearly stems from the analogy with reflections. The approach through the attributes of God is most closely related to the analogy with communication because the attributes of God are labeled using words, which are instances of communication.

A Unique View of Beauty

Using each of the five ways, we have presented observations about the origin of beauty. God is Trinitarian. God's word, his knowledge, his rule, his manifestations, and his attributes therefore reflect Trinitarian structure. Therefore, the world, utterly distinct from God, expresses Trinitarian structure in a derivative way. God is beautiful, in the beauty of unity-in-diversity in harmony. Derivatively, the world is beautiful. This view of beauty is distinctively Trinitarian. Simultaneously, it is a view of metaphysics, that is, of ultimate reality. It is incompatible with Platonic metaphysics. It is incompatible with Aristotelian metaphysics. It is incompatible with Kantian dimensionalism.[2] It is incompatible with anything and everything except itself. God rules the world, and God is Trinitarian. The world expresses the character of God and nothing else. Beauty in the world reflects the beauty in God. The world cannot express anything else because God is absolute and the world is utterly dependent.

2. We cannot expound these claims more fully in this book. But we may at least hint. First, in all three major philosophies—Plato, Aristotle, and Kant—verbal expression is utterly subordinate to thought. Thus, these philosophies have an essentially unitarian conception of the function of language. Rather than seeing language as originating in God's speaking his word, they treat language as a map of thought, which has its foundation in abstract categories (Plato, Kant) or in discernment of essences of things (Aristotle). Second, knowledge, to be true, must be utterly identical across persons. This is a unitarian conception of knowledge. Third, a pattern and an embodiment of the pattern do not intrinsically require a relation that interpenetrates both. Fourth, qualities and descriptive terms are separable in meaning, in the sense that, in principle, they can be examined one by one, without relation to the entirety of knowledge. The anti-Trinitarian slant of these philosophies does not exist here and there, but throughout.

Nevertheless, the course of Western philosophy has not been completely worthless. It has captured valid insights. In order to see these, we must first explore the idea of perspectives in the next three chapters.

Key Terms

analogy with a family
analogy with communication
analogy with reflections
attribute
beauty
metaphysics

Study Questions

1. How are the approaches to beauty in the previous chapters related to specific analogies for the Trinity?
2. Why are there multiple analogies for the Trinity?
3. How does this approach to beauty differ from the prominent approaches in Western philosophy?

For Further Reading

Frame, John M. *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2015. Pp. 63–77, 251–70.

Prayer

Dear God and Father, thank you for the magnificence of who you are. Thank you for the diversity of ways in which you have reflected and displayed your beauty in the world.

Part 3

On Perspectives

10

Introducing Perspectives

Let us now consider the topic of *perspectives*.[1] This topic is closely related to that of *beauty*. We see distinct beauties in the world if we look at it from distinct perspectives. Likewise, we see distinct beauties in God if we view him from distinct perspectives.

Since God is the most ultimate reality, the use of perspectives also says something about metaphysics. Once we acknowledge that there are multiple possible perspectives on anything in the world, it suggests that there is no *one* metaphysical analysis that alone represents the ultimate structure of the world. Rather, structures are intrinsically multiple. God has *built in* the multiplicity. The unity in one perspective is no more ultimate than the diversity expressed in several perspectives. Unity and diversity go together. Each points to the other, and neither is independent of the other. That is true in God. Subordinately, it is true in analyzing the world that God made. God's world bears the imprint of the unity-in-diversity and the diversity-in-unity that characterize his nature.

How may we understand the role of perspectives? Let us begin, as usual, with God. The knowledge that God has is unified because there is only one God. But there is also diversity in knowledge, namely, the diversity of the three persons of the Trinity (see chapter 5).

1. John M. Frame, "A Primer on Perspectivalism (Revised 2008)," https://frame-poythress.org/a-primer-on-perspectivalism-revised-2008/; Vern S. Poythress, *Symphonic Theology: The Validity of Multiple Perspectives in Theology* (repr., Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2001); Vern S. Poythress, *Knowing and the Trinity: How Perspectives in Human Knowledge Imitate the Trinity* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2018).

Perspectives within the Trinity

God knows himself by means of three distinct perspectives. Each person in the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is distinct from the other two persons, but each person fully knows God. God the Father knows God; God the Son knows God; God the Holy Spirit knows God. Each person knows God comprehensively. There is also a distinction in knowledge, as indicated in Matthew 11:27:

> All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

So we may say that God knows himself by means of three personal *perspectives*: the perspective of the Father, the perspective of the Son, and the perspective of the Spirit. These three are distinct because the persons are distinct. The distinctive perspective of the Holy Spirit is mentioned in 1 Corinthians 2:10: "For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God."

The three perspectives of the three persons are not separable. Each person knows God fully. Each person is fully God. The persons dwell in one another (coinherence). For example, the Spirit is *in* the Father in the very reality of the Father's knowing the Son.

Human Personal Perspectives

When used with respect to human beings, the word *perspective* naturally implies the limitations of our knowledge. If I am sitting in one room of my house, I can see parts of that room, but I cannot see the whole house. That is a limitation in my spatial perspective. My wife in another room sees things that I do not see. That is one aspect of her spatial perspective.

Thus, we need to be careful to remind ourselves that there are two levels of "perspectives." On the divine level, each divine person has a "perspective," but that perspective is unlimited and comprehensive. Each

divine person sees everything everywhere. We as human beings do not. On the human level, "perspectives" always imply the limitations of our knowledge. This sense of limitation includes, naturally, the limitation of being in one place at one time. I see only the room that I am in. I see a chair only from the one perspective from which I am viewing it. If I view it from the front, I do not see its back.

More broadly speaking, however, limitations in our human perspectives include those that result from our finitude. I do not know everything. What I do know, I know in the context of other knowledge. Since knowledge varies from one person to another, I have a personal perspective on knowledge. My personal perspective differs subtly from the perspective of my wife or my friend. Two of us may both know many truths, and may agree about those truths, but there will also be differences in what we know and how we know it. For example, consider a husband and wife, John and Sue. John majored in French literature, while Sue majored in biology. Sue knows more about biology than John does. And what she knows about biology, she knows by direct exposure to labs and textbooks. John may have learned much of what he knows indirectly, through Sue's explanations.

The Effects of Sin on Human Perspectives

The differences in our knowledge of the world are made painful by the fall into sin. Sin affects our knowledge by making us sometimes grasp lies and half-truths as though they were true. But even if sin had never entered the world, human beings would have differed from one from another in their knowledge of the world because God made each of us different.

Of course, sin *did* enter the world. The whole human race was corrupted by Adam's sin. So we do not know in detail what it would have been like if there had been no sin. We do, however, get a glimpse of an analogous situation when we consider the church of Jesus Christ, which is the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12). The church is supposed to be unified in doctrine, as described in Ephesians 4:1–16. But there is a diversity of gifts. There is a diversity of people. When the body of Christ is functioning in a healthy way, this diversity actually contributes to the health of the body, rather than being

a source of contention. The passages in 1 Corinthians 12–14 and Ephesians 4:1–16 are interesting because they address imperfect churches, in Corinth and in Ephesus. The Corinthian church, in particular, had serious divisions: one person took pride in his gift, and another felt despised because he did not have the same gift. But as God pointed out through the apostle Paul, that is not how it should be. When the body is functioning in love (1 Cor. 13), the distinct members of the body support and honor one another.

The situation with respect to personal perspectives can function in the same way. There is potential for mutual support. Suppose that a husband and wife go to pick out new curtains. One of them likes to deal with the economic side, and looks at prices. He or she has an economic perspective. The other likes to focus on artistry, and how the curtains will look in the room they are decorating. He or she has an aesthetic perspective. Together, they help each other to weigh *both* issues about their purchase. But in a context in which sin is still at work, there is also potential for contention. The husband and wife could start quarreling because each one refuses to understand the other person's perspective.

The same thing can be said concerning different personal perspectives in dealing with theological and moral issues in the church. One person has a perspective that focuses on what the Bible teaches; another focuses on what is happening with the people, and what might be the obstacles preventing them from understanding the Bible or applying it to a particular situation. Both perspectives are useful and are complementary. But disharmony arises if one person cares only for doctrine and tramples the people, while another person cares only for the people and pushes away true doctrine whenever someone is upset about it.

In the midst of a sinful world, God is generous. He gives gifts not only to Christians but also to non-Christians (Matt. 5:45). There is a label for it—*common grace*. It is *grace* because as sinners we do not deserve the good things that God gives. It is *common* because God distributes benefits to everyone: "For he [God] makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good" (v. 45). The same principle applies with respect to knowledge. Sinful people resist God, and in the process resist him also as the source of knowledge. God, however, in his grace holds them back from the darkest

consequences. Some people, the materialists, say that they believe only in matter, not in mind. Logically, it would follow that they would not trust their own minds and would reject all knowledge whasoever. But God restrains them, and they retain some convictions about truth. God gives true insights about the world even to unbelievers.

Multiplicity in Human Perspectives

It is estimated that over a hundred billion people have lived, counting the past as well as the present. Perhaps another hundred billion or even a trillion people are yet to be born, if the Lord does not return in the near future. Each of these people is unique. So there have been over a hundred billion personal perspectives. We might think that many of these perspectives will be permanently lost to us, because not every human being is saved by Christ and enters into eternal life.[2] But God's knowledge is complete: he knows every one of these hundred billion perspectives completely. He never forgets. So whatever is valuable in them belongs to God's complete knowledge. The diversity in these human perspectives reflects, on the level of the creature, the archetypal diversity in God himself. We are made in the image of God, and so we reflect God together, not only in the unities and commonalities of the human race, but in the diversities.

In addition to personal perspectives, there are at least two other kinds of perspectives. There are *spatial* perspectives and *thematic* perspectives.[3] A *personal* perspective is the view of the world that an individual has. A *spatial* perspective is a view of the world from a single spatial position and orientation (looking in a particular direction). A *thematic* perspective is a view of the world that looks at the world as an expression of some specific *theme*. For instance, the theme of communication is a theme that we have used to think about God and God's relation to the world.

We have observed that there are something like a hundred billion personal perspectives. (And of course, more are coming, as new people

2. To clarify: unsaved people continue to exist in the remote future, in the lake of fire (Rev. 14:11; 20:15); but Luke 16:26 suggests that saved people do not have access to them.

3. Poythress, *Knowing and the Trinity*, pt. 1.

come into the world.) There are even more possible spatial perspectives. Every motion of my body that takes me to a new location or gives me a new spatial orientation produces a new spatial perspective. In addition, we can imagine what it would be like to see reality from locations that are physically inaccessible—for example, to see the earth from a location on the surface of the sun or to see the Milky Way galaxy from a location in the Andromeda galaxy! Since God's knowledge is comprehensive, God also knows all possible spatial perspectives.

Finally, what about thematic perspectives? God knows all possible thematic perspectives. How many thematic perspectives are there? It is not easy to say, because there is no obvious way to enumerate them. We can give ourselves some idea by looking at words. Words have meanings, and a meaning can be the starting point for a perspective. Suppose that you use a particular word meaning as a starting point. Try to look at everything from the standpoint of that meaning and its connections to other meanings. Then you have a perspective, based on the word with which you started.[4]

For example, suppose that we start with the word *horse*. We use it and its meanings to look out at everything in the world. One way of doing that would be to imagine that we were a horse ourselves. How would the world look? Would a horse have some kind of dim understanding, or would it just react instinctively? We can also start by thinking about sawhorses, pommel horses, and vaulting horses. But let us return to the meaning that designates living animals. We know what horses are partly by comparison and contrast with other animals. We think first of all, perhaps, of other familiar domestic animals and farm animals. The tamability of horses leads us to think of other tamable animals. We think of the fact that horses are creatures, and so we are led to think about God, who made them. We travel outward to the larger context by a network of associations.

Today there are about seven thousand languages spoken in the world. We do not know how many languages have already died out in the course of history. Each language has its own vocabulary. English alone has something like a million words, but many of them are technical words in scientific specialties.

4. For examples, using the words *dog* and *truth*, see Vern S. Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word: Language—A God-Centered Approach* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), chaps. 33–35.

Conservatively, we may say that the basic vocabulary of a language may amount to something like five thousand words. That gives us five thousand distinct perspectives from within one language, which we use to describe or to speak about the world. Since words do not match perfectly in meaning from one language to another, each of the seven thousand distinct languages will give us five thousand more words with which to produce perspectives. It leads to a total of at least thirty-five million possible thematic perspectives.

God knows all possible human languages, not just the ones that have actually existed in history. We do not know how to set an estimate on the number of possibilities.

Angelic Perspectives

In addition, there may be angelic languages. First Corinthians 13:1 speaks about "the tongues of men and of *angels*." This verse might conceivably be referring to human languages that angels use when they communicate to human beings. But if so, the expression "tongues of men" already covers what is needed. In that case, what would be the point of adding "and of angels"? Thus, it is more likely that "tongues . . . of angels" refers to languages that angels use among themselves. The verse contemplates the possibility that a human being will use one of these languages ("If I speak . . ."). But is this all hypothetical? The point of the verse is not to give special hidden information about angels, but to illustrate the superiority of love to every kind of special gift.

So we do not really know about special angelic languages. If they exist, we as human beings might or might not be able to comprehend or learn them. If they exist, certainly God understands all of them. There may be a multitude of perspectives possible within any one angelic language. We do not know. We may never know.

The Sweep of Perspectives

All in all, there are a lot of human perspectives. There are many personal perspectives, and many spatial perspectives, and many thematic

perspectives. The diversity of perspectives is designed by God, and this diversity reflects the original or archetypal diversity of the persons of the Trinity.

Key Terms

common grace
personal perspective
perspective
spatial perspective
thematic perspective

Study Questions

1. What are perspectives within the Trinity?
2. How do divine perspectives differ from human perspectives?
3. How do human perspectives differ in knowledge?
4. What are the potential benefits and dangers in using multiple human perspectives?

For Further Reading

Frame, John M. "A Primer on Perspectivalism (Revised 2008)." https://frame-poythress.org/a-primer-on-perspectivalism-revised-2008/.

Poythress, Vern S. *Knowing and the Trinity: How Perspectives in Human Knowledge Imitate the Trinity*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2018. Chaps. 2–5.

———. *Symphonic Theology: The Validity of Multiple Perspectives in Theology*. Reprint, Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2001.

Prayer

Dear Father, thank you for the unity and diversity in the body of Christ. Please cause the Holy Spirit to work love and humility, so that each member of the body and all of them together may flourish. May this be true concerning our growth in knowledge.

11

Triads of Perspectives: Summary

When we look back at the earlier chapters in this book, we can see that they have used perspectives.

Perspectives from Chapter 3 on Genesis 1

Chapter 3, "Learning the Nature of the World through Genesis 1," used the text of Genesis 1 as a starting point to consider what kinds of things there are. In effect, Genesis 1 was used as a perspective on reality.

Perspectives from Chapter 4 on Communication

Chapter 4, "The Word of God," used the theme of the word of God as a perspective. Within this approach, one may distinguish three aspects of the word of God, namely, the speaker, the speech, and the reception. These three correspond to (1) the preeminence of the Father as the speaker; (2) the Son, the Word, as the speech; and (3) the Holy Spirit in his role as like a breath carrying the word to its destination (its reception).

On this basis, we can distinguish three perspectives that would apply to any communication. The *expressive perspective* focuses on the theme of the speaker and what he expresses. The *informational perspective* focuses on the theme of the message and what it contains (the "word").

The *productive perspective* focuses on the theme of the purpose of the communication and its effect on the recipients.[1]

Each of these perspectives functions as a perspective on the *whole* of communication. For example, let us start with the expressive perspective. This perspective focuses on what the speaker expresses. But the speaker wants to express content, which is in focus in the informational perspective. And he wants to accomplish something with those he addresses, and that is the focus of the productive perspective.

For example, suppose that Sue tells her daughter, "Please set the table." First, we can use the expressive perspective. We focus on Sue's ideas. What does she want? She wants the table to be set for dinner. It fits into her larger plans for the whole dinnertime. Second, we use the informational perspective. We focus on the content of the speech, "Please set the table." It is a specific request. It informs us about the need for a procedure to do things to get the table into the condition of being set for dinner. But it also points back to Sue, and informs us about what she has in mind—that is, what we discovered from the expressive perspective. Third, we use the productive perspective. We ask ourselves what happens as a result of Sue's speech. Her daughter gets going and sets the table. Or maybe her daughter drifts out of the house, pretending not to have heard. Both are in a sense "productive" responses, though the second one is negative. Both responses make full sense only when we understand that they *are* in fact responses to a speech. To understand the meaning of the daughter's acts, we find that we have to know about the informational content of the speech and the way in which it expresses Sue's intent, which is in focus in the expressive perspective.

The informational perspective focuses on the content. But the content indicates what the speaker intends, which is in focus in the expressive perspective. And the content is intended to influence an audience, which is the productive perspective.

In sum, the three perspectives interlock. One cannot really have one without the others. Each implies the others. They are derivatively coinherent, which is what we would expect. They reflect the intra-Trinitarian

1. Vern S. Poythress, *Knowing and the Trinity: How Perspectives in Human Knowledge Imitate the Trinity* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2018), 129–34.

communication of the persons of the Trinity—their internal "speech"—wherein the speech is the eternal Word. God speaks the Word. And the Holy Spirit is like the breath of God (Ezek. 37:5–6, 14), which sends out the Word. When God speaks to the world, it produces effects. That is the focus of the productive perspective. Since divine speech *comprehensively* specifies each created thing, and specifies all aspects of reality, reality itself is approached through multiple perspectives.

Chapter 4 introduced two additional perspectival triads. One was a triad of God's attributes: authority, control, and presence. These three function as *perspectives* on all the work of God in the world. They are also perspectives on God himself—his authority, his power, and his presence.[2] The second triad was that of contrast, variation, and distribution, an idea that stems from the work of Kenneth L. Pike.[3] Once again, the three aspects are inseparable and derivatively coinherent.

Perspectives from Chapter 5 on Knowledge

Next, chapter 5, "The Knowledge of God," uses the theme of the knowledge of God as a perspective on reality. This knowledge is triperspectival because it is the knowledge that the Father has, and that the Son has, and that the Spirit has. We also implicitly used a triad consisting of knower, known object, and the act of knowing. Pike's triad, consisting of contrast, variation, and distribution, appeared again as an implication of the unity and diversity in the knowledge of God.

Perspectives from Chapter 6 on Rule

Chapter 6 is titled "The Rule of God." The triperspectival perspective used here is that of the rule of God: planning, accomplishment, and

2. Poythress, chap. 14. The three terms *authority*, *control*, and *presence* are called the *triad for lordship*, deriving from John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1987), 15–18.

3. Kenneth L. Pike, *Linguistic Concepts: An Introduction to Tagmemics* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), pt. 2; Poythress, *Knowing and the Trinity*, app. F.

application. This triad is a reflection of the Trinitarian differentiation of the Father, who is the planner; the Son, who is the executor; and the Spirit, who is the applier.[4]

Chapter 6 also noted another triperspectival perspective: particle, wave, and field.[5] This triad again reflects the Trinity in its unity and diversity.

Perspectives from Chapter 7 on Reflections

Chapter 7, "Divine Manifestation," uses the perspective of manifestation or reflection. The structure of reflection includes three aspects: an original pattern, its reflection in an "image," and the relation between the two. These three function as three perspectives on the analogy with reflections.[6]

Perspectives from Chapter 8 on Attributes

Chapter 8, "The Attributes of God," uses the attributes of God as perspectives on God.

Key Terms

accomplishment
application
authority
coinherence
contrast
control
distribution
diversity
expressive perspective
field perspective
informational perspective
particle perspective
planning
presence
productive perspective
unity
variation
wave perspective

4. Poythress, *Knowing and the Trinity*, 136–39.
5. Poythress, 388–89; Pike, *Linguistic Concepts*, chaps. 3–5.
6. Poythress, *Knowing and the Trinity*, chap. 11.

Study Questions

1. What three perspectives derive naturally from considering communication?
2. What three perspectives belong to the knowledge that God has?
3. What three perspectives derive naturally from considering God's work in the world?

For Further Reading

Poythress, Vern S. *Knowing and the Trinity: How Perspectives in Human Knowledge Imitate the Trinity*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2018. Chaps. 11–14.

Prayer

Thank you, dear God, for the mystery of your knowledge. Thank you that you give us rich knowledge through perspectives.

12

A World Structured by Perspectives

We are now in a position to be able to say briefly what the world is like and what it is not like—to give a brief Christian metaphysics.

The world is completely specified by the word of God, which articulates the plan of God. We should remember that the Bible is the word of God. But there are also other utterances of God not found in the Bible. God governs everything by speaking (Pss. 33:6, 9; 147:15–18; Heb. 1:3). The entire utterance of God structures the entirety of reality.

The Word as Perspectival

The word of God in the Bible is expressible in any human language. Human languages differ, and personal perspectives using a single human language differ. Consequently, there is no *one* final set of categories or system of classification that provides *the* final, deepest analysis of reality.[1]

1. Some people may wonder whether the Bible in its original languages gives us a specially privileged access to reality. It is true that the Bible in its original languages is the very word of God, with full divine authority (1 Thess. 2:13). Translations have only derivative authority, which depends on the message and wording in the original (see, for example, Westminster Confession of Faith 1.8). But the desire for one final system of categories is still not fulfilled, because parts of the Bible are composed in three different languages: Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic. Moreover, some of Jesus' oral teaching was in Aramaic, the primary language of many of the Palestinian Jews at the time. Examination of these three languages shows that at a basic structural level, they display many of the triadic features belonging to all other human

Rather, all of reality is structured by multiple perspectives. Each perspective can be a perspective on the whole. No one perspective permanently displaces and disqualifies the others or makes them superfluous. God knows them all, and they are meaningful for him. Therefore, they are meaningful in the deepest sense. The unity of God's truth and God's knowledge is not in tension with this diversity of perspectives. Rather, the unity and the diversity go together harmoniously—a harmony that is to be exemplified by the unity and diversity in the knowledge of God in the church as the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12; Eph. 4:1–16).

Perspectives from the Trinity

This view of the world follows from the nature of the Trinity. We can confirm this claim by using the perspectives already developed. We have already used the perspective of the word of God, which completely structures reality and intrinsically contains a diversity of perspectives.

We can argue to the same conclusion by using God's knowledge of himself as a perspective. Knowledge among the members of the Trinity of one another is one because there is one God. Additionally, there are three personal perspectives in intra-Trinitarian knowledge on the one unified knowledge of God. This is mysterious.

God's knowledge *governs* reality. God's knowledge includes all that there is to know about God. It also includes all that there is to know about the world. His knowledge is a necessary basis for the existence of the world and all its structures.

God's knowledge is perspectival. So the structure of the world specified by that knowledge is also perspectival; it reflects its architect: God.

The search for a single final set of categories must therefore be pronounced a mistake. What may appear to human analysts to be a final set

languages. Vern S. Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word: Language—A God-Centered Approach* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009). Finally, it is significant to notice that the New Testament gospel, which goes out to all nations, denies that any special religious privilege belongs to one ethnic group. God is not more favorable to people who speak Aramaic or Hebrew than he is to people who speak Swahili (Matt. 28:19; Col. 3:11; Rev. 7:9). All the languages of the world are so shaped by God that he can speak freely using them.

of categories offers a perspective on knowledge that may or may not be flawed. If this perspective claims to be the unique, final perspective, that claim is a failure, and it makes the perspective flawed.

The Achievements of Western Philosophy

The perspectival structure of reality is useful in giving a basic sketch of the achievements of the history of Western philosophy.[2] The history of Western philosophy, from one point of view, is a history of the personal perspectives of the major philosophers. Perspectives—even flawed ones—can be insightful.

Empiricism, for instance, exploits the fact that our interaction with the world makes use of our senses. Empiricism then takes sense experience to be the beginning point of a perspective, as if one might say, "Let us consider the use of the senses as a perspective on reality." This is insightful as a perspective, but it is flawed as soon as it thinks of itself as exclusive (to other perspectives) or as having reached a definitive analysis that explains everything that exists.

Atomism exploits the fact that we can analytically cut physical reality into spatially smaller parts. So it proposes this: "Let us consider the world as consisting of things that are the sum of smaller spatial parts." This approach produces a useful perspective. But it goes astray if it claims to be exclusive.

Platonism, with its use of the forms, is akin to an explanation that starts with the attributes of God. Goodness, justice, love, and beauty are attributes of God. God displays his attributes in the things that he has made (Rom. 1:20). So the attributes of God, which are like forms, can be used as a perspective on all of reality.

Aristotelianism uses the ten categories described by Aristotle in *The Categories*.[3] More than one interpreter of Aristotle has observed that the

2. John M. Frame, *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2015).

3. Aristotle, *The Categories*, trans. Harold P. Cook, in *Aristotle: The Categories: On Interpretation: Prior Analytics*, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann, 1962). Christopher Shields provides a quote:

categories correspond at least loosely to the parts of speech in a natural language.[4] Substances correspond to nouns; qualities correspond to adjectives; quantities correspond to number words; and so on. Whether or not Aristotle actually *derived* his list of categories from grammatical information, the categories do, to some extent, correspond to grammatical structures. The big question that remains is whether these grammatical structures correspond to the nature of reality that language describes.

We can answer that question in the affirmative if we start not with human communication but with divine communication. As we saw already, God's speech structures the world. And that structuring is complete. Though no human language can make an *exclusive* claim to be a suitable medium for God's word, the Bible is translatable into all human languages. Although the Bible does not contain all the speech that God utters in governing the universe, one might presume that it would at least reflect or be analogous to God's speech in universal governance. So why not use human language as a perspective on the structure of the world? Yes, one may use it as one perspective. And with some adjustments, one might treat Aristotle's categories as a kind of perspective on the world that uses the parts of speech in human language. Thus by using Christian assumptions, we can see why Aristotle's categories offer a useful perspective.

The Limitations and Failures of the Perspectives in Western Philosophy

So far in this chapter, we have focused on the positive contributions and insights in Western philosophies. These positive contributions and

Of things said without combination, each signifies either: (i) a substance (*ousia*); (ii) a quantity; (iii) a quality; (iv) a relative; (v) where; (vi) when; (vii) being in a position; (viii) having; (ix) acting upon; or (x) a being affected. (*Cat*. 1b25–27) (Christopher Shields, "Aristotle," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* ed. Edward N. Zalta [Fall 2020], § 6, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2020/entries/aristotle/)

4. Paul Studtmann, "Aristotle's Categories," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Fall 2017), § 3, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2017/entries/aristotle-categories/, on "the grammatical approach"; Vern S. Poythress, *The Mystery of the Trinity: A Trinitarian Approach to the Attributes of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2020), 217.

insights are benefits of common grace. But of course, there is another side: we must reckon with sin. And with sin comes an antithesis—an antithesis between the human stance of rebellion against God and the human stance of trust in God through Christ. What might go wrong with Western philosophy because of sin?

Overreaching Claims

One of the obvious limitations in the history of philosophy lies in its perspectival character. Because human knowledge is limited, any one perspective is limited. To the extent that philosophers focus on one perspective only and fail to include complementary perspectives, human knowledge suffers. Sin includes human pride and a striving for autonomy: to be free from God in order to be our own gods. So a philosopher's perspective easily gets treated as though it were the final, unique, ultimate analysis. It gets treated as a perfect, godlike view of the world.

Only One Level

The failure to distinguish between two levels of existence—the Creator and the creature—is a deeper issue that is found in many philosophies. Correlative with this single-level approach to reality is the belief that there is only a single level of rationality in the world. God's rationality is ignored or simply equated with man's rationality. Man is considered competent to analyze all of reality, and anything that cannot be fully analyzed is to that extent irrational. This confidence in human rationality ignores both the Creator-creature distinction and the reality of sin that corrupts not only human behavior but also human ideas and human rationality.

Only One Language

The streak of overconfidence in human rationality may be called *rationalism*. It goes beyond merely acknowledging that human beings have gifts of rationality and that they can reason. It goes beyond in that it proposes

that human rationality is omnicompetent; it does not acknowledge that God represents a second level, that God's rationality is the standard, and that his rationality is mysterious to us. In addition, it treats human rationality as if it were unfallen. There is no acknowledgment of corruption by sin. It might admit that human rationality may be "weak," in certain respects. But sin is not merely weakness. Sin is disobedience to God and lack of conformity to the moral standard of God.

This streak of rationalism has difficulty with the reality of multiple languages and multiple cultures. It has to believe in principle that a single human being's rational abilities are competent to describe the fundamental nature of the world. Some, but not all, human beings have advanced skills in dealing with multiple languages and multiple cultures. For those human beings whose experience is confined to a single language and a single culture, the rational abilities have to function within the context of that single language and single culture. Western philosophy, throughout most of its history, has had such confidence.

But increasing attention to multiple languages and multiple cultures, including "exotic" languages and cultures with little previous interaction with Western culture, has now undermined that confidence. How do you know that the principles and insights that you put forward are universal? Maybe they are limited to your own language. The fact is that words in one language do not correspond in a one-to-one fashion to words in a second language. Sometimes there is an impressive degree of correspondence, but sometimes not.

As an example, Plato's program for contemplating the forms meets with a problem because the forms are typically represented by key words in a single language. But if these words do not correspond in a one-to-one fashion with words in other languages, then the insights that a Platonist achieves do not necessarily travel beyond his mother tongue. To put it another way, each language offers a suite of perspectives, but how can we know that these multiple perspectives actually fit together without first having a complete knowledge of all possible perspectives?

The Christian approach differs in an obvious way. We have speech from God. God spoke through chosen prophets, and then caused his word

to be put in written form in the Bible. This speech is crafted by God so that it can be translated into multiple languages (Matt. 28:18–20). We have a guarantee at two levels. First, at the divine level we have the guarantee that God knows all perspectives completely. Second, at the human level, because the Bible can be translated, we have the guarantee that God's speech can penetrate all human language and cultures, thus bringing God's truth to all human beings. Truth is stable because God is stable. It does not disintegrate into multiple competing truths, one for each culture or one for each individual. Because God has *crafted* all the languages of the world, they are all suitable vehicles with which to translate God's word.[5]

Aristotle has the same problem as does Plato. If the categories that Aristotle sets forth are an expression of human language, which human language is it? A noun in one language may be rendered by a verb in a second language, or vice versa. Even within one language, we can paraphrase the same truth in a variety of grammatical expressions. For example, we may say, "It is good that God loves us," or "God's love for us is good." In the first sentence, the form of "love" is a verb; in the second, it is a noun.

Aristotle and his followers want to derive their conclusions not from language alone, but from the reality about which our languages talk. But here also a multiplicity of perspectives confront us, such as the thematic perspectives that we examined earlier in the book.

The Uniqueness of God

We can draw one conclusion: only God is God. To try to get beyond the multiplicity of human perspectives is not only impossible but prideful. At the same time, we must affirm that God is three persons as well as one God. God himself does not "reduce" the plurality of the world to a unity that swallows or destroys the plurality. Neither does the plurality in our world destroy its unity. Rather, God has created both in relation to each other. That is natural, since God is one God, who is a plurality of persons, who are in relation to each other.

5. Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word*.

Key Terms

antithesis
Aristotle
atomism
common grace
diversity
empiricism
harmony
Plato
rationalism
unity

Study Questions

1. What is the nature of reality?
2. How might the perspectives of Western philosophers be a help?
3. How might the perspectives of Western philosophers be a hindrance?
4. How does sin corrupt the course of Western philosophy?

For Further Reading

Frame, John M. *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2015. Chap. 1.

Poythress, Vern S. *The Mystery of the Trinity: A Trinitarian Approach to the Attributes of God*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2020. Chaps. 19–23.

Prayer

Lord, thank you that you have given us the truth, in the person of Christ and in the Bible. Thank you that you have opened our hearts and ears, through the Holy Spirit, to receive the truth. Thank you for the light of the truth that you give us, that your word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path (Ps. 119:105).

Part 4

Examples Confirming Multistructured Beauty

13

Lex Christi: A Useful Explanatory Perspective

As still another example of multiple perspectives, we may consider the ten perspectives offered in the framework called *lex Christi*, "the law of Christ," which Timothy P. Yates has developed, by starting with the Ten Commandments.

A fuller explanation of this framework is found elsewhere.[1]

A Simple Summary of *Lex Christi*

The *lex Christi* framework starts with the Ten Commandments. Each of the Ten Commandments has a specific focus on one area of ethical behavior. The commandment specifies what human beings are supposed to do in order to obey God within this one area. For example, the sixth commandment says, "You shall not murder" (Ex. 20:13). It specifically prohibits unlawfully taking human life.

But each commandment also has broader implications. The commandment against murder implies by way of contrast that we should act in a manner that protects and enhances human life. All ten of the

1. Vern S. Poythress, "Introducing the Law of Christ (*Lex Christi*): A Fruitful Framework for Theology and Life" (2023), https://frame-poythress.org/introducing-the-law-of-christ-lex-christi-a-fruitful-framework-for-theology-and-life/. For Tim Yates's work, see https://www.unveiledfacesreformedpress.net/ourbooks.

commandments enhance human life. So each of the other commandments is within the scope of this broad principle. The commandment not to commit murder has become a *perspective* on the whole of our moral obligation to God.

Consider the eighth commandment: "You shall not steal" (Ex. 20:15). This commandment specifically forbids taking away someone else's property without his consent. But we can also see that this commandment invites us to take a broader view of other people's property, including God's property. Malachi 3:8–10 indicates that people rob God if they withhold their tithes. In fact, every sin is a form of withholding from God the honor that is due to him. So now the eighth commandment has become a perspective on the entirety of our human obligation.

So also with each of the other commandments. Each commandment can be expanded into a perspective on the whole of the law of God.[2]

Perspectives on God and on the World

We may go a step further by noting that each commandment to some extent highlights a particular attribute of God. For example, the sixth commandment, which again is about murder, highlights the importance of human life. Human life is important because man is made in the image of God (Gen. 9:6). The life of man reflects, on the creaturely level, the life of God the Creator. God is the *living* God. So the sixth commandment reflects the fact that God is the living God.

Likewise, each of the Ten Commandments reflects an attribute of God. (See table 13.1.)[3]

Corresponding to the Ten Commandments there are, in rough correspondence, ten attributes of God. Some of these attributes need further explanation. Most of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20:3–17 are given in *negative* form, as prohibitions. But each commandment implies that we should *positively* pursue the opposite of what is prohibited. The prohibition

2. John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008); Poythress, "Introducing the Law of Christ," § 19.

3. Poythress, "Introducing the Law of Christ," § 8.

of murder implies, on the positive side, caring for human life. The second commandment, in prohibiting the worship of images, positively commends respect for the unique holiness of God and the unique way in which he prescribes how we approach him. In the third commandment, dishonoring the name of God leads to curse. The opposite is blessing, which comes from honoring the name of God. The fifth commandment focuses on honoring one's parents. But its broader implications include living in harmony with other human beings in all our social relationships. This harmony reflects the fact that God is himself harmonious, among the persons of the Trinity. Similar observations can be made about the other commandments.

The seventh commandment says not to commit adultery. This negative prohibition is the opposite of respecting and enhancing proper intimacies among human beings. Intimacy among human beings reflects the original, archetypal intimacy in God himself, namely, the intimacy among the persons of the Trinity. The persons of the Trinity indwell each other. Intimacy is also closely associated with *beauty*, which has been one of our prime themes. We are attracted to beauty and want to become intimate with it.

Summary of the Commandments	Attributes of God
1C: do not have other gods	supreme
2C: do not bow to images	holy
3C: do not use God's name in vain	blessed
4C: keep the Sabbath	dynamic
5C: honor parents	harmonious
6C: do not murder	living
7C: do not commit adultery	intimate, beautiful
8C: do not steal	giving
9C: do not falsely witness	truthful
10C: do not covet	contented

Table 13.1. The Ten Commandments and Ten Attributes of God

Like all other attributes of God, these ten attributes function as *perspectives* on God. Each describes the whole of God, from a particular thematic angle. Thus, each in a sense includes the others; the attributes are coinherent.

The attributes of God are manifested in his works, according to Romans 1:20. So each of the Ten Commandments not only becomes a pointer to an attribute of God, but indirectly also opens a perspective on God himself and on all his works. Because the attributes are inseparable from one another, they cannot be eliminated when we consider the nature of any one thing within creation. Each created thing testifies to the God who made it. And the God who made it has all his attributes. We must acknowledge multiple perspectives on that one thing: one perspective for each attribute of God, and one perspective for each of the Ten Commandments.

For example, consider a single grape within a cluster of grapes on a vine. According to Romans 1:20, God's "eternal power and divine nature" are displayed in the grape. Only God who is supreme and who is all-powerful could make a grape. So the grape displays God's supremacy. (Yes, a farmer can help his grapevines to flourish. But he cannot make a grape—only God does that, by means of the vine.)

It is a wonderful thing that God does. It is beautiful. When we consider the wonder of it, it draws us to worship. And only what is *holy* is worthy of worship. So considering the grape has led us to think about the holiness of God, associated with the second commandment.

The third commandment reminds us that God is blessed. He is the source of blessing in the world, and the grape is a blessing to mankind.

According to the fourth commandment, God is dynamic. He has shown the vigor of his activity in all the acts by which he took care of the vine and caused it to flourish until it bore this grape. As Psalm 104:14–15 states:

> [God gives] plants for man to cultivate,
> that he may bring forth food from the earth
> and *wine* to gladden the heart of man.

The fifth commandment is associated with God's being harmonious. His harmony is reflected in the harmonious way in which objects and events fit together within the created world. The grape has come to be only because of a lot of harmonious events, events working together, within the grapevine and its roots. The roots in turn must have a soil that will harmoniously cooperate and give the roots the moisture and minerals that they need.

The sixth commandment is associated with God's being the living God. His divine life is reflected at the creaturely level in living things, both animals and plants. It takes a live plant, a grapevine, to produce this grape. And the grapevine has to come from previous vines, going back centuries in time.

The seventh commandment is associated with God's being intimate. Fruit is produced by a vine only when the fruit is intimate with the vine. Jesus uses this comparison in teaching his disciples about spiritual fruitfulness:

> As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. (John 15:4–5)

The eighth commandment is associated with the theme of God's being giving. He has given the world to mankind, including the grape. Within the world, God has ordained that there should be a human system with respect to ownership. Grapes can grow wild, on unclaimed property, but this particular grape probably belongs to someone, the person who owns the field where the vine is growing. Ownership makes sense because God has set it up.

The ninth commandment is associated with the theme that God is truthful. When we consider a grape, we are confronted with many truths about the grape: it is attached to a cluster of grapes; it is attached to the vine; it is red and juicy; it is ripe; and so on. Nothing about the grape makes sense unless we also rely on the concept of truth. And truth originates in the God of truth.

The tenth commandment is associated with the theme of contentedness. God is contented in himself. We should imitate him by being contented. The presence of the grape leads to the question whether I am contented. Am I appreciative and thankful to God for the good things in this world, including grapes? Am I also contented even if the grape is not mine? Or do I desire to steal it?[4]

In sum, many attributes of God are on display and reflected in the grape. The same principle holds if we look at other created things.

Attributes and the Trinity

We may also begin with an attribute of God and reflect on how this attribute is related to the Trinity. Consider, for example, the attribute of life, that God is the living God. God the Father is the ultimate source of life. Jesus the Son teaches, "For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself" (John 5:26). Life as a dynamic of living goes from the Father to the Son, and also to the Spirit. The Spirit is the immediate agent in bringing life to the people of God:

> It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. (John 6:63)

> "Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified. (John 7:38–39)

4. The issue of stealing has some complexities. The Old Testament indicates that it is permissible for a person to pluck fruit or grain from another person's field as he goes by: "you may eat your fill of grapes, as many as you wish" (Deut. 23:24). But he is not supposed to harvest: "but you shall not put any in your bag." What is defined as theft may vary in modern times from one country to another.

The context in the Gospel of John concerns the gift of eternal life. But the Spirit is active even in giving ordinary life to the world of animals and plants:

> When you send forth your Spirit, they [the new generation of animals] are created,
> and you renew the face of the ground. (Ps. 104:30)

The Spirit was active in the original creation of the world:

> And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. (Gen. 1:2)

Thus, Trinitarian structure undergirds all of life.

In a similar way, each of the Ten Commandments may be used as a perspective, leading to a Trinitarian view of the way in which attributes of God are displayed in the world he made. As an illustration, let us consider the ninth commandment, associated with the truthfulness of God. God is truthful, and Jesus tells us that he is the truth (John 14:6). When God communicates truth to us, he often does it by speaking. And as we saw in chapter 4, God's speech has a Trinitarian structure. God the Father gives truth through the Son, by the breath of the Holy Spirit, who impresses the truth on us: "He [God] . . . teaches man knowledge" (Ps. 94:10).

Key Terms

attribute
beautiful
blessed
coinherence
contented
dynamic
giving
harmonious
holy
intimate
lex Christi
living
perspective
supreme
Ten Commandments
truthful
Yates, Timothy P.

Study Questions

1. What is *lex Christi*?
2. What perspectives does *lex Christi* offer us?
3. How are the ten perspectives of *lex Christi* useful?
4. How are the ten perspectives coinherent?

For Further Reading

Poythress, Vern S. "Introducing the Law of Christ (*Lex Christi*): A Fruitful Framework for Theology and Life." 2023. https://frame-poythress.org/introducing-the-law-of-christ-lex-christi-a-fruitful-framework-for-theology-and-life/.

Prayer

Our righteous God, may we be righteous with your righteousness as we are clothed in the righteousness of Christ. May we serve you by obedience to each of the Ten Commandments, in each focus and in their broader implications.

14

Things, Events, and Relations

Let us consider another set of perspectives on the fundamental nature of reality, on metaphysics.

Particle, Wave, and Field

In chapter 6, we mentioned three interlocking perspectives: the particle perspective, the wave perspective, and the field perspective. These may also be labeled the static perspective, the dynamic perspective, and the relational perspective, respectively. These three correspond to three aspects in the work of God in history, namely, planning (preeminently by God the Father), accomplishment (preeminently by God the Son), and application (preeminently by God the Holy Spirit). Accordingly, the three perspectives imply one another. Each can be found "inside" the others, in a kind of derivative form of coinherence.[1]

The Question of Ultimacy

These three perspectives provide one path for considering the issues of ultimate constituents of reality. To see how, let us think about competing instances of Western philosophical metaphysics.

1. Vern S. Poythress, *Knowing and the Trinity: How Perspectives in Human Knowledge Imitate the Trinity* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2018), 379, 388–89.

Western philosophies have advocated at least three major differing views of ultimate or fundamental reality: it consists of things or of events or of relations. By far the most common of these three is that basic reality consists of things. But what *kind* of things? There are various views.

The *atomists* said that everything was composed of atoms. So atoms were the ultimate things. *Aristotle* said that the only self-standing things were substances, such as individual dogs, horses, trees, and human beings. Other aspects of reality, such as qualities and quantities, did have a kind of existence, but only by inhering in substances. *Plato* said that the ultimate things were forms. These were not directly visible or tangible things, but they were still "things," in a broad sense. They were the deeper explanation for the visible and tangible things that we experience in the world.

By contrast with all these philosophies, *process philosophy* says that reality consists in events, not things. Things are more or less temporary, more or less long-lasting concatenations of events. When the events cluster together to provide some sense of relative permanence, we see them as things.

Various forms of *structuralism* say, or appear to say, that reality consists in relations.[2] Things reduce to relations with their surroundings, and so do events.

Using Particle, Wave, and Field

The three perspectives particle, wave, and field are useful at this point because they enjoy correlations with the three kinds of philosophical metaphysics. The particle perspective views the world as composed of particles. The particles are then the things. The wave perspective views the world as dynamically changing. The changes are events. So one may say that the wave perspective views the world as composed of events. The field perspective views the world as a network of relations. So it correlates with structuralism, which reduces the world to relations.

2. Vern S. Poythress, "Structuralism and Biblical Studies," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 21, no. 3 (September 1978): 221–37, https://frame-poythress.org/structuralism-and-biblical-studies/.

Each of the three perspectives is a perspective on the whole of reality. Each works, so to speak, because a particular perspective singles out for attention a particular kind of structure or reality in the world. We can demonstrate this in detail by using all three perspectives to focus on a particular object of knowledge. Each perspective is a possible and a useful viewpoint. We can apply all three viewpoints when we consider any particular object of knowledge. Earlier (chapter 1), we applied the three perspectives in analyzing a grape. We may apply all three perspectives when we consider other items of interest, such as an apple, or a step in walking, or a bookmark, or a system of traffic lights.[3] Let us illustrate using an apple. Using the particle perspective, we focus on the fact that an apple is a stable thing over time; it is the *same* apple. Using the wave perspective, we focus on the fact that the apple changes over time. It grows and ripens on a tree; it gradually changes color; it is plucked from the tree; it is transported to a grocery store. Using the field perspective, we focus on the fact that the apple exists in relation to other things. It has spatial relations to the things surrounding it in space; it has relations of similarity to other apples of the same kind ("Delicious") or other varieties ("Macintosh" or "Granny Smith" or "Fuji"); it has relations to things that people might want to do with it—eat it raw; bake an apple pie; make applesauce.

Because each of the three perspectives is a perspective on the whole, there is some plausibility in the claim that it gives the "right" analysis, the ultimate analysis. But each perspective implies the others and is "indwelt by" the others. None actually exists without having the others potentially in the background. So the argument about an ultimate metaphysics that would be based on particles alone, or on waves alone, or on fields alone is futile. Things, events, and relations are all ordained by God. They all exist together, coinherently. There is no need to champion one as more ultimate than the others. (See table 14.1.)

3. These particular examples are worked out in Vern S. Poythress, *Redeeming Philosophy: A God-Centered Approach to the Big Questions* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), chaps. 12–14; Vern S. Poythress, "A Simple Traffic-Light Semiotic Model for Tagmemic Theory," *Semiotica* 225 (November 2018): 253–67, https://doi.org/10.1515/sem-2017-0025, https://frame-poythress.org/a-simple-traffic-light-semiotic-model-for-tagmemic-theory/.

Persons of the Trinity:	the Father	the Son	the Holy Spirit
Speaking:	the speaker	the Word	the breath
Lordship:	authority	control	presence
Aspects of a Unit:	contrast	variation	distribution
Particle-Wave-Field:	particle perspective	wave perspective	field perspective
Divine Action:	planning	executing	applying
Stability and Dynamics:	stability	dynamics	relationship
Things, Events, Relations:	things	events	relations

Table 14.1. Add Things, Events, and Relations

God in Three Perspectives

With suitable adjustments, this principle of affirming multiple perspectives holds for God, as well as for the created order of things.

First, God can be considered as a "thing" in the sense that he is an unchanging, infinitely "stable" object of knowledge. He is not, of course, a "thing" *in the world*, a created thing; he ordains the existence of all created things.

Second, God is continuously acting. He is dynamic. He is not merely an "event," if what we mean is a fleeting, passing event. But he is active. The Father generates the Son eternally. The Father breathes out the Holy Spirit through the Son, eternally. This activity is the foundation for the activities that he is engaged in as he governs the world continuously.[4] All events in the world take place only because God brings them about. He is active in every event within the world.

4. Vern S. Poythress, *The Mystery of the Trinity: A Trinitarian Approach to the Attributes of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2020), chap. 39. Note that we should not make the mistake of conceiving of God as a captive within the stream of time. He is eternal. Once he creates the world, his relation to time within the world has mysteries.

Third, God is relational. The persons of the Trinity are continuously in relation to each other. This relationality in God is just as ultimate as the stability of God on which we focus when we say that God is a "thing." The relationality *within* God is the foundation for God's having a relation to the world, once he creates the world. The world has a relation to God, and things and events within the world have relations to each other, because God relates to all the relations. He specifies them all. He specifies them eternally, in his comprehensive plan for the world. And then also, from our human position within time, we see that God specifies things and events one by one, as they unfold within the world of time (Ps. 147:15–18).

We may conclude, then, that things and events and relations within the world do not compete with one another for being the ultimate foundation. God specifies all three. They are in harmony with one another, and this harmony displays the beauty of God.

We may also say that God himself could be considered as thing and event and relational—all three. All are there eternally. God is there, as the self-existent, unchanging God ("thing"). He is eternally acting in the eternal generation of the Son ("event"). And all three persons of the Trinity are eternally related to one another. This eternal character of God is then reflected at the level of noneternal creatures. We have creaturely things and events and relations.

Secular philosophies are flawed, so long as they do not acknowledge the irreducibility of the three perspectives.

Key Terms

accomplishment
application
Aristotle
atomism
coinherence
dynamic perspective
field perspective
metaphysics
particle perspective
planning
Plato
process philosophy
relational perspective
static perspective
structuralism
wave perspective

Study Questions

1. What are three theories about the nature of ultimate reality, related to the particle perspective, the wave perspective, and the field perspective?
2. What is useful and what is wrong about the theories of ultimate reality?
3. What is useful about using the particle perspective, the wave perspective, and the field perspective?

For Further Reading

Poythress, Vern S. "Multiperspectivalism and the Reformed Faith." In *Speaking the Truth in Love: The Theology of John M. Frame*, edited by John J. Hughes, 173–200. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009. Also https://frame-poythress.org/multiperspectivalism-and-the-reformed-faith/.

Prayer

Dear Lord, thank you that you are richer, and the world is richer, than what secular philosophy has imagined.

15

Perspectives on Fundamental Physics

Is the idea of using multiple perspectives to investigate the fundamental nature of reality compatible with the current fundamental theories in physics? The standard model in quantum field theory and the general theory of relativity are widely regarded as the most fundamental scientific theories that we have.[1] It is notable that the quantum field theory has mathematical representations that attend to particles, waves, and fields. Kenneth L. Pike's terminology for the particle, wave, and field perspectives was in fact adapted from his interaction with fundamental physics—though he used the terms in his own way. There is a sense in which both quantum field theory and the general theory of relativity are intrinsically multiperspectival.[2] But our question is a different one: do these theories show us what is in some way the most fundamental metaphysical level of reality?

1. Meinard Kuhlmann, "Quantum Field Theory," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Fall 2020), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2020/entries/quantum-field-theory/. Attempts are in progress to move beyond these theories. But as of 2022, these endeavors had not become confidently accepted. They are in progress.

2. Vern S. Poythress, "Semiotic Analysis of the Observer in Relativity, Quantum Mechanics, and a Possible Theory of Everything," *Semiotica* 205 (June 2015): 149–67, https://doi.org/10.1515/sem-2015-0006, https://frame-poythress.org/semiotic-analysis-of-the-observer/.

Theories and Theorists

Some theorists believe that their theory is both fundamental and exclusive. They treat their theory as a kind of final "perspective." In their minds, the theory supersedes all previous theories. The theory eliminates rather than complements other perspectives. The theory is treated as showing the *illusory* character of ordinary observation. But there is an alternative to making an *exclusive* claim. We could treat a scientific theory as offering an account *complementary* to the experience of ordinary human observation with the senses.[3] Either of these stances involves a human choice. The theorist chooses to view the status of his theory in one way rather than another.

When we are trying to interpret the larger significance of a scientific theory, the human attitude cannot be eliminated[4]—human participation in theory-making and in theory affirmation and rejection must be taken into account. There are no theories outside the minds of persons. So a theory that proposes to show the illusory character of ordinary observation cannot actually succeed—though it may blindly think it has succeeded—in eliminating the people who propound it. And if it cannot eliminate the people, neither can it eliminate the reality of multiple personal perspectives and multiple thematic perspectives.

The impossibility of eliminating the personal viewpoint becomes all the clearer when we reckon with God's personal viewpoint. No human theorizing takes place except by the gift of God, in imitation of divine knowledge. Human beings have multiple personal perspectives. In addition, each of the three persons in God has a distinct perspective.

3. Vern S. Poythress, *Redeeming Science: A God-Centered Approach* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), chaps. 15–16.

4. The social context of scientific theory is explored in Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions: 50th Anniversary Edition*, 4th ed. (Chicago: Chicago Distribution Center, 2012). The role of the human observer is an explicit theme in tagmemic theory. Kenneth L. Pike, *Linguistic Concepts: An Introduction to Tagmemics* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 3–11. See also Vern S. Poythress, "An Information-based Semiotic Analysis of Theories concerning Theories," *Semiotica* 193 (February 2013): 83–99, https://doi.org/10.1515/sem-2013-0005, https://frame-poythress.org/an-information-based-semiotic-analysis-of-theories-concerning-theories/.

Perspectives within Fundamental Theories

We may also observe that the current fundamental theories in physics contain a significant use of perspectives *in their internal structure*. Basic physics includes an affirmation of *symmetries* in physical laws. And symmetries are instances in which the law "looks the same" from a variety of different perspectives. For example, ever since Isaac Newton developed his theory of masses and forces, scientists have observed that these laws have the same mathematical form, no matter where the observer positions himself spatially within the universe. The laws are the same in each direction that he may turn. This sameness is an expression of the symmetry of the laws with respect to spatial perspectives. Basic physical laws display such symmetries, which are related to variations in perspective. The variation includes not only spatially distinct perspectives, but sometimes perspectives of other kinds, such as a choice of generalized coordinates.[5] The dependence on multiple perspectives shows that the most advanced theories have not really dispensed with perspectives, but rather rely on them in a substantive way. The symmetries in basic physical laws are often seen as beautiful. Indeed they are. They are one more display reflecting the beauty of God.

Reliance on Preformed Order and on Initial Conditions

Current physical theories also have other dependencies, which show that they make sense only within the context of a larger order of things, understood tacitly by the theorists. First, the crafting of physical theories depends on there being an order of law in the first place. The theorist does not create the order of the universe, but depends on its being there already. This order is ordained by God. Moreover, this order in the world is in intrinsic harmony with the mind of the human theorist, because the theorist is made in the image of God. This harmony between the world and human minds was uncontaminated until the fall of mankind into sin. Since then,

5. Poythress, "Semiotic Analysis of the Observer"; Vern S. Poythress, "Newton's Laws as Allegory," *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* 35, no. 3 (1983): 156–61, https://frame-poythress.org/newtons-laws-as-allegory/.

human minds have been perverted by sin. Nevertheless, the harmony has not completely disappeared, or else science would be impossible.

Second, by themselves physical theories never account completely for experimental results. The experimental results always depend on initial conditions of the experimental setup, as well as on the theory. These initial conditions include some kind of initial configuration of matter and energy.

Let us consider a simple example. I throw a ball to my son outside in my yard. The path of the ball can be calculated using simple mathematics that takes into account the force of gravity, pulling the ball toward the earth. But where the ball ends up depends not only on the law of gravitation, but on how hard I throw the ball, in what direction I throw it, on the angle of the throw, and on the specific point of release. The way I launch the ball supplies the initial conditions for the calculation.

If the world were physically deterministic, the future would be entirely predictable (albeit only in principle) from initial conditions far back in time. But those initial conditions themselves are not explained by the theory. So the actual course of the future is richer than what the theory captures. It captures only the overall regularity, not the initial conditions.

In the present state of physical theory, the phenomenon labeled *quantum indeterminacy* suggests that physical theory cannot completely account for experimental results, even when given maximal information about initial conditions. The later states of the system are not completely predictable. There is an irreducible element of randomness, from the standpoint of the human observer. God, however, controls not only the order but also the randomness.[6] So again, the results are richer than the theory.

Physics as a Perspective

Finally, let us note that the initial decision of a theorist to study a particular aspect of the world is itself an integral part of what makes sciences what they are. Each particular science develops a kind of perspective on

6. Vern S. Poythress, *Chance and the Sovereignty of God: A God-Centered Approach to Probability and Random Events* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), esp. chap. 8.

reality. The perspective used in that science focuses on certain features. But inevitably it leaves others in the background. So perspectives in theories have not disappeared, just because one perspective—offered by fundamental theories in physics—is particularly successful and insightful.[7]

Key Terms

exclusive claim
field perspective
fundamental physics
initial conditions
particle perspective
Pike, Kenneth L.
wave perspective

Study Questions

1. What does it mean for a theory to claim to be an exclusive account?
2. What is a notable deficiency of any theory claiming to make ordinary observation illusory?
3. In what ways does the multiplicity of human perspectives bear on our interpretation of fundamental physics?

For Further Reading

Pike, Kenneth L. *Linguistic Concepts: An Introduction to Tagmemics*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982. Chap. 1.

Prayer

Thank you, our personal God and Father, that you have made *us*, not simply the physical dimensions of the world.

7. Poythress, *Redeeming Science*, chaps. 15–16.

Conclusion: Beauty, Yielding Multistructured Metaphysics

We have surveyed several important points about beauty. The search for beauty leads to God. We find in God unity and diversity in beautiful harmony. God himself is the key both to beauty and to metaphysics, the nature of ultimate reality. In conclusion, we briefly rehearse our survey.

The Uniqueness of the Creator

The search for beauty, as well as the search for metaphysics, should start by acknowledging the uniqueness of God. God always exists. Everything in the world is dependent on God, and did not always exist. There are two levels of beauty, not one. There are two metaphysical levels, not one.

The Trinity

God is one God and three persons. The foundation for both the unity and the diversity in the world is found in God.

God's Rule

God comprehensively rules everything in the world. The world is structured comprehensively by his word of command, by his rule, and by his presence in the world.

God's Perspectives

God knows comprehensively every possible human and angelic perspective. His knowledge is the foundation for all truth.

The World as Having Multiple Structures

The world has multiple structures and multiple possible perspectives built into it.

The Mistake of a Single-Perspective Monopoly

It is a mistake to think that one can master God or master the world with a single perspective. There is no single master perspective that gives exclusive insight into the ultimate structure of the world, or that gives us insight into the nature of beauty. There is no one set of categories that captures reality, that makes transparent to us the deepest character of the world. There is no way to "capture" beauty. There is no single human vision that lays bare the skeleton of reality. Western philosophy has searched for such a vision. Philosophies such as Platonism and Aristotelianism may claim to have found it. But human claims to mastery in metaphysics are illusory.

Multiple perspectives do not enable us to master the world either. But the multiplicity is a permanent reminder of God's richness, of God's beauty, of our access to his richness, and of our finite reception of his richness.

Things, Events, and Relations

In the world there are things, events, and relations—all three. Each of the three exists only in the context of the other two. They are perspectivally related.

In the world there are stable particles, dynamic movements, and systems of relations—all three. Each of the three exists only in the context of the other two. We as human agents may freely choose to take a static perspective (a particle perspective) that finds particles, a dynamic

perspective (a wave perspective) that finds "waves" and processes, and a relational perspective (a field perspective) that finds relations. Each perspective sees what it sees in the context of the structures that are in focus in the other two perspectives.

The Display of God

The world displays the glory of God and the beauty of God. God is one God in three persons. So the display reflects the unity and diversity in God. There are patterns reflecting the Trinity in every piece of the world, in worms and in galaxies, in abstract thoughts and in nerve impulses, because God is thoroughly present in the world. But God is distinct from the world. He made it. He is Lord over it.

Key Terms

Aristotle
beauty
diversity
dynamic perspective
field perspective
harmony
metaphysics
particle perspective
perspectives
Plato
relational perspective
static perspective
unity
wave perspective

Study Questions

1. Why does the world have multiple structures?
2. Why do some people want to reduce it all to one perspective?
3. How does a biblical view of God affect our view of the world?

For Further Reading

Poythress, Vern S. *Redeeming Philosophy: A God-Centered Approach to the Big Questions*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014. Part 3.

Prayer

Thank you, O God, for the beauty of the world. Thank you for the wonder and fascination of the world, which reflects your wisdom and your beauty.

Appendix A: Alternative Philosophical Views of Reality

A Christian view of metaphysics (the fundamental nature of reality) contrasts with competing views from the history of philosophy. A survey of these views could easily fill a large book.[1] The following analyses sample and simplify some of the principal views that have most influenced the Western world.[2]

Criteria for Evaluation

We will evaluate each view from three perspectives.

- **God.** Does this view cohere with the existence of the Trinitarian God?
- **Knowledge.** Does this view give an adequate account of how we can know that something is true?
- **Ethics.** Does this view offer a solid basis for ethics?

Without an ethics that supports truth-telling and honesty, no view can sustain itself plausibly. Ethics is one point at which we can test a

1. John M. Frame, *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2015).

2. India, China, Africa, and religious approaches such as Islam and Hinduism are outside our focus.

view according to Jesus' principle "Thus you will recognize them by their fruits" (Matt. 7:20). Both actual behavior and proposals for ethical principles can be considered to be the "fruit." Of course, the fruit has to be judged by biblical standards. If the fruit is bad, it shows that the root is bad, though it does not yet show specifically what went wrong with the root.

Philosophical Materialism

The most prominent metaphysical view today is philosophical materialism.[3] Philosophical materialism says that reality consists of matter and energy in motion. There are some variations among advocates of philosophical materialism. "Hard" materialism denies the existence of anything except matter and motion. "Soft" materialism says that while matter and motion are the foundation and the final explanation of all reality, complex combinations of matter can give rise to complex phenomena that we consider to be distinct—human beings, ideas, conscious experience, moral standards, and so on.

What is wrong with philosophical materialism?

God. God is not material. Either explicitly or implicitly, the various forms of materialism deny that God exists.

Knowledge. Materialism cannot give an account of itself, because the philosophical *idea* of philosophical materialism is not material. Alvin Plantinga makes a similar point in his extended interaction with materialistic Darwinism—a specific embodiment or type of materialism.[4] Of course, *soft* materialism can affirm a *kind* of existence of persons and ideas and abstract concepts. But how can we assure ourselves that our ideas of truth correspond to the world? Materialistic Darwinism promises only that we are constructed so as to enhance survival. But survival would appear

3. Frame, *History of Western Philosophy*, 52–54, 57–60; Daniel Stoljar, "Physicalism," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Summer 2021), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2021/entries/physicalism/.

4. Alvin Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion, and Naturalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

to depend on the movements of molecules and nerve impulses and other material events. How do we know that these movements correspond to mental ideas in a way that makes these ideas *true*?

Ethics. If matter is ultimate, then in the final analysis human beings are nothing more than clumps of matter. Ethical values, commitments, and choices are nothing more than personal preferences. For example, you prefer vanilla ice cream and your friend prefers chocolate. Likewise, you may prefer to help the old lady across the street, but your friend prefers to mug her. There is no transcendental set of values to which to appeal to adjudicate right actions from wrong ones, because a value is not a material thing. Ethical choices are merely the result of the motions of atoms and molecules, and atoms and molecules do not care about ethics! The natural endpoint for the ethics of philosophical materialism is the motto "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die" (1 Cor. 15:32).

Pantheism

Next, consider pantheism. According to pantheism, all is "God." Or, in panentheism, all is a part of God.

What is wrong with pantheism?

God. The Bible teaches a clear distinction between God, who is the Creator, and the world, which is created. Pantheism and panentheism have a kind of "god," but it is not the God of the Bible.

Knowledge. Since each individual allegedly "is" God, it would seem that each individual unproblematically knows everything. If that is true, why are there differences in belief? Moreover, the collapse of distinctions among things in pantheism threatens to collapse the distinctiveness of statements about things in the world. If all is genuinely and thoroughly one, there is no room for distinctions. Each individual may indeed know everything that is to be known, but what is to be known is only one thing, which is a blank darkness.

Ethics. Pantheism cannot distinguish between good and evil because both are a part of the ultimate nature of reality.

Skepticism

Next, consider skepticism.[5] Skepticism denies that we can know the ultimate nature of the world. (This position is distinct from the more modest negative observation, "I do not currently know what is true.") Since this denial is a kind of minimal theory about the nature of the world, we count skepticism as a metaphysical system.

What is wrong with skepticism?

God. Skepticism denies that God can make himself clearly known, as he has in fact done in nature (general revelation) and Scripture (special revelation).

Knowledge. Skepticism has trouble providing a foundation for itself. How can it be known that nothing ultimate can be known? That idea is self-defeating; it implies that we have investigated the world and drawn valid conclusions about it, the most basic of which is that we cannot know the world.

Ethics. Skepticism offers no basis for ethics.

Kantianism (with many variations)

Next, consider the philosophy of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804).[6] Kant argues that true metaphysics (knowing the fundamental nature of reality) is impossible. No one can know what Kant calls "the thing in itself"—a thing as it really is apart from our perceptions—because all our knowledge of the world is filtered by our mental and perceptual categories of knowing. We know the content of our minds and our perceptions—not the reality of the world. Kant called "things in themselves" *noumena* and things as they appear to us *phenomena*. Thus, a rational metaphysical analysis of the thing in itself, as an ultimate constituent of reality, is impossible.

But Kant still offers us a *system*. Its starting point is epistemology, not the thing in itself. In his epistemology, Kant tries to establish what can and

5. Frame, *History of Western Philosophy*, 704–5.
6. Frame, 251–70.

cannot be known, as well as the conditions for knowing anything. Thus, there is an ultimate structure within Kant's epistemology. The ultimate structure is not the thing in itself, but Kant's four categories of knowing —quantity, quality, relation, and modality and their respective twelve subcategories—which order our spatiotemporal perception of things.[7] The noumenal is distinguished from the phenomenal, and pure reason from practical reason. Whatever is phenomenal, what comes to us through our senses, comes to us already within a framework of the categories.

What is wrong with Kantianism?

God. Kant's system is antagonistic to the Bible because in his system God belongs to the noumenal. God cannot directly reveal himself in the world through appearances. But this is precisely what he did at Mount Sinai, and what he did in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Moreover, in Kant's system, man virtually takes the place of the Christian God. He "creates" the world as we know it by the imposition of the categories that already exist in his mind.

Knowledge. Kant's system cannot account for scientific knowledge based on the phenomenal, though it claims to offer an account. The laws of science are particular laws, not just a generic deduction from the principle of causality.[8] For example, Isaac Newton's law of gravitation says that any two massive bodies exert attractive forces on each other. The magnitude of the force is proportional to the mass of each of the bodies and is inversely proportional to the square of the distance between them.[9] The direction of the force is to point directly toward the body that is the source of the attraction. This law is very specific. It is not merely a general statement that one thing can causally influence the motion of another. God enabled Newton to discover the law by interacting with a massive amount of data

7. Frame, 258–60.

8. Vern S. Poythress, *Logic: A God-Centered Approach to the Foundation of Western Thought* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), app. F1; also Vern S. Poythress, *Redeeming Philosophy: A God-Centered Approach to the Big Questions* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), chap. 23.

9. Mathematically, F (force) = GMm/r^2, where M and m are the two masses, r is the distance between them, and G is the "gravitational constant," a universal value representing how strong the force of gravity is.

about physical motion. Newton did not impose the law merely by having a mind that thinks in terms of a principle of causality. For scientists to find these particular laws, the universe (the thing in itself!) must talk back to them, and not merely submit to a general principle already in their minds.

In addition, Kant's system cannot easily give an account of how it is possible to know the philosophical claims that Kant himself makes. The claims in Kant's book *Critique of Pure Reason*[10] seem to be rational claims about the fundamental nature of reality itself. But if the phenomenal is all that we can know (if we cannot know the world of "things in themselves"), then Kant's claims in the *Critique* exceed the bounds of the phenomenal —the only realm that Kant claims that pure rationality can know.

Ethics. Kant's ethics is based on the "categorical imperative"—universally binding, unconditional, absolute moral laws, for example: "You shall not murder." In this respect, it fares better than many other philosophies. But it still has a weakness. It cannot motivate anyone who asks, "Why should I not be selfish and disobey the alleged categorical imperative that is part of my mind?" If the imperative is actually generated by the categories of the human mind, and does not owe its existence to the reality of God, who is our Creator, it is not clear why we may not simply choose to step away from its allegedly universal claims. So I just make myself an exception, whenever I need to. Who can say that I may not?

Postmodern Contextualism

Next, consider postmodern contextualism. There are many varieties and expressions of postmodernism. What we have in mind under the label *postmodern contextualism*[11] is only one aspect, which itself has variations. Roughly speaking, postmodern contextualism has at its heart the twin convictions (1) that claims to human knowledge always come within a linguistic, social, and cultural *context*, and (2) that this threefold

10. Immanuel Kant, *Immanuel Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin's, 1965).

11. Vern S. Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word: Language—A God-Centered Approach* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), esp. chaps. 16, 17, apps. A, B, I.

context makes it impossible to know universal, transcendent truths. For the postmodern contextualist, truth is *local* to a particular culture or society; truth is culturally relative. More modest forms of contextualism might allow that sciences can arrive at universal truths, but a detailed look at the social contexts of sciences and the social flow of scientific claims to knowledge shows that sciences are the product of scientists, and scientists are social people. Scientific work is always socially *situated*. It always takes place within a social context, which includes other scientists, and often supporting staff and organizations who give grants and educational institutions. It cannot be immunized from the relativizing force arising from the analysis of social context.

What is wrong with postmodern contextualism?

God. The social situatedness of human knowledge allegedly means that God, if he exists, is inaccessible and unknowable. All that we access through human knowledge and human social relations belongs strictly to a human level. This view is opposed to the Bible, which claims to make God known to us.

Knowledge. Postmodern contextualism cannot easily account for itself. It builds its insights on linguistics and sociology, which make us more aware of the social influence of language and society. The appeal to social context extends to the social context of knowledge, as it is studied by the sociology of knowledge.[12] Linguistics and sociology, as scientific enterprises, are conditioned by their social contexts. Therefore, postmodern skepticism about accessing truth extends to the truths of linguistics and sociology. And therefore it extends also to the claims of postmodern contextualism itself. It offers no definitive insight, but only one more culturally limited claim.

Ethics. Ethics has no foundation except in culture, and cultures are plural. There is no appeal outside all cultures that could serve as a basis for condemning the abhorrent practices of some cultures, such as child sacrifice and racism.

12. Vern S. Poythress, *Redeeming Sociology: A God-Centered Approach* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), apps. F, G.

Platonism

Next, consider Platonism.[13] Platonism has many forms. We will focus on Plato himself (and Socrates, who in the Platonic dialogues tends to serve as Plato's mouthpiece). Plato says that the most ultimate constituents of the world are the *forms*: first and foremost, the form of the good, followed by the forms of justice, beauty, and holiness.

What is wrong with Platonism?

God. In the *Timaeus*, Plato allows a place for a "demiurge." The demiurge is a godlike being who looks at the eternal forms and then fashions particular things in imitation of the forms. In this system, the forms are superior to the demiurge. The demiurge is an inferior being, a counterfeit in comparison to the true God of the Bible.

Knowledge. Is Plato able to account for his own knowledge? In the famous dialogue *Meno*, Socrates explores the idea that we gain knowledge by reminiscence. This dialogue suggests that we know by remembering. We recover into consciousness the knowledge that the soul had by direct vision in its preexistent state before being in the body. But this picture puts man in the place of God. Man, as an eternally existing soul, has an eternity akin to God's eternity, and one aspect of man's eternity is eternal knowledge.

Platonism has another problem. The growth of modern science has undermined the plausibility of Platonism. Plato's project was to achieve mastery by reason. Science has certainly grown through reason, but this growth has undermined confidence in human ability to discern the nature of the forms—and therefore the fundamental nature of the world—just by use of rationality. Scientists over the centuries have found that they have to pay attention to the world. They have to do experiments. They cannot just deduce from first principles how the world *must* be.

Philosophical use of reason might take the form of direct vision of the forms, or dialectical reasoning in dialogues (Socrates' method), or discernment of the forms by intense reflection on instances of the forms.

13. Frame, *History of Western Philosophy*, 63–70.

Whichever of the variations we consider within ancient Greek philosophy, the Greeks got it wrong. They got wrong the nature of the world. They thought that the heavenly world (sun, moon, and stars) included objects in motion, but that the objects themselves did not change. They thought that the earth was at the center of a system of heavenly spheres whose motion carried the sun, the moon, the planets, and the stars. They thought that the world was built up from four "elements": earth, water, air, and fire.

Each of these conceptions of the world provides a partial truth, when treated as a perspective. But when a philosopher claims to arrive at an ultimate analysis and an ultimate layer of reality, he overreaches himself.[14]

Ethics. Plato also has problems in ethics. The proposals for government in the *Republic*, which are summarized in the early part of the *Timaeus*, involve what, from a Christian point of view, are unethical practices.

Aristotelianism

Next, let us consider the views of Aristotle (384–322 B.C.),[15] Plato's student. Aristotle differed in a major way from his teacher. Aristotle taught that the forms manifested themselves in the objects in the world, instead of objects in the world being defective copies of the forms, as Plato taught. For Plato, the forms belonged to a transcendental, invisible realm; for Aristotle, they belonged to the world of things. Each individual horse, for example, is composed of form and matter. The form is the form of a horse, which distinguishes horses from other animals; the matter is the distinct material in the composition of the particular horse, matter that differentiates *this* horse from all the other horses.

What is wrong with Aristotelianism?

God. Aristotle in his book *Metaphysics* discusses a godlike being, the "Prime Mover," who is also called "the Good" and "Mind" and "God."[16]

14. Vern S. Poythress, *Interpreting Eden: A Guide to Faithfully Reading and Understanding Genesis 1–3* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 77.

15. Frame, *History of Western Philosophy*, 70–77.

16. Vern S. Poythress, *The Mystery of the Trinity: A Trinitarian Approach to the Attributes of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2020), chap. 25.

Unfortunately, this Prime Mover is not the God of the Bible. He/it is eternal, but there are forty-seven or forty-nine other unmoved movers, all of which are eternal. None of them is the creator, but only a causal starting point for the eternal motions of eternal heavenly bodies.

Knowledge. Like Plato, Aristotle has confidence in the ability of human philosophy to sound out the nature of reality by rational reflection. The achievements of modern science have shown the failure of this kind of rational confidence.

Ethics. The Prime Mover has a loose connection with ethics. Aristotle thinks that the Prime Mover moves other entities because the entities *desire* the Prime Mover as the final Good. But the Prime Mover is thought thinking itself: "its thinking is a thinking of thinking."[17] It is empty as a source of ethics. At a practical level, ethics is related to the purposes of the things in the world. According to Aristotle, each thing, whether a human being, an animal, or a plant, has a purpose, namely, to develop its potential into actuality. The purpose is inherent in each thing. This view is contrary to the Christian view, according to which ethics rests on the character of God and is guided by what God says (as in the Ten Commandments).

The Use of Plato and Aristotle in Christian Theology and Philosophy

The deficiencies in Plato's and Aristotle's teaching about God are serious; they amount to blasphemies because they fail to show reverence for the true God and because they attribute some of his attributes to things other than God. In addition, their ethical views are defective. How could Christians have imagined that it was safe to adopt other ideas from these non-Christian philosophies? In the end, we may not know. But three possible reasons suggest themselves.

First, because of common grace there are fragmentary insights of truth in Plato and Aristotle and in all the other philosophers. That makes

17. Poythress, 286; Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann, 1962), 1074b33–35, XII.ix.4.

it attractive to adopt whatever in them seems plausible. For example, each individual horse belongs to a larger "kind," a natural kind, namely, the group of all horses. The commonalities belonging to all horses seem to be akin to a Platonic form or an Aristotelian form. Moreover, Aristotle's system of categories is vaguely akin to the major grammatical categories in human languages. Substances can be designated by nouns, qualities by adjectives, active and passive motions by verbs, and so on. And the structure of human language, as a gift of God, is adapted to talking about the world.[18]

Second, for many Christian leaders in the first centuries, it may have seemed that there were no alternatives. One seemed to need some sort of assumptions about the deepest structure of the world in order to discuss some of the big theological questions, and what Plato and Aristotle had to offer in this regard seemed to be better than most.

Third, the adoption of some of their ideas seemed to work; it seemed to promote insight. We can see useful fragmentary insights, which are God's gifts in common grace.

So it is worthwhile noting that criticisms can be lodged against even those aspects of Platonism and Aristotelianism that have found their way into Christian theology.[19] We cannot enter further into such criticisms here.

Key Terms

Aristotle
common grace
epistemology
Kant, Immanuel
panentheism
pantheism
philosophical materialism
Plato
postmodern contextualism
skepticism

18. Poythress, *Mystery of the Trinity*, 218–19.
19. Poythress, pts. 5–6; Poythress, *Logic*, pt. 1.C.

Study Questions

1. What is philosophical materialism, and what is wrong with it?
2. What is pantheism, and what is wrong with it?
3. What is Kantianism, and what is wrong with it?
4. What is postmodern contextualism, and what is wrong with it?
5. How are the defects in non-Christian philosophies mitigated by common grace?

For Further Reading

Frame, John M. *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2015. Pp. 63–77, 251–91.

Prayer

Our God, thank you for delivering us from vanity by instructing us in the Bible.

Appendix B: Aristotle, Kant, and Metaphysics

As we noted at the beginning of this book, the study of the fundamental nature of reality is associated with the term *metaphysics*. But that term needs some clarification.

Metaphysics in Aristotle

The Greek philosopher Aristotle wrote a work entitled *Metaphysics*—a title probably given it by a later compiler.[1] Later uses of the word *metaphysics* in the history of philosophy build on this early use. In a helpful article, S. Marc Cohen and C. D. C. Reeve endeavor to explain Aristotle's subject matter in his book.[2] They point out that Aristotle himself gives several explanations of his subject matter. The one that most concerns us says that he is going to study "being qua being." Cohen and Reeve explain:

> Aristotle's description "the study of being qua being" is frequently and easily misunderstood, for it seems to suggest that there is a single (albeit special) subject matter—being qua being—that is under investigation. But Aristotle's description does not involve two

1. S. Marc Cohen and C. D. C. Reeve, "Aristotle's Metaphysics," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Winter 2020), introduction, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2020/entries/aristotle-metaphysics/.

2. Cohen and Reeve, § 1.

> things—(1) a study and (2) a subject matter (being qua being)—for he did not think that there is any such subject matter as "being qua being." Rather, his description involves three things: (1) a study, (2) a subject matter (being), and (3) a manner in which the subject matter is studied (qua being).
>
> . . . It is a study of being, or better, of beings—of things that can be said to be—that studies them in a particular way: as beings, in so far as they are beings.[3]

Cohen and Reeve then go on to note that an earlier work of Aristotle, the *Categories*, contributes to the task of metaphysics:

> The *Categories* begins with a strikingly general and exhaustive account of the things there are (*ta onta*)—beings. According to this account, beings can be divided into ten distinct categories.[4]

Aristotle was occupied with several issues, and one of them is the question of what is the most basic, ultimate classification of things and what things are composed of. It appears that Aristotle thought that he had begun such a system of classification with his ten categories. He has told us what kinds of things there are, once and for all. The ten categories are as follows:

> Of things said without combination, each signifies either: (i) a substance (*ousia*); (ii) a quantity; (iii) a quality; (iv) a relative; (v) where; (vi) when; (vii) being in a position; (viii) having; (ix) acting upon; or (x) a being affected. (*Cat*. 1b25–27)[5]

3. Cohen and Reeve.

4. Cohen and Reeve, § 2. See Vern S. Poythress, *The Mystery of the Trinity: A Trinitarian Approach to the Attributes of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2020), chap. 21.

5. Christopher Shields, "Aristotle," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Fall 2020), § 6, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2020/entries/aristotle/.

The Legacy of Aristotle

In the history of philosophy, Aristotle's approach to metaphysics —using various categories—has proved attractive to many. It has been repeatedly affirmed or modified. But in some ways, Aristotle's approach has come on hard times in the last few centuries. The development of natural science has given us a distinct new way of analyzing the things that are out there. And sometimes its results appear to give us something more ultimate than Aristotle, or something at variance with Aristotle.

But in addition to science, we may suggest that it is important to take into account the influence of Immanuel Kant, who developed a philosophy partly in reaction to the skepticism of David Hume.[6] Hume doubted whether we could ever arrive by observation at a confident knowledge of the nature of things. The things that you see in the world could always be different tomorrow. Or at least you could imagine them as being different. And who could say for sure that your imagination was wrong? Hume's approach, if true, made metaphysics impossible. You always had to admit that really, you did not know the nature of things. It was a matter of your best guess. It was a matter of living with constant uncertainty.

Kant thought he had a way of overcoming and moving beyond Hume's skepticism. But there was a price. He had to make a concession, namely, that human observation and human reason could never attain to knowledge of "the thing in itself." According to Kant, the reason for this limitation was that the human mind already had innate fundamental structures of time, space, and causation in its own reception of the world. The mind imposed time, space, and causation on the "raw" input from the world. The human mind was always organizing the world before it reached consciousness. Therefore, what you experienced was not the thing in itself but only phenomena already processed by the mind. The regularities about which Hume worried and doubted could be affirmed. Common sense was in a way preserved. Hume's skepticism was blocked.

6. John M. Frame, *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2015), 199–205, 251–70; James N. Anderson, *David Hume*, Great Thinkers (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2019).

But the regularities were there, not because of the nature of the outside world (the thing in itself), but because of the nature of the innate structures or categories of the human mind.

With this move, Kant made metaphysics impossible. The thing in itself and the world of things in themselves were permanently inaccessible. And since they were inaccessible, it was vain to wish for an ultimate, permanent analysis and classification of them.

There have been a lot of developments in the history of Western philosophy since Kant.[7] Many philosophers in the Western tradition gave up on the thing in itself. You might say that they gave up on metaphysics. But many of them nevertheless did not give up on the goal of finding an ultimate analysis of the world. Kant's own philosophy is such a system. According to Kant, we cannot have the thing in itself, but we can have a system of analysis that tells us what are the limits of human knowledge, what is the nature of knowledge, and why we cannot have the thing in itself. Kant's system offers itself as the most ultimate analysis that we as human beings can have, even though it acknowledges fixed limitations to human knowledge.

The offer of a final system, such as Kant gives us, is a second sense that we might give to the word *metaphysics*. In the first sense of the term, *metaphysics* offers the most general and ultimate analysis of *things*—things in themselves. In the second sense, it offers an ultimate kind of analysis of whatever is analyzable. It offers the most general, overarching view of reality. In the history of Western philosophy, we continue to find instances of the second kind of metaphysics. Empiricism postulates the ultimacy of sense experience. Idealism postulates the ultimacy of ideas. These are both metaphysical claims, in the second kind of metaphysics.

The Bible teaches that God's knowledge is ultimate. The existence of multiple perspectives leads to the conclusion that an offer of ultimate analysis is not in fact ultimate, but at best a perspective. In fact, it is usually a seriously flawed perspective. Though it may offer piecemeal insights, it may also subtly incorporate erroneous assumptions. One such assumption

7. Frame, *History of Western Philosophy*, chaps. 7–12.

is the obvious one, that human knowledge can find an ultimate root in something else besides God.

Key Terms

Aristotle
empiricism
Hume, David
idealism
Kant, Immanuel
metaphysics
thing in itself

Study Questions

1. What is metaphysics?
2. What is most basic in Aristotle's approach to metaphysics?
3. In what sense did Kant claim that metaphysics was impossible?
4. In what sense did Kant offer an alternative metaphysics?

For Further Reading

Frame, John M. *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2015. Chap. 7.

Prayer

Our Lord and God, we pray that you would deliver us from sins in the area of the mind and in the area of ideas, and enable us to sift wisely among the ideas that offer themselves to us in the culture around us.

Appendix C: Abstractions and Attributes

Chapter 14 considered the world as made up of things, events, and relations. This classification has an affinity with a basic classification familiar in semantics, the "TEAR" classification, in which the initials stand for "Thing, Event, Abstraction, and Relation."[1] What is the TEAR classification, and how does it differ from our earlier discussion of things, events, and relations? There are two notable differences.

Inclusive Perspectives and Exclusive Choices for Classification

The most important difference is that chapter 14 considers things, events, and relations as the focus of three distinct *perspectives*. The TEAR classification, by contrast, does not discuss perspectives, but focuses on the organization of meanings of words and semantic units into the most basic classes.

From the standpoint of chapter 14, we can consider the whole world as made up of things. This approach is called the *particle perspective*. And then events and relations come in at a secondary level: the events happen to things and the relations exist between things. This secondary level occurs *within* the particle perspective. Moreover, each event can itself be viewed as a particle, with its own internal unity. Each relation can be viewed as a

1. John Beekman and John Callow, *Translating the Word of God: With Scripture and Topical Indexes* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), 68. Beekman and Callow briefly survey a number of earlier authors with a similar system of classification (68n1).

particle. In a similar manner, the wave perspective treats the whole world as consisting of events or processes. *Everything* is a process. Things and relations come in at a secondary level, as concatenations of events that result in a stable configuration, either of a single whole (thus, a particle) or of a relation between two or more wholes (thus, a relation). Each stable thing (a particle) can be *viewed* as participating in processes over time. Likewise, each relation within a field of relations can be viewed as a particle, with distinctive features, and as a wave, which is involved in processes.

Each of the three perspectives, particle, wave, and field, is a perspective on the whole world. They are complementary perspectives. Ideally, each includes the other two. We do not need to permanently choose between them, though at any one moment we may use one rather than another.

The TEAR classification classifies a particular semantic unit as a designation *either* of a thing or of an event or of an abstraction or of a relation. Ideally, the choice is exclusive. It is one or another. For many words in a dictionary, such a classification is reasonable. The word *horse* designates a thing. The word *speak* designates an event. The word *white* designates an abstraction. The word *under* designates a relation. There may also be words whose classification is not so easy. They "fall between the cracks."[2] For example, the word *runner* in its common meaning designates a thing, a human being or an animal that is running. But there is an underlying event as well, namely, the act of running.

Abstractions

The second notable difference is that the TEAR classification contains four fundamental categories rather than three perspectives. What do we say about the third category in TEAR, that is, the "A," standing for *abstraction*? It does not have an obvious affinity with any one of the three perspectives in chapter 14, the particle perspective, the wave perspective, and the field perspective.

2. Vern S. Poythress, *The Mystery of the Trinity: A Trinitarian Approach to the Attributes of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2020), 231–35.

First, what is an *abstraction*? Beekman and Callow give some examples to help to explain: "Abstractions include qualities and quantities, such as soft, red, round, many, quickly, unexpectedly."[3] In a typical case, we have adjectives or adverbs that function to modify some other central word or words. Adjectives modify nouns, and adverbs modify verbs or adjectives or other adverbs. We can see an affinity with Aristotle's ten categories, as discussed in Appendix B.[4] In the TEAR classification, *things* correspond roughly to substances in Aristotle's classification. *Events* correspond to Aristotle's categories "(ix) acting upon" and "(x) a being affected."[5] *Abstractions* correspond to "(ii) a quantity," and "(iii) a quality," and plausibly include also "(vii) being in a position" and "(viii) having." *Relations* correspond to "(iv) a relative" and probably also "(v) where" and "(vi) when." The boundaries may be somewhat fuzzy.

We can consider both the TEAR classification and Aristotle's system of categories as perspectives on the world. They invite us to focus on certain aspects. And we can learn from using a variety of perspectives, as discussed in chapter 12.[6]

Particle, Wave, and Field Applied

We can also apply the particle, wave, and field perspectives to TEAR itself. According to the particle perspective, the world consists in things. But events, abstractions, and relations have recognizable unity and integrity. So they too can be considered as particles. Things such as horses contrast with other kinds of animals. The contrasts include contrasts in the events in which horses participate. Horses when trained can run through obstacle courses that include jumps. Horses contrast with other animals in height and weight and shape, which can be seen as abstractions. When we look carefully at a horse using the particle perspective, we attempt to

3. Beekman and Callow, *Translating the Word of God*, 68.

4. Poythress, *Mystery of the Trinity*, chap. 21.

5. Christopher Shields, "Aristotle," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Fall 2020), § 6, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2020/entries/aristotle/.

6. Vern S. Poythress, *Symphonic Theology: The Validity of Multiple Perspectives in Theology* (repr., Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2001).

explain what makes a horse a distinct thing. And that leads us to consider events, abstractions, and relations, each of which describes contrasting features of the horse family or of an individual horse.

In a similar way, we can apply the wave perspective to analyzing the world. According to the wave perspective, the world consists in events. This view has correlations with the TEAR classification *event*. But when we go on to describe events in detail, we say that they are events involving particles—things such as horses that participate in the events.

If, now, we wish to correlate abstraction with one of the three perspectives, it is suggestive to correlate it most closely with the field perspective. Consider an example. If we observe that a horse is brown, our observation makes sense because we can think of other instances of the color brown. This horse has, then, a relation to other instances of brown. We can generalize and say that other instances of abstractions can be seen as instances when we see a *relation* among many instances of the occurrence of the abstraction. But as usual, we are considering three interlocking and interpenetrating perspectives. Relations, which are in focus in the field perspective, do not exist except in connection with *things* that enjoy relations. Nor do they exist in our perception except in connection with the experience of the *event* of perception. We *see* brown in an event in our own life.

Affirming TEAR as a Perspective

In a perspectival approach, we may affirm that the TEAR classification into four classes is complementary to the triperspectival triad consisting in particle, wave, and field perspectives. When appreciated as perspectives, they are complementary rather than competitive. We do not claim that either is the exclusive answer to the metaphysics of reality.

Key Terms

field perspective
particle perspective
perspective
semantics
TEAR classification
wave perspective

Study Questions

1. What is the TEAR classification?
2. What is an *abstraction*, and how does the concept of abstraction relate to the particle, wave, and field perspectives?
3. How can one analyze the TEAR classification using the particle perspective, the wave perspective, and the field perspective?
4. In what way might the TEAR classification be seen as an ultimate reality, and what are its deficiencies?

For Further Reading

Beekman, John, and John Callow. *Translating the Word of God: With Scripture and Topical Indexes*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974. Pp. 67–75.

Louw, Johannes P., and Eugene A Nida. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*. Vol. 1. New York: United Bible Societies, 1988. Pp. xv–xix.

Prayer

We thank you, our Lord, for crafting human languages and for the variety of expressions in them. Thank you for crafting the world and giving us language that we can use to talk about the world.

Appendix D: Writings on Reality as Perspectival

Here we provide a brief list of resources for further exploration of the foundations of a Trinitarian approach to the nature of reality—metaphysics, through the use of perspectives.

A. Foundational Theological Truths

1. Trinity

a. Sources: classic Trinitarianism in the history of theology. Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship*, rev. ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2019), may serve as a starting point. Cornelius Van Til's works emphasize the doctrine of the Trinity in a creative way.

b. Formulations of the doctrine of the Trinity.

c. Processions and coinherence.

d. Perspectives deriving from the persons of the Trinity:

Poythress, Vern S. *Knowing and the Trinity: How Perspectives in Human Knowledge Imitate the Trinity*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2018.

e. The Trinity and God's relation to the world:

Poythress, Vern S. *The Mystery of the Trinity: A Trinitarian Approach to the Attributes of God*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2020.

f. The Trinity in the work of Cornelius Van Til and Kenneth L. Pike:

Hibbs, Pierce Taylor. *The Trinity, Language, and Human Behavior: A Reformed Exposition of the Language Theory of Kenneth L. Pike*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2018.

Tipton, Lane G. *The Trinitarian Theology of Cornelius Van Til*. Libertyville, IL: Reformed Forum, 2022.

2. Creator-Creature Distinction

a. Sources: classic theology of God; Cornelius Van Til and John Frame.

b. Frame's square for ontology and for epistemology:

Frame, John M. *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1987. P. 14.

c. Man in the image of God:

Poythress, Vern S. *Redeeming Science: A God-Centered Approach*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006. Chap. 11.

3. Analogies for Trinitarian Action

a. Source:

Poythress, Vern S. *Knowing and the Trinity: How Perspectives in Human Knowledge Imitate the Trinity*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2018. Chaps. 8–9.

b. The analogy with communication.

c. The analogy with a family.

d. The analogy with reflections.

4. Simplicity

a. Sources: classical Christian theism.

b. Attributes as perspectives:

Poythress, Vern S. *The Mystery of the Trinity: A Trinitarian Approach to the Attributes of God*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2020. Chap. 43.

c. *Lex Christi* framework:

Poythress, Vern S. "Introducing the Law of Christ (*Lex Christi*): A Fruitful Framework for Theology and Life." 2023. https://frame-poythress.org/introducing-the-law-of-christ-lex-christi-a-fruitful-framework-for-theology-and-life/.

Yates, Timothy P. *Westminster's Foundations: God's Glory as an Integrating Perspective on Reformed Theology*. Rev. ed. Lancaster, PA: Unveiled Faces Reformed Press, 2023. https://bethoumyvision.net/.

5. God's Decrees

The doctrine of God's decrees, as expounded in Reformed theology, is significant for the purpose of metaphysics because the doctrine links God and who he is with the world and what it is. It explains the world as the product of the execution of God's decrees.

B. Triads of Perspectives

Frame, John M. *The Doctrine of God*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2000.

———. *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008.

———. *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1987.

———. *Perspectives on the Word of God: An Introduction to Christian Ethics*. Reprint, Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1999.

Poythress, Vern S. *Knowing and the Trinity: How Perspectives in Human Knowledge Imitate the Trinity*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2018.

C. Further Pieces Relevant to Metaphysics

Frame, John M. *We Are All Philosophers: A Christian Introduction to Seven Fundamental Questions*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2019.

Hibbs, Pierce Taylor. *God of Words: Essays on God and Language*. N.p.: Truth Ablaze, 2022.

———. *The Speaking Trinity & His Worded World: Why Language Is at the Center of Everything*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2018.

———. *The Trinity, Language, and Human Behavior: A Reformed Exposition of the Language Theory of Kenneth L. Pike*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2018.

Poythress, Vern S. *Knowing and the Trinity: How Perspectives in Human Knowledge Imitate the Trinity*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2018.

——. *Logic: A God-Centered Approach to the Foundation of Western Thought*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013. Part 1.C.

——. *The Mystery of the Trinity: A Trinitarian Approach to the Attributes of God*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2020.
——. *Redeeming Philosophy: A God-Centered Approach to the Big Questions*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014. Part 4.
——. *Symphonic Theology: The Validity of Multiple Perspectives in Theology*. Reprint, Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2001.

D. Triperspectivalism in Breadth

1. Short Introductions

Frame, John M. "A Primer on Perspectivalism (Revised 2008)." https://frame-poythress.org/a-primer-on-perspectivalism-revised-2008/.
——. *Theology in Three Dimensions: A Guide to Triperspectivalism and Its Significance*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2017.
Poythress, Vern Sheridan. "Multiperspectivalism and the Reformed Faith." In *Speaking the Truth in Love: The Theology of John M. Frame*, edited by John J. Hughes, 173–200. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009.

2. Short Book

Poythress, Vern S. *Symphonic Theology: The Validity of Multiple Perspectives in Theology*. Reprint, Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2001.

3. Guidance on Resources

Frame, John M. "Recommended Resources." In *Speaking the Truth in Love: The Theology of John M. Frame*, edited by John J. Hughes, 1063–70. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009.

4. Festschrifts

Festschrift for John M. Frame: *Speaking the Truth in Love: The Theology of John M. Frame*. Edited by John J. Hughes. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009.
Festschrift for Vern S. Poythress: *Redeeming the Life of the Mind: Essays in Honor of Vern Poythress*. Edited by John M. Frame, Wayne Grudem, and John J. Hughes. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017.

5. Bibliographies of John Frame and Vern Poythress

Frame:

https://frame-poythress.org/john-frame-bibliography/.

Frame, John M. "Bibliography." In *Speaking the Truth in Love: The Theology of John M. Frame*, edited by John J. Hughes, 1029–62. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009.

Poythress:

https://frame-poythress.org/vern-poythress-bibliography/.

"Writings of Vern Poythress." In *Redeeming the Life of the Mind: Essays in Honor of Vern Poythress*, edited by John M. Frame, Wayne Grudem, and John J. Hughes, 389–404. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017.

6 . Triperspectivalism in the Thought of Kenneth L. Pike

Hibbs, Pierce Taylor. *The Trinity, Language, and Human Behavior: A Reformed Exposition of the Language Theory of Kenneth L. Pike*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2018.

Pike, Kenneth L. *Language in Relation to a Unified Theory of the Structure of Human Behavior*. 2nd ed. The Hague/Paris: Mouton, 1967.

——. *Linguistic Concepts: An Introduction to Tagmemics*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982.

Poythress, Vern S. *In the Beginning Was the Word: Language—A God-Centered Approach*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009.

Key Terms

metaphysics
perspective
Trinity

For Further Reading

Frame, John M. "A Primer on Perspectivalism (Revised 2008)." https://frame-poythress.org/a-primer-on-perspectivalism-revised-2008/.

Glossary

accomplishment. Executing a work in the world. Accomplishment is one of three **perspectives** on God's **rule** over the world. The other two are **planning** and **application**.

analogy with a family. The analogy between human father and son on the one hand, and the divine Father and Son on the other hand, used to display the **unity** and **diversity** in the **Trinity**. Compare **analogy with communication**; **analogy with reflections**.

analogy with communication. The analogy between human verbal communication of words and the original divine communication, in which the Father speaks the Word (John 1:1). Compare **analogy with a family**; **analogy with reflections**.

analogy with reflections. The analogy between reflections of an original within the world, and the original imaging with the **Trinity**, whereby the second person of the Trinity is the exact **image** of God (Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3). See **persons** (of the Trinity). Compare **analogy with a family**; **analogy with communication**.

antithesis. The opposition and contrast in thought and action between people in rebellion against God and people who are submissive to him, through faith in Christ.

application. Producing change by bringing a work to bear on things or events. Application is one of three **perspectives** on God's **rule** over the world. The other two are **planning** and **accomplishment**.

archetype. The original pattern, according to which a copy or **ectype** is generated and exists.

Aristotelian. See **Aristotle**.

Aristotle. An influential Greek philosopher (384–322 B.C.), a disciple of **Plato**, who put forward an elaborate system of ultimate categories. There are ten categories, the most fundamental of which is the category of **substance**. **Aristotelian**, adj.

atomism. A view of the world that says that the world at its most basic level consists in *atoms*, which are the smallest bits of **matter**. See **Democritus**.

attribute. A characteristic. The term *attribute* is typically used to label characteristics of God, such as his omnipotence and eternity.

authority. An **attribute** of God, describing his innate right to be the source and Ruler. Authority is one of three **perspectives** that John Frame uses in expounding the meaning of lordship. The other two are **control** and **presence**. See **rule**.

beautiful. Having **beauty**. One of ten **attributes** of God, associated with the seventh commandment, within the framework of ***lex Christi***.

beauty. The splendor and **harmony** of God, which is reflected in the world that he made.

blessed. Receiving supreme good. One of ten **attributes** of God, associated with the third commandment, within the framework of ***lex Christi***.

breath. Air emitted by a **speaker**. In the **context** of the **Trinity**, the Bible sometimes uses language about breath to describe the distinct role of the Holy Spirit in the work of God in renewal.

coinherence. The teaching that each of the **persons** of the **Trinity** dwells in the other persons.

common grace. Benefits that God gives to human beings generally ("common"), including those who are still in rebellion against him.

contented. Having peace of mind with what one has. One of ten **attributes** of God, associated with the tenth commandment, within the framework of ***lex Christi***.

context. The environment in which any particular item appears.

contrast. The distinctive nature and **identity** of some item, in comparison with surrounding items. Contrast is one of three aspects that **Kenneth L. Pike** discusses, which belong to a stable item that we can analyze. The other two are **variation** and **distribution**.

control. God's governance of the world and everything in it, so that each event takes place in accordance with his plan. Control is one of three **perspectives** that John Frame uses in expounding the meaning of lordship. The other two are **authority** and **presence**.

create. What God did to bring the world and everything in it into existence (Gen. 1).

creature. Anything created by God. God is distinct from all creatures.

Democritus. An early Greek philosopher (c. 460–370 B.C.) who said that the world consisted in atoms. See **atomism**.

distribution. The sum total of **contexts** in which a particular item can be expected to appear. Distribution is one of three aspects that **Kenneth L. Pike** discusses, which belong to a stable item that we can analyze. The other two are **contrast** and **variation**.

diversity. The property of being many distinct things, differing from one another. Compare **unity**; **unity-in-diversity**.

dynamic. Active, engaging in lively activity. One of ten **attributes** of God, associated with the fourth commandment, within the framework of ***lex Christi***.

dynamic perspective. See **wave perspective**.

ectype. A copy or **image**, according to an original pattern, which is the **archetype**.

empiricism. See **empiricist**.

empiricist. A philosopher who believes that sense experience is the most fundamental layer of reality. **empiricism**, n.

epistemology. The study of knowledge and how we come to know.

essence. In the doctrine of the **Trinity**, the **unity** of the one God. God is one essence, one **substance**.

eternal generation of the Son. A Christian doctrine formulated in the Nicene Creed, which says that the Son is God and has the same nature as the Father, but also that the Father eternally begets or fathers or generates the Son, who is the second person of the **Trinity**. See **persons** (of the Trinity).

ethics. The study of moral standards and the evaluation of human attitudes and behavior according to moral standards.

exclusive claim. A claim that one theory is exclusively the right one, and eliminates all other **perspectives** as faulty or illusory.

expressive perspective. The **perspective** on communication that focuses on the **speaker**'s intention and what he reveals about himself. Compare **informational perspective**; **productive perspective**.

field perspective. The **perspective** used in forming and analyzing theories that focuses on relations when analyzing a particular subject matter. It is one of three such perspectives. The other two are the **particle perspective** and the **wave perspective**. Also called *relational perspective*.

form. In **Platonic** philosophy, an abstract concept to which particular things conform. The form of horseness is the form to which all actual horses conform. In **Aristotelian** philosophy, the form is the structure forming **matter** and making it what it is. A **substance** is composed of form and matter.

fundamental physics. The theories of physics currently regarded as unveiling the most fundamental aspects of physics, and perhaps also the most fundamental aspects of all of reality. The standard model of quantum field theory and the general theory of relativity currently hold this position.

giving. Providing generously. One of ten **attributes** of God, associated with the eighth commandment, within the framework of ***lex Christi***.

glory. Splendor, brightness, magnificence. In the **context** of God, the glory of God displays his character.

harmonious. Being in **harmony**. One of ten **attributes** of God, associated with the fifth commandment, within the framework of ***lex Christi***.

harmony. Intrinsic agreement and peace between diverse aspects. One **attribute** of God is that he is **harmonious**. The **persons** of the **Trinity** are in harmony with each other. See **beauty**.

holiness. The **attribute** of God associated with his ethical purity and the religious purity and separation of **holy** spaces, as in the **tabernacle**.

holy. Ethically pure and separated from contamination. One of ten **attributes** of God, associated with the second commandment, within the framework of ***lex Christi***. See **holiness**.

Hume, **David**. An Enlightenment philosopher (1711–76) known for his skeptical questioning of many commonsense ideas about the world. See **skepticism**.

idealism. The philosophical view that says that the world consists in ideas.

identity. The fact that an item is identifiably the same. The concept of identity goes together with **contrast**.

image. A copy of an original. In the **context** of the **Trinity**, the Son is the image of God the Father. See **analogy with reflections**.

informational perspective. The **perspective** on communication that focuses on the discourse and its informational content. Compare **expressive perspective**; **productive perspective**.

initial conditions. Physical conditions at the start of a physical experiment, or at the start of a calculation predicting future conditions. It is important to note that the initial conditions are never supplied by major physical theories.

intimate. Being close to. One of ten **attributes** of God, associated with the seventh commandment and with **beauty**, within the framework of ***lex Christi***.

Kant, **Immanuel**. An influential German philosopher (1724–1804) of the Enlightenment, who tried to combine affirmations of sense experience and **rationalism**.

levels of existence. Major distinct ways that things exist. There are two levels of existence: (1) God and (2) everything that God made (created things).

lex Christi. "The law of Christ," referring to a framework of ten **perspectives**, based on the Ten Commandments, developed by **Timothy P. Yates**.

light. An **attribute** of God (1 John 1:5); in other **contexts**, a designation for created brightness (Gen. 1:3).

living. Being alive. One of ten **attributes** of God, associated with the sixth commandment, within the framework of ***lex Christi***.

materialist naturalism. The view that the natural world is all that there is (no gods or spirits) and that the world consists at the most ultimate level of particles of **matter**. See **philosophical materialism**.

matter. In **Aristotelian** philosophy, the underlying stuff of which a **substance** is composed.

metaphysics. The study of the fundamental nature of reality and being, and closely related topics.

monism. The view that all is one. It contradicts the Creator-**creature** distinction.

ordinary language. Common language of observation, as distinct from technical **scientific language**.

panentheism. The view that the whole world is *in* God, such that the world is a part of God.

pantheism. The view that the world as a whole is God.

pantheist. A person who believes that the world as a whole is God.

particle perspective. The **perspective** used in forming and analyzing theories that focuses on discrete units, "particles." It is one of three such perspectives. The other two are the **wave perspective** and the **field perspective**. Also called *static perspective*.

personal perspective. One person's view of the world and truth about the world.

persons (of the **Trinity**). The three members of the Trinity: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

perspective. A view of something from somewhere by someone. For specific types of perspectives, see **expressive perspective**; **field perspective**; **informational perspective**; **particle perspective**; **personal perspective**; **productive perspective**; **spatial perspective**; **thematic perspective**; **wave perspective**.

philosophical materialism. The view that the world consists in **matter** in motion, and nothing more. See **materialist naturalism**.

Pike, **Kenneth L**. A Christian linguist (1912–2000) who developed a triperspectival approach to language and language analysis.

planning. Laying out in one's mind what one will do. Planning is one of three **perspectives** on God's **rule** over the world. The other two are **accomplishment** and **application**.

Plato. An influential Greek philosopher (c. 328–347 B.C.), of whom **Aristotle** was a disciple. Plato taught that abstract **forms** were the ultimate source for the world around us. **Platonic**, adj. **Platonism**, n.

Platonic; **Platonism**. See **Plato**.

postmodern contextualism. One of a complex of postmodern views that says that what can be perceived as true is always relative to a **context** in language and culture. Universal truth, if it exists, is not accessible.

presence. God's being right there at every time and place. Presence is one of three **perspectives** that John Frame uses in expounding the meaning of lordship. The other two are **authority** and **control**.

priest. A specially **holy** person appointed to mediate between common people and the **presence** of God. The Old Testament priests reflect the **holiness** and **beauty** of God.

process philosophy. A philosophy that says that the world at its most basic level consists in events. Things are composed of concatenations of events.

productive perspective. The **perspective** on communication that focuses on the actual effects of the communication on its recipients (what it produces in them). Compare **expressive perspective**; **informational perspective**.

rationalism. Trust in the ability of human reason to guide us and find out the nature of the world, in a way that ignores or flees the **presence** of God and his word. See **Kant, Immanuel**; **word of God**.

relational perspective. See **field perspective**.

relationality. The property of having a relation or being in relations. Relationality is one of three aspects that belong together as **perspectives**. The other two are **unity** and **diversity**. See **field perspective**.

relativism. The philosophical view that says that there is no absolute truth, but only "truths" belonging to individuals or groups, and that there is no way of rising above the **diversity** in which one person's "truth" contradicts another's.

rule. Governance. God rules the world and everything in it. See **authority**.

scientific language. Specially crafted language used in various sciences, in contrast to **ordinary language** in common observations.

semantics. The study of meanings in language, especially the meanings of words.

simple. The **attribute** of God that says that he is not divisible into parts. Also, God's attributes cannot be separated from each other. Each involves the others.

skepticism. The view that truth does not exist or that we cannot access it. We cannot know anything. See **Hume**, **David**.

spatial perspective. The view of a scene from a particular spatial location.

speaker. Someone who utters verbal discourse. The **archetype** or original for a speaker is God the Father, who speaks the Word (John 1:1). See **breath**; **expressive perspective**; **speech**; **word of God**.

speech. What someone says. The **archetype** or original for speech is the eternal Word (John 1:1). See **word of God**.

static perspective. See **particle perspective**.

structuralism. A view that focuses its analysis on structures and relations. It is akin to the **relational perspective**. But as a philosophy and a method, it is often associated with the claim that the world at its most basic level consists in relations, and that everything else is built up out of these relations.

subsistence. In the doctrine of the **Trinity**, the **persons** in the Trinity.

substance. In Aristotle's **metaphysics**, an individual thing, such as a dog or an oak tree, composed of **form** and **matter**. In the doctrine of the **Trinity**, the **unity** of the one God. God is one substance, one **essence**.

supreme. Absolute and superior to everything else. One of ten **attributes** of God, associated with the first commandment, within the framework of ***lex Christi***.

tabernacle. The special holy tent that God instructed Moses to make as a symbolic dwelling place for God in the midst of the people of Israel. The tabernacle reflected the **holiness** and **beauty** and **harmony** of God.

TEAR classification. A framework of classification in **semantics**, which classifies words or concepts into four distinct fundamental categories: *thing* (T), *event* (E), *abstraction* (A), and *relation* (R). The word *dog* designates a thing; the word *go* designates an event; the word *good* designates an abstraction; and the word *beside* designates a relation.

Ten Commandments. The ten directives given by God from Mount Sinai in Exodus 20, and repeated in Deuteronomy 5.

Thales. An early Greek philosopher (c. 624–546 B.C.) who said that the fundamental nature of things was water.

thematic perspective. The view of a particular area of thought arising from seeing that area as an expression of a fixed, prechosen theme.

theophany. A visible appearance of God.

thing in itself. In **Immanuel Kant**'s philosophy, an object that actually exists in the outside world—independent of our perceptions.

Trinitarian. See **Trinity**.

Trinity. The biblical teaching that God is one God who is three persons. **Trinitarian**, adj. See **persons** (of the Trinity).

truthful. Being in accord with God's knowledge. One of ten **attributes** of God, associated with the ninth commandment, within the framework of ***lex Christi***.

ultimate reality. The nature of the deepest level of existing things. Philosophical views vary on what constitutes ultimate reality.

unchangeability. An **attribute** of God that designates his being the same God with the same character, throughout all ages.

unity. The property of being one, being unified. Compare **diversity**; **unity-in-diversity**.

unity-in-diversity. The pattern in God, in which the **unity** of God is equally ultimate with the **diversity** of three persons. This pattern is reflected at the level of the **creature** in the things that God has made. See **persons** (of the **Trinity**).

variation. The range of variety belonging to a particular item. Variation is one of three aspects that **Kenneth L. Pike** discusses, which belong to a stable item that we can analyze. The other two are **contrast** and **distribution**.

wave perspective. The **perspective** used in forming and analyzing theories that focuses on dynamic development. It is one of three such perspectives. The other two are the **particle perspective** and the **field perspective**. Also called *dynamic perspective*.

word of God. What God says. This includes the Bible and God's utterances that rule the world (Pss. 33:6, 9; 147:15–18). See **speaker**; **speech**.

Yates, **Timothy P**. A Reformed theologian, teacher, and counselor who originally developed the theological and perspectival framework of ***lex Christi***, based on the **Ten Commandments**. See **perspective**.

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