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Postmodern Trinitarian Philosophy: A Multiperspectival Approach

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

POSTMODERN TRINITARIAN PHILOSOPHY:
A MULTIPERSPECTIVAL APPROACH

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
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DISSERTATION ACCEPTANCE CERTIFICATE

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**POSTMODERN TRINITARIAN PHILOSOPHY:
A MULTIPERSPECTIVAL APPROACH**

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ABSTRACT

To fulfill its missional imperative, the 21st Century, Western Church must engage a postmodern culture. To facilitate such engagement the following manuscript will relate Trinitarian theology to postmodern philosophy by using a Trinitarian grammar known as *multiperspectivalism*. In particular, multiperspectivalism will be used to integrate Trinitarian theology with the three *loci* of postmodern philosophy: non-foundational epistemology, socially constructive linguistics, and holistic relational ontology. As these various *loci* imply, postmodernism is characterized by a movement toward relationality in epistemology, linguistics, and ontology. It is precisely this emphasis on relationality that produces the resonance between postmodern philosophy and Trinitarian theology.

After outlining this integrative approach in Chapter 1, Chapter 2 will provide an extended discussion of the Biblical basis and historical development of Trinitarian theology. Chapter 3 will then introduce the Trinitarian grammar known as multiperspectivalism. According to multiperspectivalism, the divine perichoresis gives rise to a perichoretic interplay of three philosophical perspectives: existential perspective (subject); situational perspective (object), and normative perspective (law). Since these three perspectives continually arise within the diverse contexts of epistemology, linguistics, and ontology, multiperspectivalism emerges as a Trinitarian grammar capable of analyzing and synthesizing philosophical problems in terms of a structured threeness of subjectivity, objectivity, and normativity. Through the use of this grammar, Trinitarian theology will first be explicated for each of the philosophical *loci* in Chapters 4-6 (analysis), and then the *loci* themselves will be arranged within a multiperspectival framework in Chapter 7 to yield a triad of triads (synthesis). The result will be a

postmodern Trinitarian philosophy that relates the heart of Christian theology to the heart of postmodernity, thereby achieving an inter-contextualization.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: POSTMODERN CONTEXTUALIZATION

The transition from the modern era to the postmodern era poses a grave challenge to the church in its mission to its own next generation. Confronted by this new context, we dare not fall into the trap of wistfully longing for a return to the early modernity that gave evangelicalism its birth, for we are called to minister not to the past but to the contemporary context, and our contemporary context is influenced by postmodern ideas.

Postmodernism poses certain dangers. Nevertheless, it would be ironic—indeed, it would be tragic—if evangelicals ended up as the last defenders of the now dying modernity. To reach people in the new postmodern context, we must set ourselves to the task of deciphering the implications of postmodernism for the gospel.

Imbued with the vision of God’s program for the world, we must claim the new postmodern context for Christ by embodying the Christian faith in ways that the new generation can understand.

Stanley Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*

As indicated above,¹ God has placed the 21st Century Western church within a postmodern context. For this reason the church’s missional imperative (Mt. 28:18-20) calls it to familiarize itself with postmodern thought and culture in order to contextualize the Gospel. While some may fear postmodern ideas and long for a return to modernity, God calls the church to move forward into His “preferred and promised future.”² The church does not have the option of choosing the time and the culture in which it will minister. These choices have already been determined by God Himself. What the church does have the option of choosing, however, is whether or not it will remain faithful to its calling in the circumstances in which God has placed it.

Yet such a manner of speaking may cause the reader to paint an unduly negative picture of postmodernism. As the following manuscript will show, postmodernism is a

¹ Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), 10.

² Patrick R. Keifert, *We Are Here Now: A New Missional Era* (Eagle, ID: Allelon Publishing, 2006).

fertile field with great spiritual potential. Compared to the rationalism and empiricism of modernity, its worship of science, and its rank individualism; postmodernism is a highly relational and personal alternative which embraces mystery and paradox and therefore has an affinity with ancient spirituality.³ For this reason postmodernism should prove highly resonant with a central Christian mystery, the doctrine of the Trinity. What are needed are theologians capable of building bridges by translating Christianity into the postmodern idiom, and vice versa.

THE PROBLEM

To this end the following manuscript represents a work of inter-contextualization. First, it seeks to contextualize Trinitarian theology within three major *loci* of postmodern philosophy. However, since this first step alone would at best produce a Trinitarian *postmodern philosophy*, it also seeks to contextualize postmodern philosophy within a Trinitarian framework, thereby producing a postmodern *Trinitarian philosophy*.

In affecting this work of inter-contextualization, three components will define the specific problem to be solved. First, following the impulse of the late Stanley Grenz, the argument will *proceed from* the motive of making the Trinity central to all of life and thought.⁴ Second, to apply this Trinitarian vision, the argument will *proceed toward* three philosophical targets which Nancey Murphy has identified as the *loci* of postmodern philosophy: non-foundational epistemology, socially constructive linguistics, and holistic

³ Robert Webber, *Ancient-Future Faith: Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1999).

⁴ Stanley J. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001).

relational ontology.⁵ Finally, to connect Grenz' vision with Murphy's targets, the argument will *proceed by means of* Van Til's Trinitarian theology. So understood, the present manuscript seeks to bring Grenz, Murphy, and Van Til into conversation as the respective motive, end, and means of a common project.

METHODOLOGY

The above project will be pursued in a manner consistent with the theological methodology of Stanley Grenz according to which systematic theology involves a 3-way conversation between Biblical exegesis, the history of doctrine, and the embedding cultural context.⁶ Yet to solve the specific problem outlined above, a Trinitarian grammar will be required in order to inter-relate Trinitarian theology with this embedding context. This grammatical framework will be supplied by yet a fourth conversation partner John M. Frame.

John Frame is a former student of Van Til's and is also Van Til's foremost living interpreter. In addition to studying with Van Til, however, Frame also studied with the Yale theologian George Lindbeck, the father of postliberalism. Steeped in Anglo-American philosophy of language with heavy doses of the post-critical philosophers Kuhn, Polanyi, and Wittgenstein, Frame is able to communicate Van Til's theology in a culturally resonant way. In particular, building upon the insights of Van Til, Lindbeck, and others, Frame has developed a Trinitarian grammar known as *multiperspectivalism* or *triperspectivalism*. This grammar provides a means of organizing philosophical problems

⁵ Nancey Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism: How Modern and Postmodern Philosophy Set the Theological Agenda* (Valley Forge, Penn.: Trinity Press International, 1996), 1-3, 152, 153.

⁶ Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 24, 25.

within a Trinitarian framework of three interpenetrating perspectives: existential (subjective), situational (objective), and normative (deontological).⁷ For example, in ethics the existential perspective concerns the purity of the motive; the situational perspective concerns the utility of the ends within a particular context, and the normative perspective concerns the lawfulness of the means employed. Because these perspectives are interdependent, multiperspectivalism is non-foundational grammar suited to the articulation of complex truth.⁸ For this reason it serves as an ideal grammar for translating Trinitarian categories into the postmodern idiom, and vice versa (inter-contextualization).

On the basis of this discussion, the dimensions of the overall problem become clear. The goal is to achieve inter-contextualization by using Grenz's theological method in conjunction with Frame's enabling grammar. To this end, the present manuscript will pursue the following chapter sequence. In Chapter 2 the Biblical basis and historical development of Trinitarian theology will be presented to provide a context for the subsequent discussion. In Chapter 3 multiperspectivalism will be set forth as a Trinitarian grammar ideally suited to the problems of postmodern philosophy. In Chapters 4-6, Trinitarian theology will then be successively contextualized within the three target areas identified by Nancey Murphy: non-foundational epistemology, socially constructive linguistics, and holistic relational ontology. Finally, in Chapter 7 multiperspectivalism will be used to integrate the material from Chapters 4-6 by contextualizing the three preceding *loci* within a single Trinitarian framework. So understood, Chapters 4-6 will

⁷ John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, A Theology of Lordship (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Pub., 1987), 73-75.

⁸ In this regard, the non-foundational status of multiperspectivalism follows from the fact that the three perspectives are not only interdependent but also fail to yield indubitable truth even in combination and moreover depend upon the presuppositions of Trinitarian faith to recognize their perichoretic interaction.

constitute the centrifugal movement toward cultural contextualization, and Chapter 7 will constitute the centripetal movement of theological integration which will complete the project of inter-contextualization.

CHAPTER 2

THE TRINITY AND THE EMERGENCE OF COVENANT ONTOLOGY

Whenever the story of theology in the last hundred years is told, the rediscovery of the doctrine of the Trinity that sprouted and then came to full bloom during the eight decades following the First World War must be given center stage, and the rebirth of Trinitarian theology must be presented as one of the most far-reaching theological developments of the century.

Stanley Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God: The Trinity in Contemporary Theology*

A striking feature of 20th and 21st Century theology is the resurgence of the doctrine of the Trinity from near oblivion to center stage. Having been central to the theological construction of the early church and the speculative theology of the Middle Ages, the doctrine of the Trinity was nearly eclipsed in the modern era, owing to the rise of Enlightenment rationalism. Given this fact, it is interesting that the Trinitarian renaissance closely coincides with the dawning of the postmodern age. In this regard, it cannot be claimed that postmodernism is a direct cause of the Trinitarian recovery since Barth's work on the Trinity antedates the beginning of the postmodern era by at least a generation. Nevertheless, since postmodernism provides an environment in which Trinitarian theology can flourish, it is at least a contributing cause if not a direct one. At a minimum, postmodernism has "added fuel to the fire" in a way that has both sustained and accelerated the Trinitarian resurgence noted by Grenz above.¹

The reason for this resonance between postmodernism and Trinitarian theology arises from the fact that both are relational views. Trinitarian theology expounds the relationships between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit within God's being and the manifestation of these relationships in God's external interaction with creation.

¹ Stanley J. Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God: The Trinity in Contemporary Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 1.

Moreover, as will be developed later in this book, postmodernism is itself relational, being characterized by non-foundational epistemology, socially constructive linguistics, and a relational holistic ontology which ranges from the cosmic to the subatomic scales. Consequently, far from being intrinsically hostile to Christianity, the postmodern environment actually provides an opening for Trinitarian views. To this end, it will be the purpose of this book to show that the doctrine of the Trinity provides the metaphysical basis for postmodern epistemology, linguistics, and ontology.

In pursuit of this larger goal, the focus of the present chapter will be to set forth the doctrine of the Trinity as a basis for its application to specific problems in subsequent chapters. In this regard, the Biblical basis for this doctrine will first be examined, followed by a comparatively longer discussion of its historical development. As will be argued below, the doctrine of the Trinity is latent in the New Testament, but not theologically explicated therein. Thus, the Trinity arises as a New Testament problem which could only be fully worked out as the church's confrontation with heretical movements forced it to grapple with the Bible's Trinitarian implications in order to translate these implications into the philosophical idiom of Greco-Roman culture. In this regard, the current postmodern context provides a similar challenge and opportunity.

THE TRINITY AS A NEW TESTAMENT PROBLEM

In his exhaustive examination of the New Testament evidence for the doctrine of the Trinity, Arthur W. Wainwright argues that the Trinity arises in the New Testament as a theological problem to which the doctrinal development of the church provides the later answer. In so far, therefore, as the answer is implicit in the question itself, and in so far as

the New Testament data reveal a conscious grappling with the basic question, the doctrine of the Trinity may be said to emerge from the New Testament itself.

It is often supposed that the doctrine of the Trinity arose after the New Testament had been written, and that it is a speculative doctrine, which is not essential to the Christian message. This book has been written in the conviction that the problem of the Trinity was being raised and answered in the New Testament times, and had its roots in the worship, experience, and thought of first-century Christianity. The word “problem” has been preferred to the word “doctrine”, because there is no formal statement of the doctrine of the Trinity in the New Testament. But in so far as a doctrine is an answer to a problem, the doctrine of the Trinity emerges in the New Testament. The problem of the Trinity is raised there, and an attempt is made to answer it.²

With regard to content Wainwright identifies the divinity of Christ as the core of the Trinitarian problem since this problem arose from an attempt to reconcile the monotheistic faith of Israel with the deity of Christ.

The belief in the divinity of Christ raised the problem of his relation to God. If he could be called God and Lord, if he could act as judge, creator, and saviour, if he could be the object of prayer and worship, and be ascribed divine titles, what was his relation to the God whom he himself worshipped and to whom men had access through him? This is the core of the Trinitarian problem.³

Consistent with the centrality of Christ to the Trinitarian problem, the New Testament contains far more data relating to the divinity of Christ than to that of the Holy Spirit. With regard to the former, Wainwright examines the Biblical evidence in 7 chapters entitled: “Jesus Christ is God,” “Jesus Christ is Lord,” “The Worship of Jesus Christ,” “Jesus and Judgment,” “Jesus and the Creation,” “Jesus and Salvation,” and “Father and Son.” With regard to the Holy Spirit, the data is grouped into a mere two chapters entitled: “The Nature of the Spirit and His Relation to Christ,” and “The Spirit and God.” Finally, with regard to the Trinity proper, Wainwright includes two further

² Arthur William Wainwright, *The Trinity in the New Testament* (London,: S.P.C.K., 1962), vii.

³ Ibid., 171.

chapters entitled: “The Threefold Formulae,” and “The Trinitarian Thought of the New Testament.” This thorough listing of Wainwright’s chapters has been given to provide some indication of the categories of Biblical evidence which one could examine in setting forth the doctrine of the Trinity. Due to the limited space of the current section, however, it will not be possible to reproduce Wainwright’s exhaustive treatment. Here only some of the most obvious passages will be examined in order to provide the essential data within a short space.

With regard to the divinity of Christ, a key passage is the prologue to John’s Gospel:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God. The word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. John testifies concerning him. He cries out, saying, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.’” From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known. (John 1:1-18)

In addition to simultaneously identifying Christ with God and distinguishing Christ from Him, this passage also testifies to His role in creation, revelation, and redemption.

Edmund Fortman writes:

The Prologue tells a great deal about the Word. It indicates His eternal pre-existence, 'In the beginning was the Word'; His personal distinction from the Father, 'the Word was with God,' 'the only Son who is in the bosom of the Father'; His divinity or divine nature, 'the Word was God'; His creative function, 'all things were made through him'; His incarnation, 'and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us'; and His revelatory function, 'No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known.'⁴

With regard to the deity of Christ, His pre-existence, His role in creation, and His relation to the Father, the following passages are also significant:

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. (Phil 2:5-11)

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. (Col 1:15-20)

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact

⁴ Edmund J. Fortman, *The Triune God: A Historical Study of the Doctrine of the Trinity* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), 25.

representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. (Heb 1:1-3)

With regard to the deity of the Holy Spirit, two passages from John's Gospel are significant in establishing His divine origin, His distinction from the Father and the Son, and His procession from the Father and the Son:

"If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him." Then Judas (not Judas Iscariot) said, "But, Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?" Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me. All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. . ." (John 14: 15-26)

"Now I am going to him who sent me, yet none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' Because I have said these things, you are filled with grief. But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned. I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you. (John 16: 5-15)

With regard to the Trinitarian significance of these passages, B.B. Warfield writes:

... It would be impossible to speak more distinctly of three who were yet one. The Father, Son and Spirit are constantly distinguished from one another—the Son makes request of the Father, and the Father in response to this request gives an Advocate, “another” than the Son, who is sent in the Son’s name. And yet the oneness of these three is so kept in sight that the coming of this “another Advocate” is spoken of without embarrassment as the coming of the Son Himself (vs. 18-21), and indeed as the coming of the Father and the Son (ver. 23). There is a sense, then, in which, when Christ goes away, the Spirit comes in His stead; there is also a sense in which, when the Spirit comes, Christ comes in Him; and with Christ’s coming the Father comes too. There is a distinction between the Persons brought into view; and with it an identity among them; for both of which allowance must be made.⁵

... Here the Spirit is sent by the Son, and comes in order to complete and apply the Son’s work, receiving His whole commission from the Son—not, however, in derogation of the Father, because when we speak of the things of the Son, that is to speak of the things of the Father.⁶

With regard to the deity of the Holy Spirit, additional evidence stems from His role in the conception (Luke 1:35) and resurrection (Rom. 8:11) of Christ, His intercession on behalf of the saints (Rom 8:26), His searching of the deep things of God (1 Cor. 2:10), and His role in the inspiration of scripture (2 Pet. 1:21). Moreover, in view of the fact that the Spirit’s initial hovering over the waters at creation and the tongues of fire at Pentecost are both manifestations of the same Shekinah phenomenon, the attribution of Pentecost to the activity of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4) establishes the Spirit’s role in creation retroactively. This is especially true in light of the fact that the Johannine prologue identifies Christ as the creative Word.

On the basis of this Biblical data, the elements of the later doctrine of the Trinity are seen to be present. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are each seen to be God and yet

⁵ Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *Biblical Doctrines*, 10 vols., The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991), 151.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 152.

to be different from one another. These differences manifest themselves in the fact that the Father sends the Son, and the two together send the Holy Spirit. Later theology will state that the Father is Himself *ingenerate* and that He *generates* the Son. Moreover, the Father and the Son will be said to *spirate* (i.e. breathe) the Holy Spirit.

On a more technical level, the doctrine of the Trinity will later be summarized by the 5-4-3-2-1 rule. It will be said that in God's being, there are 5 basic notions: *ingenerateness* (Father), *paternity* (Father), *filiation* (Son), *active spiration* (Father and Son), and *procession* or *passive spiration* (Holy Spirit). Of these 5 basic notions, it will be said that 4 are relations of opposition: *paternity*, *filiation*, *active spiration*, and *procession* or *passive spiration*. 3 of these relations will be said to be person constituting: *paternity* (Father), *filiation* (Son), and *procession* or *passive spiration* (Holy Spirit). Moreover, since the Father is Himself ingenerate, 2 of these persons will be said to be constituted by relations of origin: *generation* (Son) and *procession* or *passive spiration* (Holy Spirit). And finally, all of these notions, relations, and persons will be said to pertain to a single essence constituting 1 divine being. As regards God's internal being, *generation* and *procession* will be referred to generically as the two *processions*. With regard to the economy of God's external operations, these same two relations will be referred to as the *missions* of the Son and the Holy Spirit.

From this discussion it may be clearly seen how the later doctrine will emerge smoothly from the Biblical data and also incorporate many technical elements not strictly demanded by these data themselves. For instance, the concepts of *substance* and *person* will be introduced to guard the oneness and threeness of God. Additionally, the concepts of *generation* and *procession* will be introduced in an attempt to distinguish the internal

activities of the Son and the Holy Spirit. As will be shown below, these additions will be made to clarify and safeguard orthodox belief in the church's struggle against heresy.

While the New Testament does not supply such technical formulations, it does coordinate the three persons within triadic formulae which provide additional evidence for the emergence of the Trinitarian problem within the New Testament itself.

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. (2 Cor. 13:14)

There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. (1 Cor. 12:4-6)

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to God's elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood. . . (1 Pet. 1:1, 2)

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. (Matt. 28:19, 20)

As these verses show, the experience of God's work through Christ and in the power of the Spirit left a strong triadic impression upon the apostles, even apart from systematic reflection. With regard to the last of these verses, however, scholars have debated whether the words are authentic to Matthew's Gospel and especially to Jesus Himself. Regardless of how these questions are answered, there can be no doubt that these verses reflect a Trinitarian tradition which arose rapidly within the church because it bore a direct connection to Jesus' teaching and example.

In these verses, the three persons are shown to share a single name, a fact which is pregnant with covenantal implications. First, since God exists as a triune community, a

single name (reference) implies that God is an internally covenanted being.⁷ In fact, God *is* covenant Himself. Second, since the Biblical concept of naming is descriptive as well as referential, the threefoldness of this name describes the covenantal being of God, making the name itself covenantal. Third, due to the greater fullness of New Testament revelation, Yahweh, the mysterious name of the covenant making God, thus emerges as itself a covenantal reality. Finally, since baptism replaces circumcision as the covenant sign, the command of Jesus is thus to bring people into the covenant of the God who is Himself covenant. While it is true that these implications are only latent in the text and have yet to be fully worked out, the fact remains that the Trinitarian problem emerges within the New Testament and with it the related problem of covenant ontology.

PROGRESS THROUGH DOCTRINAL CONFLICT: STOIC AND PLATONIC TRAJECTORIES

As mentioned above, the Trinitarian implications of the New Testament were explicated in the church's confrontation with religious, philosophical, and heretical movements. Such movements can be categorized as polytheistic, dualistic, or monistic, depending upon their tendency to emphasize the many, the two, or the one.⁸ Because Christianity retained the monotheistic faith of Judaism, polytheism was never a serious threat. The trick was to integrate this monotheistic faith together with the divinity of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit without succumbing to dualism and monism in the process.⁹ The difficulty, however, was that clarifying its Trinitarian faith and setting it

⁷ Ralph Allan Smith, *A Covenantal Ontology of the Triune God* (accessed 8 December, 2006); available from <http://www.berith.org>.

⁸ William J. Hill, *The Three-Personed God: The Trinity as a Mystery of Salvation* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1982), 8, 34.

⁹ John Norman Davidson Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 5th rev. ed. (London A.: C. Black, 1977), 87.

over against the various heretical movements required the church to use the philosophical idiom of the Greco-Roman culture. In this regard, the two viable alternatives were a Stoicizing Platonism and a Platonizing Stoicism.¹⁰ However, since Platonism and Stoicism were themselves based upon the respective ontologies of dualism and monism, the church was forced to use the very philosophies against which it was contending to express its own doctrine. While the church was largely successful in transforming this philosophical language to carry Biblical meanings, it was not able to completely escape the alien conceptual frameworks presupposed by these philosophical traditions. Thus, in the church's approach to Trinitarian theology, two basic approaches emerged in which Platonism and Stoicism set the respective parameters. Moreover, since these two approaches have determined the respective frameworks for Eastern and Western Trinitarian theology, they have left a lasting mark to this very day.

THE STOIC TRAJECTORY

The Stoic trajectory commences with the Apologists and continues through Irenaeus and Tertullian, eventually setting the parameters for Augustine's work, even though Augustine philosophy was Neo-Platonist. With regard to the Apologists, Justin Martyr^{11, 12} was a pagan philosopher who was converted to Christianity around 130 A.D. and was martyred around 165. In his attempt to make Christianity understandable to Greco-Roman culture and to defend it against the charge of worshipping a man (i.e. against atheism), Justin set forth an approach which would come to be known as *Logos*

¹⁰ Ibid., 14-19.

¹¹ Ibid., 95-104.

¹² William G. Rusch, *The Trinitarian Controversy*, ed. William G. Rusch, trans. William G. Rusch, 5 vols., Sources of Early Christian Thought (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 3-6.

Christology. Using the Stoic categories of immanent word (*logos endiathetos*) and emitted or expressed word (*logos prophorikos*), Justin argued that the Word was eternally immanent within the Father, yet also distinct so that the two could communicate eternally. For the sake of creation, however, the Father emitted His Word at a point in time, yet in such a way that there was no division of substance between them. Since the *Word* became the *Son* only at this point of emission, Justin's Logos Christology involved a *two-stage theory of the logos*. Although Justin believed in the Holy Spirit due to his allegiance to the church's rule of faith, he did not integrate the Holy Spirit into his Logos Christology. Thus, while Justin's system provided for a Father and His Word that were consubstantial and eternally distinct, its weakness lay in the temporal emission of the Word, the two-stage theory of the logos, and its inability to incorporate the Holy Spirit.

Irenaeus^{13, 14} was a bishop in Lyons, France toward the end of the 2nd Century. While operating within the basic framework of the Logos Christology, Irenaeus rejected the two-stage theory of the logos, referring to the Word as Son even before His temporal emission. Moreover, he included the Holy Spirit within the Godhead Himself. Irenaeus was contending with Gnostic dualists who argued that God could only create the world indirectly through a chain of intermediaries since God's ineffable oneness could not bear contact with material plurality. In contrast, Irenaeus argued that God created directly through His Son and His Spirit who were eternally immanent within His being and then emitted in time as His "two hands". This external emission of the Son and Spirit was held to occur without division of substance and to reveal the eternal distinctions latent within God's being. Irenaeus referred to these external operations through the word "economy".

¹³ Kelly, 104-108.

¹⁴ Rusch, 6, 7.

Thus, like Justin and the Logos Christology generally, Irenaeus' theology has the weakness of the temporal emission of the Word and the Holy Spirit. It represents an advance over Justin's system, however, in that it rejected the two-stage theory of the logos, integrated the Holy Spirit within its system, and referred to God's external operations as an economy. As a result of this last point, Irenaeus' version of Logos Christology would come to be known as *economic Trinitarianism*.

Tertullian^{15, 16} was a theologian who was born and lived in Carthage in Northern Africa. He had legal training and was heavily steeped in Stoic philosophy. Like Irenaeus Tertullian also opposed dualism, arguing that God created the world directly. However, due to fears that the Logos Christology was dividing the Godhead and heading toward tritheism, there arose a monarchian reaction in the Western church against which Tertullian also had to contend. One version of this *monarchianism* referred to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as merely different names applied to the same God at different times. A more sophisticated version known as *Sabellianism* referred to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as merely different external operations or external modes of the same God. As a result of these several movements, Tertullian found himself in an intellectual vice in which he had to defend the traditional faith against both dualism and monistic monarchianism, all the while using the philosophical tools of monistic Stoicism. A tall order indeed! Tertullian rose to this challenge by simultaneously accentuating the substantial unity of the Godhead and the distinctions of the persons. In so doing he introduced the technical words, "substance," "person," and "trinitas" into Trinitarian

¹⁵ Kelly, 110-115.

¹⁶ Rusch, 9-11.

theology. Since he thereby established the framework within which Western Trinitarian theology would develop, he became known as the father of Latin theology.

According to Tertullian's conception, a single Godhead is disposed into the economy of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for the purposes of creation and redemption. However, since this disposition occurs without division of substance, the personal distinctions revealed in the economy are held to antedate the economy and thus to pertain to the Godhead itself. So understood, Tertullian's theology retains the weakness of the temporal emission characteristic of Logos Christology. Moreover, since he held that the Word only becomes the Son at the point of emission, his theology marks a regression to a two-stage theory of the logos. Aside from these defects, however, it maintains Irenaeus' concept of the economy and represents a great advance in that it introduces the conceptual framework for Western Trinitarian theology.

THE PLATONIC TRAJECTORY

While Tertullian was developing Western theology within the framework of his Stoic categories, an Alexandrian theologian named Origen^{17, 18} was transposing Trinitarian theology into a Platonic key. Alexandria had long been a hotbed of Platonic speculation, and two centuries prior to Origen, an Alexandrian Jew named Philo had sought to express the Jewish faith within Platonic categories as well. Origen sought to do the same for Christianity, using the categories of Middle Platonism.

Classical Platonism was dualist. The forms constituted a spiritual world of static being which stood over against the material world of temporal becoming. Chief among

¹⁷ Kelly, 126-136.

¹⁸ Rusch, 13-17.

these forms was the Good or the One which drew the rest of the forms into a unity.

Middle Platonism sought to modify this scheme by substituting Aristotle's supreme Mind for the Good or the One. This difference gave Middle Platonism a more theological cast since the supreme Mind produced the forms and unified them by its thinking. For Neo-Platonism, by contrast, an ineffable One produced the supreme Mind which in turn produced the World Soul in a descending chain of causation. In comparison to classical Platonism, Middle and Neo-Platonism were both emanationist. Since Neo-Platonism was developed by Origen's contemporary Plotinus, it had not yet become popular in Origen's lifetime. Thus, Origen thought within the categories of Middle, and not Neo-Platonism.

In this regard, Origen believed that God could not be God without being a creator. Consequently, since God was eternal, he necessarily created eternally and therefore eternally generated His Son as His mediator and instrument of creation. Thus, in contrast to the Stoic distinction between an immanent and an emitted Word, which characterized Logos Christology, Origen argued that the Son is eternally generated and thus eternally expressed. In a similar manner the Holy Spirit is eternally derived from the Father through the Son. With regard to the scope of their respective activities, the Father affects the entire creation; the Son affects rational creatures only, and the Holy Spirit affects only those who are regenerate. So understood, Origen's doctrine of the Trinity is emanationist and hierarchical. While the three persons share a common origin (the Father being the origin of Himself as well as the others), it is uncertain from Origen's writings whether their union is merely one of origin, process, and will alone or also one of substance. If there is any substantial unity, however, it would seem to be progressively attenuated due to the reduction in the scope of activity as one moves down the chain of emanations. On

either interpretation Origen's theology reveals a strongly pluralist strain in that he refers to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as distinct subsistences (*hypostases*). In comparison to the Logos Christology, Origen's theology had the advantage of referring to the Son and the Holy Spirit as being eternally, rather than temporally expressed. It had the disadvantage, however, of failing to guard the substantial unity of the persons.

THE APPARENT CONVERGENCE AND SUBSEQUENT DIVERGENCE OF THE TWO TRAJECTORIES

For orthodox Trinitarianism to develop, it would be necessary to combine the eternal generation of Origen's system with the substantial unity of Logos Christology. An occasion for such a synthesis was provided by the heretic Arius.^{19, 20} Arius translated Origen's eternal subordinationism into the temporal sphere by confusing two terms which are nearly identical in Greek: *agenetos* (ingenerate) and *agenetos* (without beginning). Origen had stated that the Son was *eternally* generate of the Father and thus without a temporal beginning. By contrast, Arius argued that ingenerateness is essential to Godhood since generateness necessarily implies a temporal beginning. Consequently, since the Son was by definition generate from the Father, He was therefore a creature with a temporal beginning. "There was when he was not" became a catch phrase of Arian theology. While Arius held Jesus Christ to be the chief of God's creatures and His instrument for the rest of creation, he also believed that God was as incomprehensible to the Son as the Son was to humanity in general.

Since Arius' theology implied creature worship, Arius was condemned by a council and sent into exile by bishop Alexander of Alexandria. In exile, however, Arius

¹⁹ Kelly, 223-231.

²⁰ Rusch, 17-20.

managed to attract supporters to his cause and stir up controversy. When Constantine gained control over the entire empire, he sought to unify the empire through Christianity and thus moved to suppress this controversy. Accordingly, he summoned an ecumenical council which met at Nicea in 325 at which Arius' views were condemned. The Council of Nicea issued a creed which was to be the standard of orthodoxy:

We believe in one God, the Father All Governing (*pantokratora*), creator (*poietai*) of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father as only begotten, that is, from the essence (reality) of the Father (*ek tes ousias tou patros*), God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten not created (*poiethenta*), of the same essence (reality) as the Father (*homoousion to patri*), through whom all things came into being, both in heaven and in earth; Who for us men and for our salvation came down and was incarnate, becoming human (*enanthropesanta*). He suffered and the third day he rose, and ascended into the heavens. And he will come to judge both the living and the dead.

And (we believe) in the Holy Spirit.

But, those who say, Once he was not, or he was not before his generation, or he came to be out of nothing, or who assert that he, the Son of God, is a different *hypostasis* or *ousia*, or that he is a creature, or changeable, or mutable, the Catholic and Apostolic Church anathematizes them.²¹

While the Council of Nicea seemed to close the door to Arianism, subsequent history would reveal that a diversity of views could operate within its framework. The council had said that Christ was *homoousios* (of one substance) with the Father, but left the term *ousios* (substance or essence) undefined. As seen from the creed's anathemas, the council regarded *ousios* and *hypostasis* as synonyms. At best, however, the two words had different connotations and different denotations at worst.

²¹ Rousas John Rushdoony, *The Foundations of Social Order: Studies in the Creeds and Councils of the Early Church* (Fairfax, VA: Thoburn Press, 1978), 25.

Ousia was originally a Platonic term signifying *essence* whereas *hypostasis* was a Stoic term signifying *substance*.²² Consequently, while both terms were used to denote unity within their respective systems, the connotation of *ousia* was generic and abstract while that of *hypostasis* was specific and concrete. Thus, on the level of connotation, it was left undecided whether the council had intended to say that the Son had the same generic nature as the Father (*ousia*) or the same concrete substance (*hypostasis*). However, apart from this connotative difference between systems, *hypostasis* could also function within the Platonic system to signify concrete particularity or individual subsistence. Thus, in addition to the connotative differences between Platonic *ousia* and Stoic *hypostasis*, there were also denotative differences between the Platonic and Stoic meanings of *hypostasis* itself. As a result, Eastern theologians could use *hypostasis* to denote the individual persons, as Origen had done, and would therefore naturally interpret the Western view of a single *hypostasis* or substance as a Sabellian denial of the personal distinctions. Likewise, Western theologians would use *hypostasis* or *substance* to denote the unity of the divine nature, and would then interpret the Eastern view of three *hypostases* as an Arian denial of the divine unity.

The reason for this ambiguity was that the Council of Nicea had been called to address the more limited problem of the deity of Christ and not the more general problem of the unity of the divine nature. As a result, it did not define its terms with this latter end in view. Additionally, the council had said nothing about the deity of the Holy Spirit, since this subject too was outside its immediate scope. As a result of this neglect, 56 years of theological and political fighting ensued until an orthodox solution to the Trinitarian problem was finally imposed by the Council of Constantinople in 381.

²² Rusch, 14.

While the creed of Nicea held firm during Constantine's lifetime, theological differences clearly emerged after his death in 337. These differences may be characterized in terms of two major groups which further divide into a total of five subgroups. The Anti-Nicene party included Arians on their left, *homoiousions* (those who thought that the Father and the Son were of like nature) on their right, and an ill defined moderate group in the middle. The Nicene party was smaller and included mostly the *homoousions* (those who thought that the Father and the Son were of the same substance) with a few Sabellians on their extreme right. When Constantine died, the empire was divided among his sons. Between 337 and 350 the Arian Constantius ruled in the East and the homoousion Constantz ruled in the West. When Constantius gained control over the entire empire in 350, it was a political victory for the Arians. However, their theological extremism sent shock waves through the rest of the Anti-Nicene party, first driving the moderates into the homoiousion camp, and then driving this combined group close to the homoousions in the Nicene party. Diplomatic efforts between the two groups eventually allowed them to come together, isolating the Arians and the Sabellians on the extreme left and right and preparing the way for the orthodox victory at Constantinople. The theologians most instrumental in bringing the two groups together were Athanasius and the three Cappadocian Fathers, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzen, and Basil's younger brother, Gregory of Nyssa.

Athanasius^{23, 24} came from the homoousian group and had been a key figure at the Council of Nicea. Athanasius believed that the Father and Son share one concrete substance but that the two are also eternally distinct since the Son is continually

²³ Kelly, 240-247, 255-258.

²⁴ Rusch, 22, 23.

generated from the Father through an eternal process. According to Athanasius, both the Father and the Son are eternal because the Father cannot be the Father without the Son and vice versa. His opposition to Arianism stemmed from his belief that God had to become man in Christ in order to divinize man. Moreover, since the Holy Spirit was also intimately involved in man's salvation, he was also necessarily divine. In this regard, Scripture showed that the Holy Spirit belonged to God and came from God, and that His operations were intimately involved with those of Christ. Thus, Athanasius considered the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to be equally divine. They shared a common divine substance and yet were distinct from one another. However, since Athanasius regarded *ousia* and *hypostasis* as synonyms for divine unity, he lacked the technical vocabulary to express God's simultaneous oneness and threeness.

This technical vocabulary would come from the Cappadocian Fathers^{25, 26} and would provide the key to the orthodox settlement. Coming out of the homoiousion party, they operated within a Platonic framework which characterized God as a single *ousia*, manifesting itself in three *hypostases*. Previously dialog had been hamstrung by connotative differences between the Platonic use of *ousia* and the Stoic use of *hypostasis* as well as by denotative differences between the Platonic and Stoic uses of *hypostasis*. The Cappadocians clarified matters by fixing the terminology in such a way that different terms were used to denote God's oneness and His threeness. To explain the relation between these terms, the Cappadocians held that *ousia* relates to *hypostasis* in the manner of a universal to its particulars. In terms of this analogy, the divine persons were held to possess a common divine nature in the same way as human beings possess a common

²⁵ Kelly, 258-269.

²⁶ Rusch, 23-25.

human nature. However, since human nature is abstract, this analogy had tritheistic implications. The Cappadocians saw the deficiency of this analogy and argued that it was limited since the three persons share a nature which is simple, indivisible, and concrete.

With regard to their theology of the Holy Spirit, the Cappadocians were not only instrumental in arguing for His deity but also in developing the doctrine of His Trinitarian relations. With regard to His deity, Basil argued from:

(a) the testimony of Scripture to the Spirit's greatness and dignity, and to the power and vastness of His operation; (b) His association with the Father and Son in whatever They accomplish, especially in the work of sanctification and deification; and (c) His personal relation to both Father and Son.²⁷

With regard to His intra-Trinitarian relations, the Cappadocians sought to differentiate His mode of origin from that of the Son. Whereas the Son was generated, Basil said that the Holy Spirit was breathed. Gregory of Nazianzen said simply that the spirit proceeds from the Father, and Gregory of Nyssa said that the Spirit proceeds from the Father through the Son and so is produced indirectly by the Father, not directly like the Son. At the Council of Constantinople, Gregory of Nazianzen's view of procession from the Father would prevail, and the Cappadocian settlement of 1 *ousia* and 3 *hypostases* would provide the formula that would permanently define catholic orthodoxy. It would also establish the high water mark for Trinitarian theology in the Eastern Church:

We believe in one God, the Father All Governing (*pantokratora*), creator (*poietai*) of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible;

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten from the Father before all time (*pro panton ton aionon*), Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten not created (*poiethenta*), of the same essence (reality) as the Father (*homoousion to patri*), through Whom all things came into being, Who for us men and because of our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the

²⁷ Kelly, 261.

Virgin Mary and became human (*enanthropesanta*). He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered and was buried, and rose on the third day, according to the Scriptures, and ascended to heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father, and will come again with glory to judge the living and the dead. His Kingdom shall have no end (*telos*).

And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and life-giver, Who proceeds from the Father, Who is worshiped and glorified together with the Father and Son, Who spoke through the prophets; and in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. We confess one baptism for the remission of sins. We look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.²⁸

While this creed would become the standard of orthodoxy in both the Eastern and Western churches, subsequent developments in Western theology would lead to a different interpretation of its contents. In the Western Church this line of development²⁹ runs through Hilary, Ambrose, and C. Marius Victorinus, reaching its culmination in Augustine. Hilary was a compatriot of Athanasius and thus in agreement with him theologically. Along with Athanasius, he was instrumental in the diplomatic efforts which allowed the homoousians and the homoiousians to join together. Ambrose articulated an identical theology, holding that the three persons have a common substance, divinity, will, and operation. With Victorinus, however, new ideas begin to enter the theological stream.

Victorinus was a converted Neo-Platonic philosopher. He held that God's essence is concrete and eternally active (*esse = moveri*) so that the eternal generation of the Son and the procession of the Holy Spirit could produce no change in the divine being. As envisioned by Victorinus, this internal activity is a triadic process of unfolding and refolding. In the unfolding process the Father as pure being projects the Son as the form that limits Him and makes Him comprehensible. Here, the Father relates to the Son as

²⁸ Rushdoony, 26.

²⁹ Kelly, 269-271.

potency to act. In the refolding process the Holy Spirit becomes the copula overcoming the distinction between the Father and the Son through an act of intelligence. Thus, in Victorinus' system Father, Son, and Holy Spirit could relate to one another as substance, form, and concept as well as essence, life, and intelligence. Because humanity was created in the image of God, Victorinus held to an analogy between the Trinity and the human soul. As will be seen below, some of Victorinus' ideas were to influence the thought of Augustine.

Augustine^{30, 31} was a bishop of Hippo in North Africa who had been influenced by Neo-Platonism and who built upon the theology of Ambrose and Victorinus. According to Augustine, the Trinity is a mystery which can only be known by revelation, not reason. Consequently, since reason cannot prove the doctrine of the Trinity, it fulfills a subordinate role of explicating Trinitarian doctrine in an act of "faith seeking understanding."

In his Trinitarian explication, Augustine begins with the simple and indivisible essence of God, rather than with the person of the Father. (He preferred the word *essence* to *substance* because he felt that the latter connoted a subject with attributes.) Because the divine essence is fully expressed in each person, each person is equal to each of the others and to the Godhead as a whole, a fact which eliminated subordination. Due to their common essence, the persons are not isolated individuals, but rather interpenetrate one another exhaustively. Moreover, since the unity of essence implies a unity of will, the three persons have a common external operation. Thus, each of the persons is involved in the work of creation, redemption, and sanctification, yet in such a way that the unique

³⁰ Ibid., 271-279.

³¹ Rusch, 25-27.

role of each person is not smothered. For instance, since the Father initiates all divine activity, His role uniquely stands out in creation. As the mediator of divine activity, the Son stands out in redemption, and Spirit stands out in sanctification since He brings God's work to completion. Consequently, while all of the persons are involved in each type of action, creation, redemption, and sanctification may be particularly assigned to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This assignment is referred to as *appropriation*.

With regard to the persons themselves, Augustine held that their distinctions are grounded in their relations of origin. The Father begets the Son, and the two together bestow the Holy Spirit upon one another as their common gift, love, or communion. Augustine did not feel that the term *person* was descriptively adequate but felt that he had to use it both for tradition's sake and to avoid the alternative of having nothing to say. He preferred to refer to the persons as subsistent relations. With regard to the relations of origin, Augustine found it difficult to distinguish generation from procession. The obvious difference, as he saw it, was that the Son originated from the Father alone, whereas the Spirit originated from the Father and the Son. In this origination, Augustine held that the Holy Spirit had the same relation to the Son as he had to the Father. Thus, the Holy Spirit was held to proceed from the Father and the Son as from a common principle, just as creation had originated from a common operation of the entire Trinity. On the basis of his teaching of this double procession of the Holy Spirit, the Western Church would eventually add the *filioque* clause to the Nicene Creed, thereby precipitating the schism between the Orthodox East and the Catholic West. Yet, Augustine's actual position did not need to antagonize the East. After all, he held the

Father to be the primordial source of the Holy Spirit because in generating the Son the Father Himself gave Him the power to bestow the Spirit.

Like Victorinus Augustine too believed that the Trinity was reflected in the human soul because humanity had been created in the image of God. Thus, within the human soul a Trinity was evident in the mind, its self knowledge, and its self love. Another illustration advanced by Augustine was memory (the mind's unconscious knowledge of itself), understanding (the mind's conscious understanding of itself), and will (the mind's love of itself). As Augustine saw it, each of these models involved three coordinate faculties within a single personality whose mutual inter-relations were analogous to those of the divine persons.

Nevertheless, Augustine saw his illustrations as limited because the human mind was only a faint image of the Triune God. First, whereas the divine persons were coterminous with the divine essence, the human faculties were not coterminous with the human personality. Because of this difference, the human faculties operated independently of one another, rather than sharing a common will and action, like the divine persons did. Finally, whereas the human image involved three independent faculties of a single person, the Trinity involved three persons of a single essence who were in consequence of this fact highly united. Thus, Augustine was aware that his analogies had modalistic implications and so sought to correct their implications by emphasizing the concreteness of the divine persons. Augustine's psychological model of the Trinity would rise to great heights in the middle ages through the theology of Thomas Aquinas. Moreover, his Trinitarian theology would assume creedal form in the Western

church in a creed developed anonymously by a later author and falsely attributed to

Athanasius. The so-called Athanasian Creed is quite long and reads in part:

Whoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the catholic faith.

Which faith except every one do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly.

And the catholic faith is this, that we worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity.

Neither confounding the Persons nor dividing the Substance.

For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost.

But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost is all one: the glory equal, the majesty coeternal.

Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Ghost.

The Father uncreate, the Son uncreate, and the Holy Ghost uncreate.

The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, and the Holy Ghost incomprehensible.

The Father eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Ghost eternal.

As there are not three Uncreated nor three Incomprehensibles, but one Uncreated and one Incomprehensible.

So likewise the Father is almighty, the Son almighty, and the Holy Ghost almighty.

And yet they are not three Almighty, but one Almighty.

So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God.

And yet they are not three Gods, but one God.

So likewise the Father is Lord, the Son Lord and the Holy Ghost Lord.

And yet they are not three Lords, but one Lord.

For like as we are compelled by the Christian verity to acknowledge every Person by Himself to be God and Lord.

So we are forbidden by the catholic religion to say, There be three Gods or three Lords.

The Father is made of none, neither created nor begotten.

The Son is of the Father alone, not made nor created, but begotten.

The Holy Ghost is of the Father and of the Son, neither made nor created nor begotten, but proceeding.

So there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; and one Holy Ghost, not three Holy Ghosts.

And in this Trinity none is before or after another; none is greater or less than another;

But the whole three Persons are co-eternal together and coequal, so that in all things, as is aforesaid, the Unity in Trinity and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshipped.

He therefore, that will be saved must think thus of the Trinity. . .³²

³² Rushdoony, 86, 87.

ORTHODOXY TRIUMPHANT: THE ONE AND THE THREE

Looking back over the centuries of development, it can be seen that Western and Eastern theology developed along different trajectories which have here been labeled *Stoic* and *Platonic*. Within the Stoic paradigm the West begins with the God who is one and then tries to solve the riddle of His threeness. By contrast the East operates within the Platonic paradigm and thus begins with God's threeness before tackling the mystery of His oneness. The reason for these differing approaches can be explained in terms of the differing terminology used and the different cultural-linguistic frameworks within which these terms are reckoned.

The terminology that prevailed in the West was originally set by Tertullian within a Stoic framework. In the East the final terminology was determined by the Cappadocian settlement after a long struggle, and this terminology was both determined by, and interpreted within a Platonic framework. The differences in the terminology and their linguistic frameworks are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. Competing Trinitarian Terminologies and Linguistic Frameworks

	EAST (PLATONIC) GREEK	WEST (STOIC) GREEK	WEST (STOIC) LATIN
ABSTRACT	1 <i>ousia</i>	3 <i>prosopa</i>	3 <i>personae</i>
CONCRETE	3 <i>hypostases</i>	1 <i>hypostasis</i>	1 <i>substantia</i>

In Table 1 the Western Stoic framework has been repeated twice in order to give its equivalent terminology in both Greek and Latin. This has been done to show that

hypostasis and *substantia* are exact etymological equivalents which mean *to stand under* and thus denote concrete, underlying reality. However, whereas in Stoicism a *concrete unity* stands under diversifying abstract forms (Tertullian held the personal distinctions to be formal), Platonism places *concrete diversity* under unifying abstract forms. In other words, Stoicism holds to a concrete universal with abstract particulars, and Platonism holds to concrete particulars with an abstract universal. Of course, a Platonic realist would want to reverse this judgment, but as a practical matter the form of the One or the Good will not achieve the concreteness of the material diversity of daily life.

Based on this table, the twofold struggle between East and West becomes visually apparent. First, participants within different frameworks who were thinking in terms of the etymological equivalence of *hypostasis* and *substantia* would see one another as denying unity (the East) or diversity (the West) within the Godhead. However, once the difference in language had been accounted for, and it was recognized that *ousia* and *substantia* were the corresponding terms for unity, the connotative difference between these terms would provide another challenge, for *ousia* denoted an abstract unity, whereas *substantia* was more concrete. Given this last difference, the West tended more naturally toward a homoousion interpretation, whereas a homoiousion interpretation was favored in the East. So understood, both sides sought to build upon what they took to be concrete reality. However, since they were operating within different cultural-linguistic frameworks, they talked past one another.

One way to approach this difference is to say that each side was controlled by a different metaphor. Saussure³³ held that word meaning is not determined by etymology, reference, or subjective factors, but rather by its place within a cultural-linguistic system.

³³ Ferdinand de Saussure and others, *Course in General Linguistics* (LaSalle, Ill.: Open Court, 1986).

Along similar lines Thomas Kuhn³⁴ argued that in science the meaning of theoretical terms and experimental data is paradigm dependent. At still smaller scales of life, Wittgenstein³⁵ said that word usage was dependent upon language games, and Lakoff and Johnson³⁶ have argued that these language games are often dominated by metaphors which people hold unconsciously. Thus, metaphors control the use of language so that people operating in terms of different metaphors will fail to understand one another. This is particularly true when the metaphors operate unconsciously.

For instance, the metaphor of “a wall of separation between church and state” is frequently used to interpret the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Yet, not only do the words, “wall of separation between church and state,” not occur within the text of the First Amendment, they are also contrary to its meaning. Nevertheless, because a compact metaphor is more powerful than the text itself, this metaphor overrules the text, controlling the meaning of its language, and thus governing its interpretation.

With respect to Trinitarian theology, the East and West have been controlled by different metaphors which not only governed their formative doctrinal periods but which have also governed their respective approaches to this very day. Thus, in their analogy of a universal and its particulars, the Cappadocians began with an analogy emphasizing a concrete diversity and an abstract unity. To avoid tritheism they had to reject the abstract implications of their analogy and “manually” assert a concrete unity. By contrast, in his psychological model, Augustine began with an analogy emphasizing a concrete unity and an abstract diversity. To avoid modalism he had to reject the abstract implications of his

³⁴ Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd. ed. (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1970).

³⁵ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (New York,: Macmillan, 1953).

³⁶ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

analogy and “manually” assert the concrete particularity of the divine persons. From this discussion two conclusions may be fairly drawn. First, it is unfair to refer to the Cappadocians as latent tritheists and to Augustine as a latent modalist since they all sought to correct the deficiencies of their analogies. On the other hand, it is absolutely fair to level these charges against the systems within which they were operating and the metaphors governing these systems, since “manual” intervention was required to override the tritheistic and modalistic implications of the systems themselves.

The problem, then, is that the East operates in terms of concrete particulars and an abstract universal, whereas the West operates in terms of a concrete universal with abstract particulars. What is needed, therefore, is a system which emphasizes both a concrete universal and concrete particulars. However, to arrive at such a system, one would have to solve the one-and-many problem which has eluded the human intellect for millennia and which can only be solved *by starting with* Trinitarian categories in which unity and diversity are equally ultimate and mutually conditioning. Thus, rather than stuffing the Trinity into the straight jacket of human philosophical systems, perhaps the reverse process of articulating philosophy within Trinitarian categories should be attempted. As will be shown later, Trinitarian theology provides a covenantal ontology which is personal, relational, and concrete. In so doing it may well provide a new metaphor which will first transcend and then eliminate East-West theological differences.

SOCIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL TRINITARIANISM IN THE MIDDLE AGES

While Trinitarian theology reached its mature development in the East with the Council of Constantinople, its development in the West continued through the middle

ages. In this regard, two models of the Trinity were evident. The social model of Richard of St. Victor envisioned the Trinity as a society of love. This model was influential with the Franciscans and exerted a strong influence on Bonaventure. The second model was the psychological model of Augustine which reached its full development in the theology of Thomas Aquinas, a contemporary of Bonaventure. Additionally, Trinitarian doctrine developed as a result of the work the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), the Second Council of Lyons (1279), and the Council of Florence (1438-1445). From the perspective of Trinitarian theology, the main contributions of these councils were to develop and solidify the teaching of the *filioque* (the double procession of the Holy Spirit) and the nature of the relation of the persons to the divine essence.

According to Denis Edwards,³⁷ Richard of St. Victor (d. 1173) lived in an era marked by a keen interest in friendship and romantic love and therefore used the concepts of love and friendship to express a social Trinitarianism. Beginning with the concept of God as supreme goodness and love, he argued that a second person must also exist since perfect goodness and love overflows the self to embrace the other. Richard called this process *dilection*. Moreover, since perfect love implies a self giving that is both complete and reciprocal (reciprocal *dilection*), he argued that both the lover and the beloved must be fully divine for their love to be perfectly mutual. Finally, arguing that perfect love would seek to share the joy of this relationship with another, the lover and the beloved would seek to include a third. Richard referred to this final process as *condilection*. Now, since no novel aspect could be added to the original relationship by including a fourth

³⁷ Edwards, Denis. "The Discovery of Chaos and the Retrieval of the Trinity." In Robert J. Russell and others, *Chaos and Complexity: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action*, 2nd ed., A Series On "Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action" (Vatican City State; Berkeley, Calif.: Vatican Observatory Publications ; Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences, 1997), 158, 159.

person, Richard argued that there must be three, and only three, persons in the Godhead. Because Richard's model was based on dynamic relationships rather than an abstract substance, it had the potential to connect with popular piety due to its concreteness.

Building upon Richard's theology and that of Alexander of Hales, Bonaventure³⁸ became the second great theologian of the Franciscan order, his teacher Alexander being the first. Using Alexander's principle that goodness is self diffusive,³⁹ Bonaventure argued that maximal goodness corresponded to maximal self diffusion, and thus to a self diffusion that was both natural and willed (essential and voluntary). Accordingly, there should be two processions within the divine essence resulting from God's nature and will, respectively. The first of these was called generation and led to the production of the Son, while the second was called procession and led to the production of the Holy Spirit. Thus, in a manner similar to Richard, the Trinity was seen as a society of love built upon the diffusive goodness of God. A passage from his *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum* is cited by Fortman:

Should you then be able to see with the eyes of your mind this pure goodness, you can also see that its supreme communicability necessarily postulates the Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Since goodness is supreme in them, so must communicability be; since communicability is supreme, so must consubstantiality be; since consubstantiality is supreme, so must likeness be, which necessitates supreme coequality and this in turn supreme coeternity; while all the above attributes together necessitate supreme mutual indwelling, with each person existing necessarily in the others by supreme circumincession and each acting with the others in utter indivision of substance, power, and operation in this most blessed Trinity. . . . Here indeed is supreme communicability together with individuality of persons; supreme consubstantiality with hypostatic plurality; supreme likeness with distinct personality; supreme coequality with orderly origin; supreme coeternity with emanation; supreme indwelling with emission. Who would not be lifted up in wonder on beholding such marvels? Yet if we raise our eyes to the supremely excellent goodness, we can understand

³⁸ Fortman, 212-217.

³⁹ Ibid., 211.

with complete certainty that all this is to be found in the most blessed Trinity.⁴⁰

In contrast to the social model of Richard and Bonaventure, Thomas Aquinas^{41, 42} refined the psychological model of Augustine. Thomas begins with the essence of God which he characterizes as pure act: be-ing, knowing, and willing (here the hyphen has been added to *being* to emphasize its original participial nature as an *act* of existence). Since the essence of God is ever active, the knowing and willing of the essence produce two eternal processions known as generation and procession, respectively. Each procession, in turn, produces a pair of opposed relations which subsist within the divine essence: *paternity* (generation) and *filiation* (being generated), *spiration* (breathing) and *procession* or *passive spiration* (being breathed). Since three of these relations are not only opposed but also distinct, they are person constituting. Thus, *paternity*, *filiation*, and *procession* constitute the persons of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Here it can be seen that since the relations constitute rather than merely distinguish the persons, the relations *are* the persons rather than something that exists in a space between them. Thus, for Thomas the persons reduce to subsistent relations within the divine essence which in turn derive from the incessant activity of this essence itself. As subsistent, they are logically but not ontologically distinct from the divine essence (*esse in*), and as relations, they are both logically and ontologically distinct from one another (*esse ad*).

As can be seen, Thomas' system is highly rarefied in comparison to the social Trinitarianism of Richard and Bonaventure. Whereas Bonaventure attributed the two processions to nature and will, Thomas attributed them to knowledge and will. Thus, for

⁴⁰ Ibid., 216, 217.

⁴¹ Hill, 69-75.

⁴² Fortman, 204-210.

Bonaventure Jesus was Word because Son while for Thomas Jesus was Son because Word. That generation should be based upon knowledge followed for Thomas from the fact that an expressed Word resembled its originating Idea in the same way that an engendered Son resembled His originating Father. Thus, the two processes were analogous to one another as “likeness-producing operations” or, as later theologians would say, “formally assimilative operations,” whatever that means. By contrast, the procession by will or love was an “impulse-producing operation” of a unitive nature. So understood, generation was based upon projection and therefore involved a standing apart, whereas procession was based upon a mutual attraction which united the two parties in their difference. Since Thomas’ approach gained ascendancy over the social Trinitarianism of Richard and Bonaventure, Trinitarian theology became an abstract intellectual affair, increasingly detached from the piety of the church. As argued forcefully by Karl Rahner, the eclipse of Trinitarian theology in the modern age may be traced to this scholastic abstruseness.⁴³

In addition to the theologies of Richard, Bonaventure, and Aquinas, there were three major councils in the middle ages whose activities contributed to the development of Trinitarian doctrine. The Fourth Lateran Council (1215) is noteworthy for addressing two issues: the relation of the essence to the persons, and the *filioque*. Some years before the council, Joachim of Flora had accused Peter Lombard of advocating a *quaternity* in the Godhead since he distinguished between the three persons and the divine essence. In contrast to this accusation, it was clear to the council that the omission of the divine essence would imply only a collective unity of persons and hence tritheism. Thus, the council sought to clarify how it is that a distinction between the essence and the persons

⁴³ Karl Rahner, *The Trinity* (New York: Crossroad Pub., 1997), 10-21.

does not imply a quaternity. With regard to the *filioque*, the council affirmed that the Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son:

We, therefore, with the approval of the sacred council, believe and confess with Peter Lombard that there is one supreme reality, incomprehensible and ineffable, which is truly Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; at once the three persons taken together and each of them singly; and so in God there is only a Trinity and not a quaternity, because each of the three persons is that reality, that is the divine substance, essence or nature: which alone is the principle of all things and beside it no other can be found. And that reality is not generating, nor generated, nor proceeding, but it is the Father who generates, the Son who is generated, and the Holy Spirit who proceeds: so that there are distinctions in the persons, unity in the nature.⁴⁴

It is clear therefore that in being born the Son received the substance of the Father without any diminution, and so the Father and the Son have the same substance; and thus the same reality is the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit who proceeds from both.⁴⁵

The Second Council of Lyons (1274) was convoked in part to reunite the Latins and the Greeks. Hence a central issue for this council was the *filioque*. In addressing this issue Lyons II went beyond Lateran IV in clarifying that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son as from a single principle:

. . .with faithful and devout profession we confess that the Holy Spirit proceeds eternally from the Father and the Son, not as from two principles but as from one, not by two spirations but by one. . . But because there are some men who through ignorance of this unshatterable truth have fallen into various errors, we desire to close the road to these errors and so with the approval of the holy council we condemn and reprobate those who presume to deny that the Holy Spirit proceeds eternally from the Father and the Son or those who rashly dare to assert that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son as from two principles and not as from one.⁴⁶

Finally, the Council of Florence (1438-1445) was also called to affect union with the Greeks and so the *filioque* was once again a focal point. In discussions the Latins and

⁴⁴ Fortman, 199, 200.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 201.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 218, 219.

the Greeks came to a consensus that the procession of the Spirit from the Father and Son was equivalent to statements by the Greek Fathers that the Spirit proceeds from the Father *through* the Son. Florence went beyond Lyons II in clarifying this equivalence, in indicating that the *filioque* had therefore been lawfully added to clarify the meaning of the creed (not as an innovation), and in declaring that the Holy Spirit receives both His essence and His subsistent personality in His procession from the Father and the Son:

In the name of the Holy Trinity of the Father and Son and Holy Spirit, with the approbation of this holy general Council of Florence we define that this truth of faith be believed and accepted by all Christians, and that all likewise profess that the Holy Spirit is eternally from the Father and the Son, and has His essence and his subsistent being from the Father and Son simultaneously, and proceeds from both eternally as from one principle and one spiration; we declare that what the holy Doctors and Fathers say, namely, that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father through the Son, tends to this meaning, that by this is signified that the Son is also according to the Greeks the cause, and according to the Latins the principle of the subsistence of the Holy Spirit, as is the Father also. And since all things which are the Father's, the Father has given to the Son in generating Him—except to be Father—so the Son has eternally from the Father that the Holy Spirit should proceed from the Son. . . In addition we define that the explication of those words *Filioque* has been lawfully and reasonably added to the Creed for the sake of declaring the truth and because of imminent necessity.⁴⁷

In addition to the Greeks, a delegation of Coptic Christians came from Egypt seeking union with Rome. After long meetings with several Cardinals, a bull was promulgated which the Copts accepted in the name of their Patriarch. While this *Decree for the Jacobites* is not officially part of the definition of Florence, it is of hermeneutical significance in its clarification of the thinking involved. In regard to the *filioque*, the decree stated that the Father and Son form one principle with respect to the procession of the Holy Spirit, just as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit form a single principle with respect to creation. Additionally, the decree said that the *perichoresis* of the persons was

⁴⁷ Ibid., 225.

based upon their unity of essence. Finally, it was stated that in God's being all is one where a relation of opposition does not intervene. Thus, unlike the oppositional relation between the persons, which makes them both conceptually and actually distinct, the relation between the essence and the persons is merely logical, not oppositional, and therefore involves a conceptual distinction alone. Consequently, since the essence does not exist apart from the persons (i.e. is not opposed to them), God is a Trinity, not a quaternity:

The holy Roman Church, founded by the decree of our Lord and Savior firmly believes, professes and teaches: There is one true God, all-powerful, unchangeable, and eternal, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one in essence but three in persons. The Father is not begotten, the Son is begotten of the Father, the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. . . These three persons are one God, not three gods, for the three persons have one substance, one essence, one nature, one divinity, one immensity, one eternity. And everything is one where opposition of relation does not intervene. Because of this unity the Father is entirely in the Son and entirely in the Holy Spirit; the Son is entirely in the Father and entirely in the Holy Spirit; the Holy Spirit is entirely in the Father and entirely in the Son. None of the persons precedes in eternity or exceeds in magnitude or surpasses in power any of the others. . . Whatever the Father is or has He has not from another but from Himself, and He is principle without principle. Whatever the Son is or has, He has from the Father and He is principle from principle. Whatever the Holy Spirit is or has, He has at once from the Father and from the Son. Yet the Father and the Son are not two principles of the Holy Spirit, but one principle, just as the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are not three principles of creation but one principle.⁴⁸

THE RESURGANCE OF THE TRINITY IN MODERN THEOLOGY

As indicated previously, the doctrine of the Trinity has suffered from several centuries of neglect and has only returned to center stage in the 20th Century. As outlined

⁴⁸ Ibid., 226.

by Stanley Grenz,⁴⁹ the reasons for this period of neglect are several. First, as indicated above, the abstruseness of scholastic theology isolated Trinitarian doctrine from popular piety. Second, while the Reformers accepted Trinitarian theology, their focus was on soteriology, not the doctrine of God. Third, the Reformers' thoroughgoing Biblicism and opposition to ecclesiastical abuse had the unintended affect of causing some to devalue central doctrines clarified by the dogmatic tradition of the church. Fourth, religious warfare in the wake of the Reformation, prompted the rise of Enlightenment rationalism and hence the demise of any doctrine that could not adjudicate itself before the bar of autonomous reason. Finally, through the restriction of rational knowledge to the phenomenal realm, the basis for even this rational religion was destroyed by Immanuel Kant. During the 19th Century, there were some Trinitarian stirrings as Schleiermacher and Hegel attempted to explicate the doctrine in terms of Romantic and Idealistic philosophy, respectively. The real awakening, however, would begin in the 20th Century with the revelational theology of Karl Barth.

Karl Barth's theology was a reaction to the liberalism of his era which had over emphasized the immanence of God and identified His kingdom with secular society. In the wake of World War I, however, this liberal optimism had been shattered, and Barth reacted against it by stressing God's absolute transcendence. Because God was "wholly other," human beings could not reason their way upward to God, but were dependent upon God's downward revelation to them in Christ. For Barth, therefore, God's revelation was historical, but history was not itself revelational. With regard to God's revelation, Barth asserted that it had an implicit Trinitarian structure since it was

⁴⁹ Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God: The Trinity in Contemporary Theology*, 12-16.

dependent upon the Father who sent it (the revealer), Christ who was its content (the revelation), and the Holy Spirit who made it effectual (the revealedness):

. . . applying out ternary of revealer, revelation and being revealed, we can also say quite confidently that there is a source, an authorship, a ground of revelation, a revealer of himself just as distinct from revelation itself as revelation implies absolutely something new in relation to the mystery of the revealer which is set aside in revelation as such. As a second in distinction from the first there is thus revelation itself as the event of making manifest what was previously hidden. And as the result of the first two there is then a third, a being revealed, the reality of which is the purpose of the revealer and therefore at the same time the point or goal of the revelation.⁵⁰

Because of revelation's Trinitarian structure, Barth placed the Trinity at the front of his *Church Dogmatics*, arguing that all Christian theology must be Trinitarian in both method and content. However, since Barth's historical skepticism undermined his confidence in the Bible, he derived the Trinity through an analysis of the concept of revelation itself (as illustrated above), rather than through a synthesis of the historical data of Scripture. The result of deriving the Trinity by a *conceptual* division of God's one revelation was to lead Barth, despite his deeper intent, in a modalist direction. An additional factor pushing him in this same direction was the fact that he was operating with a 19th Century concept of *person* as a self contained, social atom. Since he therefore feared that reference to three persons in God would constitute tritheism, he referred to God as a single person existing in three modes of being (*seinsweise*).⁵¹

These same internal tensions surfaced in the work of Karl Rahner. In his book *The Trinity*, Rahner sought to promote a Trinitarian renewal. He began by deploring the

⁵⁰ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. G. W. Bromiley, 2nd. ed., vol. I/1 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975), 363.

⁵¹ Ted Peters, *God as Trinity: Relationality and Temporality in Divine Life*, 1st ed. (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/J. Knox Press, 1993), 94.

neglect of Trinitarian theology in his day, arguing that at the level of daily life, Christians were practical monotheists:

All of these considerations should not lead us to overlook the fact that, despite their orthodox confession of the Trinity, Christians are, in their practical life, almost mere “monotheists.” We must be willing to admit that, should the doctrine of the Trinity have to be dropped as false, the major part of religious literature could well remain virtually unchanged.⁵²

Rahner blamed this state of affairs on the abstruseness of Trinitarian theology, its lack of connection to vital spirituality, and its relative separation from other Christian doctrines. To correct these problems, he argued that Trinitarian doctrine should begin with salvation history and then reason upward to God’s being rather than the reverse.

Compared to Barth’s theology, Rahner’s prescription of reasoning from the economic to the immanent Trinity showed a greater confidence in historical revelation. He crystallized this approach in an axiom which was subsequently labeled *Rahner’s rule*: “The ‘economic’ Trinity is the ‘immanent’ Trinity, and the ‘immanent’ Trinity is the ‘economic’ Trinity.”⁵³ Despite his greater openness to historical revelation, however, Rahner also shared a methodological approach similar to Barth’s in which he sought to derive the Trinity analytically from God’s self communication to humanity:

In the dimension of salvation history, this distinction is truly “real.” The origin of God’s self-communication, its “existence” as it radically expresses and utters itself, the self communication’s welcoming acceptance brought about by himself, are not indistinctly “the same thing” signified by different words. That is: as understood by the experience of faith, based on the witness of Scripture, the Father, the Word, and the Spirit (however deficient all these words may and must be) point to a true distinction, to a double mediation within this self-communication.⁵⁴

⁵² Rahner, 10, 11.

⁵³ Ibid., 22.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 37.

In addition to this analytical approach to the Trinity, Rahner was also captivated by an atomistic concept of the person⁵⁵ and therefore sought to interpret the traditional reference to divine *persons* in a way that avoided tritheism. Thus, he defined *person* as a “distinct manner of subsisting”⁵⁶ and referred to God as a single consciousness subsisting in a threefold way.⁵⁷ As seen from this description, the confluence of an atomistic concept of the person and an analytical approach to revelation drove Rahner in a modalist direction, despite his deeper intentions.

As seen in the theologies of both Barth and Rahner, their deeper Trinitarian instincts were hamstrung by an atomistic view of the human person. However, with the advent of the postmodern era, this particular stumbling block has been removed since the emerging postmodern view of interdependent personality affords new opportunities for constructive theology. If persons are who they are by virtue of their positions in a network of relations, then community and personhood, unity and diversity, become correlative to one another. On a relational view of the person, therefore, the Trinitarian persons can be referred to as such without the fear of falling into tritheism.⁵⁸

One example of this relational approach stems from the Trinitarian ecclesiology of Orthodox theologian John D. Zizioulas. Zizioulas defines personhood as a twofold mode of existence involving both *hypostasis* (individuality) and *ekstasis* (relational drive).⁵⁹ In *ekstasis* the individual seeks to reach out beyond the self to affect communion with other selves. The consequence is that on both the divine and ecclesial (i.e. human)

⁵⁵ Ibid., 43, 44, 56, 57, 108.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 110.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 107.

⁵⁸ Peters, 35, 36.

⁵⁹ John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*, Contemporary Greek Theologians ; (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), 106.

levels, being takes on a communal nature in which community and individuality become interdependent correlative terms:

In this way the discussion of the being of God leads patristic thought to the following theses, which are fundamentally bound up with ecclesiology as well as ontology:

(a) There is no true being without communion. Nothing exists as an “individual,” conceivable in itself. Communion is an ontological category.

(b) Communion which does not come from a “hypostasis,” that is, a concrete and free person, and which does not lead to “hypostases,” that is concrete and free persons, is not an “image” of the being of God. The person cannot exist without communion; but every form of communion which denies or suppresses the person is inadmissible.⁶⁰

While Zizioulas’ program has many attractive elements, it has two major deficiencies. First, in regard to the immanent Trinity, the Trinitarian communion is free, not necessary, and derived from the monarchy of the Father through the freedom of His will. But if personality is interdependent, how can the Father freely will the others into being when both His personality and thus His free will presuppose their antecedent existence? Second, with regard to the economic Trinity, Zizioulas fails to integrate historical development with his Trinitarian theology. According to Zizioulas, ecclesial personhood is the result of the coming together (*synaxis*) of the church in the power of the Spirit during the Eucharist. Since this action prefigures the eschatological kingdom, ecclesial personhood is an eschatological reality “which has its roots in the future and its branches in the present.”⁶¹ However, since this eschatological reality passes with the completion of the Eucharist, history appears as a flux of profane time punctuated by momentary intrusions of sacred time which enter from the future. Such a view fails to connect with the salvation historical implications of the Trinitarian narrative.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 18.

⁶¹ Ibid., 59.

If history is undervalued in Zizioulas' theology, the reverse is the case for Jürgen Moltmann. In his program Moltmann seeks to combine the substantial, relational, and historical views of personality which he traces to Boethius, Augustine, and Hegel, respectively.⁶² With regard to the substantial and relational aspect of the problem, Moltmann locates God's unity not in the divine essence, but in the perichoretic interpenetration of the persons:

The Father, the Son and the Spirit are by no means merely *distinguished* from one another by their character as Persons; they are just as much united with one another and in one another, since personal character and social character are only two aspects of the same thing. The concept of person must therefore in itself contain the concept of unitedness or at-oneness, just as, conversely, the concept of God's at-oneness must in itself contain the concept of the three Persons. This means that the concept of God's unity cannot in the Trinitarian sense be fitted into the homogeneity of the one divine substance, or into the identity of the absolute subject either; and least of all into one of the three Persons of the Trinity. It must be perceived in the *perichoresis* of the divine Persons. If the unity of God is not perceived in the at-oneness of the triune God, and therefore as a *perichoretic* unity, then Arianism and Sabellianism remain inescapable threats to Christian theology.⁶³

With regard to the temporal aspect of the problem, Moltmann emphasizes that each of the divine persons are not only related to one another, but also to a changing world and are therefore changing themselves. Consequently, the *perichoretic* union of persons is constantly adjusting to the changes of each of the divine persons with the consequence that the Trinity itself undergoes historical development. The result is to submerge the Trinity in time so that the immanent Trinity emerges from the economic

⁶² Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom : The Doctrine of God*, 1st ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 174.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 150. Some have accused Moltmann of tritheism for these statements. However since he elsewhere refers to God's essence, another interpretation is possible. Perhaps Moltmann is simply saying that the divine essence is epistemologically insufficient to *reveal* God's unity. After all, since unity presupposes diversity, unity cannot be predicated of a simple essence. Indeed, it is precisely for this reason that Hindu philosophers refer to their position as non-dualism, rather than monism.

Trinity only with the eschatological dawning of the Kingdom. Thus, the title of Moltmann's book is *The Trinity and the Kingdom*:

If it is the quintessence of doxology, then the doctrine of the immanent Trinity is part of eschatology as well. The economic Trinity completes and perfects itself to immanent Trinity when the history and experience of salvation are completed and perfected. When everything is 'in God', and 'God is all in all', then the economic Trinity is raised into and transcended in the immanent Trinity. What remains is the eternal praise of the triune God in his glory.⁶⁴

While Zizioulas and Moltmann reflect opposite extremes in relating the Trinity to historical development, Wolfhart Pannenberg sets forth a relational approach which gives place to historical development without subjecting God's being to a process of becoming. With regard to the relationality of persons, Pannenberg's view does justice to both the *perichoretic* interactions of the persons and the unity of the divine essence:

The divine persons, then, are concretions of the divine reality as Spirit. They are individual aspects of the dynamic field of the eternal Godhead. This means that they do not exist for themselves but in ec-static relation to the overarching field of deity which manifests itself in each of them and in their interrelations. But in this respect their reference to the divine essence that overarches each personality is mediated by the relations to the two other persons. The Son has a share in the eternal deity, and is the Son, only with reference to the Father: the Father has his identity as the Father, and is (Father) God, only with reference to the Son; the Father and Son have their unity, and therefore their divine essence, only through their relation to the Spirit; and the Spirit is a distinct hypostasis only by his relation to the distinction and fellowship of the Father and the Son in their differentiation. For the Spirit has full personal independence, not as proceeding from the Father, as radiating from his divine essence, but only in his distinction from the Father and the Son in their differentiation.⁶⁵

With regard to history, Pannenberg's position is again balanced. From one perspective, he argues that in creating the world God has risked his deity which now

⁶⁴ Ibid., 161.

⁶⁵ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols., T & T Clark Academic Paperbacks, vol. 1 (London ; New York: T & T Clark International, 2004), 430.

depends upon the victory of His kingdom in time.⁶⁶ Yet, from another perspective, this eschatological victory is certain, and will simply give retroactive confirmation to the deity of God which remains from eternity to eternity:

Refuted herewith is the idea of a divine becoming in history, as though the trinitarian God were the result of history and achieved reality only with its eschatological consummation. In our historical experience it might seem as if the deity of God whom Jesus proclaimed is definitively demonstrated only with the eschatological consummation. It might also seem as if materially the deity of God is inconceivable without the consummation of his kingdom, and that it is thus dependent upon the eschatological coming of the kingdom. But the eschatological consummation is only the locus of the decision that the trinitarian God is always the true God from eternity to eternity.⁶⁷

In comparing Pannenberg's eschatology to that of Moltmann, it seems that for Pannenberg the eternal God is active in time whereas for Moltmann God is Himself temporal. Consequently, whereas for Moltmann the immanent Trinity emerges from the economic Trinity eschatologically, for Pannenberg the economic Trinity is finally subsumed into the immanent Trinity who "is always true God from eternity to eternity."

CORNELIUS VAN TIL AND THE EMERGENCE OF COVENANT ONTOLOGY

The resurgence of Trinitarian theology sketched above has not characterized evangelical circles until recently. One exception to this generalization was the Trinitarian theology of the late Reformed apologist, Cornelius Van Til. Van Til received his doctorate in philosophy from Princeton University in 1927, specializing in idealistic philosophy. Believing that theology required continual restatement in the language of the day, Van Til used idealist forms of expression as vehicles for Christian content. For instance, he referred to Christianity as the only philosophical system capable of handling

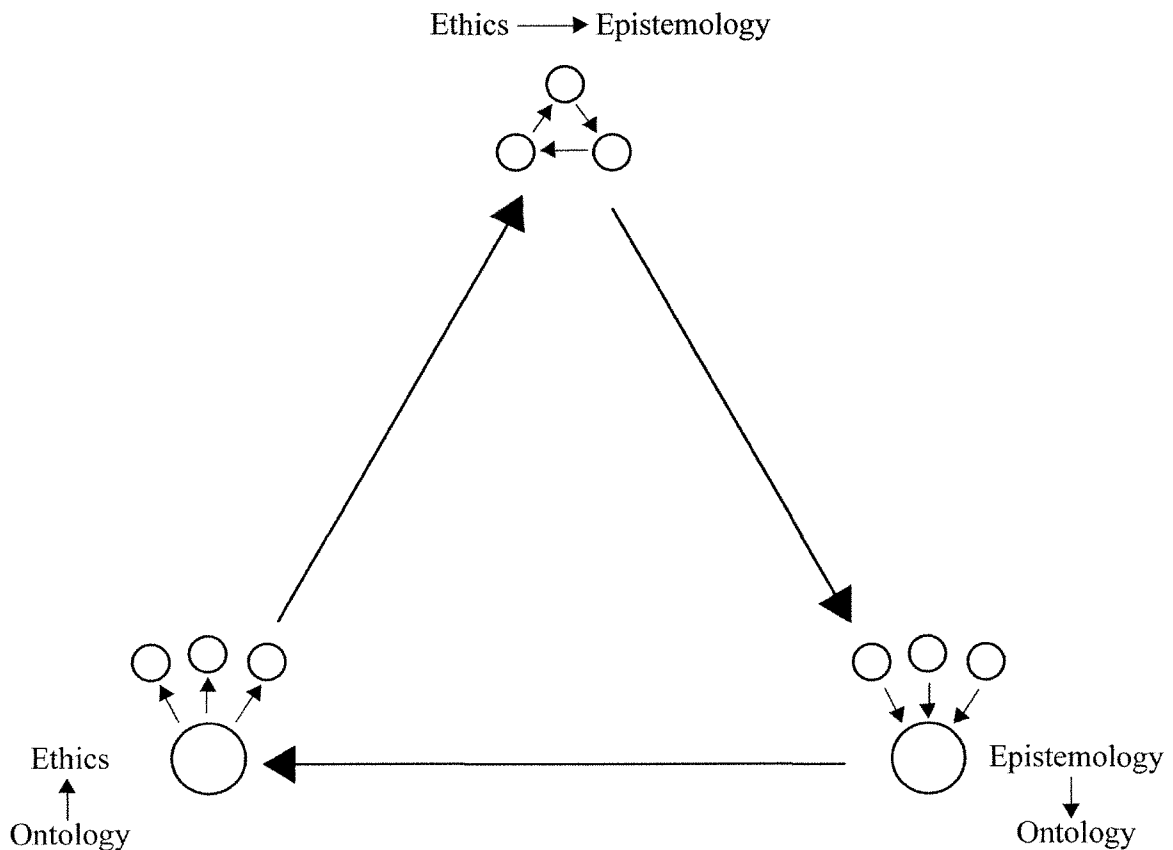
⁶⁶ Ibid., 313.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 331.

the “one-and-many” problem because the Trinity alone provided a “concrete universal.” Because Van Til was an apologist rather than a systematic theologian, however, his Trinitarian insights arose in relation to specific philosophical problems and so are scattered throughout his works. Consequently, while they are philosophically deep and penetrating, they are not systematically organized and related to one another. What follows is an attempt to draw integrated conclusions from a synthesis of three of Van Til’s major Trinitarian insights.

For Van Til God is *a se* because He is an internally interdependent (i.e. internally covenanted) being. As Van Til’s writings show, this interdependence manifests itself in three types of relationships: essence-person, person-person, and person-essence. These relationships may be visualized as completing a circuit as shown in Figure 1 below.

With regard to these relationships, the essence-person relationship will be referred to as the *ontological-ethical* relation. The reason for this designation is that the full expression of the infinite, personal essence in each of the three persons guarantees their personal infinitude and hence their perichoretic interaction which is covenantal and thus ethical. The person-person relationships will be referred to as the *ethical-epistemological* relation because the covenantal (ethical) interaction of the persons defines their identities epistemologically. Finally, the person-essence relationship will be referred to as the *epistemological-ontological* relation because the reciprocal definition of the persons resulting from their covenantal interaction ensures that God is internally rather than externally defined. As a result, God is both *a se* and personal because He is internally defined in a covenantal manner and not correlative to a finite, impersonal world.



**Figure 1. Circuit of Intra-Trinitarian Relationships
(*Explicatio-Implicatio-Complicatio*)**

The implication of this discussion is that the ontological, ethical, and epistemological aspects of God's being and activity form a circuit of interdependence (a relation of relationships) as shown in Figure 1. Because each of these relationships is internally dependent upon each of the others and upon nothing external to God's being, God is *a se*. The character of these relationships may be illuminated by a trilogy of Latin terms: *explicatio*, *implicatio*, and *complicatio*.⁶⁸ In this regard, the divine essence *unfolds* itself into each of the three persons (*explicatio*); the three persons also *interweave* themselves together (*implicatio*) in perichoresis, and finally the three persons also *fold* themselves *together* into the divine essence (*complicatio*). Before expounding these

⁶⁸ Catherine Keller, *Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2003), 231, 232.

relationships, it should be remembered that the distinction between the essence and persons intended within this analytical model is conceptual only, not oppositional. In other words, the distinction is not intended to imply a quaternity.

THE ONTOLOGICAL-ETHICAL RELATION (ESSENCE-PERSON)

As mentioned above, the full expression of God's essence in each of the persons implies that all three are omnipresent and therefore coextensive with one another. Thus, the infinitude of God's essence enables the ethical or covenantal interaction between the persons by establishing the ontological possibility of *perichoresis*. However, since divine *persons* cannot derive from an abstract, impersonal essence, the divine essence must itself be personal to enable this possibility. As a result of this latter insight, Van Til opted for a paradoxical formulation of God as both a tri-conscious and a one-conscious being. According to Lane Tipton, this paradoxical formulation was driven by his apologetic desire to directly confront modernity's demand for airtight, logical consistency.⁶⁹ Van Til therefore grounded the three Trinitarian persons in a personal divine essence:

It is sometimes asserted that we can prove to men that we are not asserting anything that they ought to consider irrational, inasmuch as we say that God is one in essence and three in person. We therefore claim that we have not asserted unity and trinity of exactly the same thing.

Yet this is not the whole truth of the matter. We do assert that God, that is, the whole Godhead, is one person. . . we have noted how theologians insist that each of the persons of the Godhead is co-terminous with the being of the Godhead. . . We need both the absolute coterminicity of each attribute and each person with the whole being of God, and the genuine significance of the distinctions of the attributes and the persons. "Each person," says Bavinck, "is equal to the whole essence of God and coterminous with both other persons and with all three". . . Over against all other beings, that is, over against created beings, we must therefore hold that God's being presents an absolute numerical identity. And even

⁶⁹ Lane Tipton, "The Function of Perichoresis and the Divine Incomprehensibility," *Westminster Theological Journal* 64, no. 2 (2002): 290.

within the ontological Trinity we must maintain that God is numerically one. He is one person. When we say that we believe in a personal God, we do not merely mean that we believe in a God to whom the adjective “personality” may be attached. God is not an essence that has personality; He is absolute personality.⁷⁰

. . . We speak of the essence of God in contrast to the three persons of the Godhead. We speak of God as a person; yet we speak also of three persons in the Godhead. As we say that each of the attributes of God is to be identified with the being of God, while yet we are justified in making a distinction between them, so we say that each of the persons of the Trinity is exhaustive of divinity itself, while yet there is a genuine distinction between the persons. Unity and plurality are equally ultimate in the Godhead. The persons of the Godhead are mutually exhaustive of one another, and therefore of the essence of the Godhead. God is a one-conscious being, and yet he is also a tri-conscious being.⁷¹

THE ETHICAL-EPISTEMOLOGICAL RELATION (PERSON-PERSON)

In this relation the emphasis falls upon the way that God internally defines Himself through perichoretic interaction. According to Van Til, the divine persons have a completely personal relationship without residue and are therefore mutually and exhaustively representational of one another. In fact, this mutual representation is so integral that God’s being may be said to be constructed “upon the representational plan.” From these statements it follows that God is internally self defined because His internal interaction allows Him to compare and contrast within His own being. Moreover, since “the idea of exhaustive personal relationship is the idea of the covenant,”⁷² Van Til sees God’s internal self-definition to derive from a perichoretic interaction which is covenantal in nature. Here Van Til was undoubtedly influenced by the Dutch Calvinism

⁷⁰ Cornelius Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1978), 229, 230.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 220.

⁷² Ralph Allan Smith, *Missing Quotations Van Til on Trinity and Covenant* (accessed 8 December 2006); available from <http://www.vantil.info/byauthor.html>.

of Abraham Kuyper who had formulated covenantal Trinitarianism decades earlier.⁷³

Van Til writes:

. . . It were quite legitimate and true to say that the foundation of all personal activity among men must be based upon the personality of one ultimate person, namely, the person of God, if only it be understood that this ultimate personality of God is a triune personality. In the Trinity there is completely personal relationship without residue. And for that reason it may be said that man's actions are all personal too. Man's surroundings are shot through with personality because all things are related to the infinitely personal God. But when we have said that the surroundings of man are really completely personalized, we have also established the fact of the representational principle. All of man's acts must be representational of the acts of God. Even the persons of the Trinity are mutually representational. They are exhaustively representational of one another. Because he is a creature, man must, in his thinking, his feeling and his willing, be representative of God. . . Since the whole being of God, if we may in all reverence say so, is built upon the representational plan, it was impossible for God to create except upon the representational plan.⁷⁴

THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL-ONTOLOGICAL RELATION (PERSON-ESSENCE)

In this final relation the emphasis falls upon the way in which God's internal self definition guards His *aseity* and personality, and hence the infinite personality of the divine essence. The key point here is that because God is internally self defined, He does not need to define Himself externally and thereby become correlative and dependent upon a finite impersonal world. Additionally, since God's internal interaction is covenantal and therefore personal, such interaction not only guards the infinitude of the divine essence, but also establishes its personal character. This epistemological-ontological relation therefore completes the circuit shown in Figure 1 by yielding the original starting point, an essence that is both absolute and personal:

⁷³ Ralph Allan Smith, *Paradox and Truth : Rethinking Van Til on the Trinity by Comparing Van Til, Plantinga, and Kuyper* (Moscow, Idaho: Canon Press, 2002), 77-80.

⁷⁴ Cornelius Van Til, *A Survey of Christian Epistemology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1969), 78, 79.

We may express this thought philosophically by saying that for us the eternal one and many form a self-complete unity. God is absolute personality and therefore absolute individuality. He exists necessarily. He has no non-being over against himself in comparison with which he defines himself; he is internally self-defined.

Using the language of the One-and-Many question we contend that in God the one and the many are equally ultimate. Unity in God is no more fundamental than diversity, and diversity in God is no more fundamental than unity. The persons of the Trinity are mutually exhaustive of one another. The Son and the Spirit are ontologically on a par with the Father. . . In God's being there are no particulars not related to the universal, and there is nothing universal that is not fully expressed in the particulars.⁷⁵

In regard to this epistemological-ontological relation, Van Til's contribution appears to be both unique and revolutionary. As the present historical survey has shown, previous theologians have concentrated upon the essence-person, and person-person relations, but not upon the person-essence relation. By explicating this latter relation, Van Til has "closed the loop" to produce a covenant ontology that is personal, relational, and concrete. Because God's substance is personal, and the persons are substantial, God emerges as a concrete universal in which unity and diversity are equally ultimate. As a result, covenant ontology may provide a fruitful perspective for East-West ecumenical dialog because it transcends their respective philosophical positions by incorporating them both into a common loop.

Moreover, since Figure 1 shows God's *aseity* to be both the result and the cause of His internal self relatedness, it follows that within God's being the absolute is the relative, and the relative is the absolute. Because this paradoxical insight resonates with postmodern epistemology, it will be applied again and again to different problems in the chapters that follow. For this reason this last citation from Van Til will be repeated *ad nauseum* in the chapters below. As mentioned above, this particular insight is both unique

⁷⁵ Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1967), 25, 26.

to Van Til and revolutionary in its implications. As the following chapters will show, it is especially this insight which makes such a conservative Presbyterian so highly relevant to the postmodern context.

CONCLUSION

The present chapter has sought to trace the doctrine of the Trinity from its Biblical origins through its historical development to its present day significance. In this regard, it was first shown that Eastern and Western Trinitarian theology originally developed within the differing frameworks of Platonism and Stoicism, causing them to emphasize personal diversity and substantial unity, respectively. It was then shown that Western Trinitarian theology peaked during the Middle Ages and subsequently declined due its inability to connect with popular piety. Next, the 20th Century resurgence of Trinitarian theology was documented through an analysis of some of the key theologians involved. Finally, Van Til's covenantal Trinitarianism was set forth to show its highly personal, relational, and concrete nature. Because of these qualities, it has the potential to facilitate East-West dialog, to connect with popular piety, and to meet the postmodern hunger that is driving the Trinitarian resurgence. In each of these cases, it is interesting that the philosophical remedy derives from the Biblical concept of *covenantal personalism*. As the subsequent chapters will show, the fruitfulness of this perspective for postmodern contextualization derives from the interdependence which it posits between absoluteness and relativity.

CHAPTER 3

MULTIPERSPECTIVALISM AS A TRINITARIAN GRAMMAR: THE ROLE OF PERICHORESIS

I noted above that a theology that seeks to be responsive to, and to take seriously, postmodern sensitivities after the demise of foundationalism views itself as a conversation. More specifically, theological construction--the attempt to delineate what ought to be the belief-mosaic of the Christian church--may be characterized as an ongoing conversation that the participants in the faith community share as to the meaning of the cultural symbols through which Christians express their understanding of the world they inhabit. These symbols include sacred texts, language, rituals, and practices. This constructive theological conversation requires the interplay, or perichoretic dance, of three sources of insight. . .

The demise of foundationalism accompanying the postmodern situation opens the way for an evangelical theological method that views constructive theology as an ongoing conversation involving the interplay of Scripture, tradition, and culture.

Stanley Grenz, *Renewing the Center*

As seen from the citation above,¹ Stanley Grenz sets forth a non-foundational theological method which involves the perichoretic interplay of three sources of insight. Because theology is a *socially embodied, historically extended* task in which the church continually interprets the *Bible* and applies it to its *cultural context*, the three sources of Grenz's theological method are the Bible, the dogmatic tradition of the church, and the embedding cultural context. According to Grenz, these three aspects of theological methodology should interpenetrate one another perichoretically in a three way conversation that Grenz elsewhere refers to as "trialog."² So understood, systematic theology is the result of a trialectic engagement between Biblical exegesis, dogmatic history, and missiology.

¹ Stanley J. Grenz, *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 214, 219.

² Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei*, x.

It is precisely this theological method that is being pursued in the present book. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the objective of this book is to inter-relate Trinitarian theology with the principle *loci* of postmodern philosophy as identified by Nancey Murphy: non-foundational epistemology, socially constructive linguistics, and holistic relational ontology. Having discussed the Biblical basis and the historical development of Trinitarian theology in Chapter 2, attention will now shift to cultural application for the balance of the text. However, to apply Trinitarian theology to these various *loci*, a means is needed to translate Trinitarian theology into a form that applies more directly to philosophical problems and categories. In providing such an approach, the present chapter will form a bridge to the heart of the argument in Chapters 4-6.

As it turns out, John Frame has provided such an approach in his book, *Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*.³ This approach is known alternately as *multiperspectivalism* or *triperspectivalism*. According to Frame, epistemology is a branch of ethics⁴ since both fields evaluate types of action (i.e. knowing is a form of doing) in terms of an interplay of three distinct perspectives: existential, situational, and normative.⁵ For instance, ethics evaluates human action according to the purity of the motives (existential perspective), the utility of the ends within a given context (situational perspective), and the lawfulness of the means employed (normative perspective). Similarly, epistemology evaluates the criteria by which a human subject (existential perspective) knows an object in its external context (situational perspective) in accordance with the laws of thought (normative perspective).

³ Frame.

⁴ Ibid., 63, 73, 74, 108, 109.

⁵ Ibid., 74, 75.

In both of these cases, Frame argues that the three perspectives, though distinct, are ultimately inseparable⁶ since they interpenetrate perichoretically with one another. Because the perspectives therefore cohere, there is a common truth of which they are the perspectives. Yet because this one truth requires a diversity of perspectives, it is complex, rather than simple. So understood, multiperspectivalism offers a true third way between modern reductionism which tries to reduce problems to the simplicity of a single perspective (i.e. subjectivism, empiricism, and rationalism) and postmodern perspectivalism which is nihilistic and therefore denies truth to every perspective. Multiperspectivalism is thus able to chart a course between these extremes because it is a Trinitarian method which captures the diversity-in-unity of complex truth. Moreover, because it offers a common flexible framework for distinct fields (i.e. ethics and epistemology), it is more precisely referred to as a Trinitarian *grammar*. Before developing the applications of multiperspectivalism, however, it is necessary to ground it in a Trinitarian ontology in order to fully explicate its Trinitarian nature. To this end it will be necessary to turn to the Trinitarian theology of Cornelius Van Til.

MULTIPERSPECTIVALISM AND THE ONTOLOGICAL TRINITY

Because it is a perichoretic method, multiperspectivalism derives from the Trinitarian perichoresis itself. In this regard, the divine persons mutually exhaust one another because they are on an ontological par.⁷ Moreover, since each of the persons is equal to the whole of the divine essence, each of the persons is not only coterminous with

⁶ Ibid., 107, 163, 191.

⁷ Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 25, 26.

each of the others but also with all three taken together.^{8, 9} Consequently, because each person knows each of the others from the inside, the subject and object of knowledge are coterminous within the Godhead. Moreover, since each person is also coterminous with all three together, the subject and object of knowledge are coterminous with the divine society as a whole. Thus, the subject and object of knowledge are not only coterminous with one another but also with the social norm. Within God's being, therefore, the existential, situational, and normative perspectives exhaustively interpenetrate one another. Consistent with this social analogy, Van Til views the divine knowledge as taking place eternally within a circuit of mutually exhaustive personalities:

To this we should add that the Trinity, as taught in the Scriptures, gives the most basic description possible of God as the *principium essendi* of knowledge for man. . . . When God existed alone, there was no time universe, and there were no new facts arising. The only knowledge activity that existed was completed in the circuit of the mutually exhaustive personalities of the triune God.¹⁰

By integrating the subjective, objective, and normative perspectives within God's being, perichoresis also makes human knowledge possible because it guards the *aseity* or independence of God. After all, if subject, object, and norm were not exhaustively correlative within God's being, then God would be correlative to the world as subject to object and thus part of a larger whole which would constitute the normative connection between the two. However, because God is exhaustively correlative within His own being, He can compare and contrast within Himself with the result that He is internally self defined and thus independent of the world. Consequently, it is precisely the exhaustive interpenetration of the existential (subjective), situational (objective), and

⁸ Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 229.

⁹ Herman Bavinck, *The Doctrine of God* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1951), 302.

¹⁰ Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 10.

normative (social) perspectives within God's being that establishes God's *aseity* and therewith His ability to guarantee the coherence of these same three perspectives in human thought and action:

. . . We may express this thought philosophically by saying that for us the eternal one and many form a self-complete unity. God is absolute personality and therefore absolute individuality. He exists necessarily. He has no non-being over against himself in comparison with which he defines himself; he is internally self-defined.

Using the language of the One-and-Many question we contend that in God the one and the many are equally ultimate. Unity in God is no more fundamental than diversity, and diversity in God is no more fundamental than unity. The persons of the Trinity are mutually exhaustive of one another. The Son and the Spirit are ontologically on a par with the Father. . . . In God's being there are no particulars not related to the universal, and there is nothing universal that is not fully expressed in the particulars.¹¹

. . . It is of the greatest moment to make clear that the ultimate subject of our predication is not the Universe, Reality, or Being in general in which God is the universal, and historical facts are the particulars. If such were the case, God and the universe would be correlative to one another. And it is precisely in order to set off the Christian position against such correlativism that the equal ultimacy of the one and the many within the Godhead, prior to and independent of its relation to the created universe, must be presupposed. As Christians, we hold that in this universe we deal with a *derivative* one and many, which can be brought into fruitful relation with one another because, back of both, we have in God the original One and Many. If we are to have *coherence* in our experience, there must be a correspondence of our experience to the eternally coherent experience of God. Human knowledge ultimately rests upon the internal coherence within the Godhead; our knowledge rests upon the ontological Trinity as its presupposition.¹²

As seen from the last citation above, human thought coheres to the extent that it corresponds to the absolute coherence of God's thought. As the one in whom subject, object, and norm cohere exhaustively, God can infallibly create a world in which derivative subjects, objects, and norms also cohere. Unlike God, however, human subjects do not comprehend themselves, their external world, or the mediating norms

¹¹ Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 25, 26.

¹² Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 23.

exhaustively. As a result, the perichoresis between the existential, situational, and normative perspectives of human knowledge is partial, not complete. Moreover, since each aspect depends upon a prior coherence within God's being, the coherence in human knowledge is mediated (i.e., correspondence to God's coherence) rather than direct. Human knowledge is thus a covenantal phenomenon because its interrelations are rooted in the God who is Himself covenant:

It may even be said that *Calvin's covenant idea is Theism come to its own*. The covenant idea is nothing but the expression of the representational principle consistently applied to all reality. The foundation of the representational principle among men is the fact that the Trinity exists in the form of a mutually exhaustive representation of the three Persons that constitute it. The emphasis should be placed upon the idea of *exhaustion*. . .

It was upon this foundation of a truly Trinitarian concept that Calvin built his conception of covenant theology. If the Persons of the Trinity are representationally exhaustive of one another, human thought is cast on representational lines too. There would in that case be no other than a completely personalistic atmosphere in which human personality could function. Accordingly, when man faced any fact whatsoever, he would *ipso facto* be face to face with God. It is metaphysically as well as religiously true that man must live and cannot but live *coram deo* always. Even the meeting of one finite personality with another finite personality would not be truly personal if there were an impersonal atmosphere surrounding either or both of these personalities. What makes their meeting completely personal is the fact that the personality of each and of both is surrounded by the personality of God. Hence all personal relationship between finite persons must be mediated through the central personality of God.¹³

THE HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF MULTIPERSPECTIVALISM

The above discussion of Van Til's theology is somewhat anachronistic in that the three perspectives, though implicit in his writings, were never fully explicated by him. For instance, with regard to human knowledge, Van Til argued that the subject-object

¹³ Van Til, *A Survey of Christian Epistemology*, 96, 97.

problem was solved because the subject and object of knowledge were coterminous within God's being.^{14, 15, 16} However, since Van Til's explanation omitted any discussion of the normative perspective, his thinking on this topic remained bimodal rather than triperspectival. Nevertheless, Van Til had a penchant for 3-fold formulations. He described ethics as an evaluation of the motive (existential perspective), standard (normative perspective), and goal (situational perspective) of human behavior.^{17, 18} He described God's redemptive activity in terms of objective acts in history (situational perspective), the supernatural Word revelation which defined the meaning of these acts (normative perspective), and the subjective application of these truths in regeneration (existential perspective).¹⁹ Finally, with regard to revelation itself, Van Til held that God's supernatural Word revelation (normative perspective) was necessarily supplemented by His natural revelation both within the human conscience (existential perspective) and in the surrounding world (situational perspective).^{20, 21} In fact, Van Til even set forth a 9-fold view of revelation in which the revelation of God (normative perspective), humanity (existential perspective), and the world (situational perspective) could each derive from three different revelational sources: God (normative perspective), humanity (existential perspective), and the world (situational perspective).²² Yet, in all of Van Til's discussion of these 3-fold phenomena, the three perspectives, evident within

¹⁴ Ibid., 171.

¹⁵ Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 137.

¹⁶ Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 43.

¹⁷ Ibid., 51.

¹⁸ Cornelius Van Til, *Christian Theistic Ethics* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1980), 41-151.

¹⁹ Cornelius Van Til, *Psychology of Religion* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1971), 116-166.

²⁰ Cornelius Van Til, *Apologetics* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980), 29-37.

²¹ Van Til, *A Survey of Christian Epistemology*, 196.

²² Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 64-74.

the parentheses above, remained beneath the surface of his discussion. Accordingly, it fell to Van Til's former student John M. Frame to draw these implications out and then draw them together into a multiperspectival methodology.

After graduating from Westminster Theological Seminary, Frame went on to graduate studies at Yale. There he came under the influence of two important people: George Lindbeck, the father of postliberalism, and Paul Holmer (Frame's advisor), the man responsible for the Wittgensteinian influence that came to characterize "Yale theology." In addition to Van Til, therefore, Frame was reading a lot of Wittgenstein as well as the post-critical philosophers of science, Thomas Kuhn and Michael Polanyi. Moreover, in a manner similar to Van Til's 3-fold formulations, George Lindbeck was developing his 3-fold typology of liberal, conservative, and postliberal theologies which he would later classify as experiential-expressive (existential perspective), cognitive-propositional (situational perspective), and cultural-linguistic (normative perspective), respectively.²³ As related by John Frame in a private communication, it was the confluence of these various factors that eventually resulted in multiperspectivalism:

The ideas occurred to me around 1969 or 1970. I was teaching Doctrine of God based on a transcendence/immanence scheme, but it occurred to me that "transcendence" needed further explanation, a distinction between God's control and his authority. That led to more studies of God's lordship, and the control-authority-presence scheme. At the same time, I was teaching ethics, based on Van Til's goal/motive/standard distinction. Eventually, I saw that goal/motive/standard could be correlated with control/presence/authority, and I was off.

Some other things that inclined me in this sort of direction, not necessarily in this order:

1. Van Til's emphasis on the Trinity.

²³ George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), 15-19.

2. Van Til's threefold system of natural revelation in his Intro to Systematic Theology.
3. A college course in metaphysics from Dennis O'Brien that showed how otherwise different philosophical positions can be seen as perspectives on one another.
4. A grad course with George Lindbeck on "Comparative Dogmatics" that offered a similar approach to theology.
5. Van Til's way of relativizing disputes about theological encyclopedia: e.g. you don't need to make apologetics "prior" to systematics or vice versa, because they each presuppose the other. VT was big on reciprocal relationships among biblical doctrines. (See my "Van Til, the Theologian.")
6. Thomas Kuhn, Michael Polanyi, Wittgenstein, even perhaps a dollop of Nietzsche (but no more than that). . . .²⁴

As can be seen from Frame's account above, multiperspectivalism represents a blend of Westminster Theological Seminary and the "Yale School." As such, it embodies traditional Trinitarian orthodoxy in the form of a postliberal theological grammar. It is precisely this combination of factors that makes it an attractive method for contextualizing Trinitarian theology in a postmodern world. Moreover, since the purpose of a linguistic grammar is to facilitate *speech-acts*, multiperspectivalism, as a theological grammar, is designed to facilitate theology-acts (i.e., the *application* of the faith). In this regard, this methodology coheres with Frame's conviction that meaning is pragmatic (i.e. meaning = use) and therefore that theology *is* an application of the Word.²⁵ Thus, just as language is a tool for social construction, multiperspectivalism is a *tool* for theological construction in the social worlds of church and culture. As acknowledged by Frame, these views reflect a Biblically moderated influence of Ludwig Wittgenstein.²⁶

²⁴ John Frame, "Private Communication," (2006).

²⁵ Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, 33, 34, 66, 67, 79-83, 199.

²⁶ Ibid., 97.

THE MEANING-APPLICATION OF MULTIPERSPECTIVALISM

As mentioned above, multiperspectivalism is a *Trinitarian* grammar. According to Frame, the situational, normative, and existential perspectives reflect God's *control* in creation, His *authority* as mediated by His Word, and His *presence* in sanctification.²⁷ Accordingly, the situational, normative, and existential perspectives can be related to the respective persons of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, although Frame is hesitant to make such identifications. (Here the identification of the divine persons with particular perspectives is similar to the doctrine of appropriation in which the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are *appropriated* to the respective works of creation, redemption, and sanctification, even though it is known that each person is active in each task.) Furthermore, just as the divine persons interpenetrate perichoretically, so do the three perspectives. Thus, the three perspectives are inseparable and logically implicate one another. None has priority over the others, and the existence of each entails the existence of the other two. As a result, they constitute three perspectives on the whole of knowledge and on one another. In fact it is precisely to underscore this inseparability that Frame refers to them as *perspectives* rather than *parts*:

. . . These distinctions, then, generate three "perspectives" on knowledge. When we think about knowledge as a knowledge of the world, we are examining it under the "situational" perspective. Knowledge as self-knowledge constitutes the "existential" perspective. And knowledge as a knowledge of law or criterion constitutes the "normative" perspective.

These perspectives are not distinct "parts" of knowledge. They are "perspectives"; each describes the *whole* of knowledge in a certain way. The existential perspective describes *all* knowledge as self-knowledge, the situational perspective as knowledge of the world, and the normative perspective as knowledge of law.²⁸

²⁷ Ibid., 62-65.

²⁸ Ibid., 107.

. . . Ultimately, the three perspectives differ only in *emphasis* or *focus*. Each includes the other two, and so the three all cover the same territory; they have the same content.

Thus I maintain that the three perspectives are equally ultimate, equally important. Each depends on the others, so that without the others, it could not be intelligible.²⁹

Because the three perspectives cohere with one another, they represent a common truth. Yet since this truth requires multiple perspectives for its expression, it is complex, rather than simple. In this regard, multiperspectivalism offers a true third way between the simple truth of modernistic reductionism and the nihilistic perspectivalism of Continental postmodernity. With regard to the former, Nancey Murphy has argued that modern epistemology, linguistics, and ontology were each characterized by an atomistic reductionism.³⁰ At the other extreme Continental postmodernity deriving from Nietzsche and poststructuralism seeks to deconstruct reason, observation, and even the self. In contrast to both of these alternatives, multiperspectivalism is a connective, holistic, and complex methodology that is reconstructive rather than deconstructive. As such, it shares a strong affinity with Anglo-American postmodernity as represented by Nancey Murphy.³¹ Indeed, this affinity is not surprising since apart from the influence of Van Til, the two views share a common intellectual pedigree: Austin, Kuhn, Lindbeck, Polanyi, Quine, Wittgenstein, etc. Because of this strong affinity, multiperspectivalism constitutes the logical tool with which to apply Van Til's Trinitarian theology to the philosophical targets identified above by Nancey Murphy. This application will be the burden of Chapters 4-6.

²⁹ Ibid., 163.

³⁰ Murphy, 1-3, 151, 152.

³¹ Nancey Murphy, *Anglo-American Postmodernity: Philosophical Perspectives on Science, Religion, and Ethics* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1997), 1, 2.

With regard to epistemology Murphy argues that in the transition to the postmodern age, the governing metaphor has changed from a *building* to that of a *web* or a *net*.³² In terms of the old image, philosophers searched for indubitable *foundations* upon which the *edifice* of knowledge could be constructed. Beginning with Quine, however, the image of a net has come to predominate. Since the new image emphasizes connectivity rather than foundations, postmodern epistemology is referred to as *non-foundational* epistemology.

In this regard, multiperspectivalism may be characterized as non-foundational in the sense that nothing in the created order may serve as *epistemological bedrock*. Since none of the perspectives has foundational priority over the others, they exhibit an interdependent coherence as shown below in Figure 2a. However, while none of the perspectives is foundational to the others, their coherence results from the fact that they share a transcendent foundation in the Triune God. Yet since the divine persons are exhaustively interdependent and correlative to one another, no person is foundational to the other two. Thus, in the words of Colin Gunton, *the Trinity is the “non-foundational foundation”*³³ *of humanity’s non-foundational knowledge*.

Apart from the Trinity, however, human thought will try to absolutize one of the perspectives and make it foundational to the other two. When this happens, the coherence of the perspectives gives way to the warring camps of empiricism, rationalism, and subjectivism as shown in Figure 2b. However, since none of these perspectives is capable of grounding the epistemological enterprise, the resulting skepticism may well produce a

³² Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism: How Modern and Postmodern Philosophy Set the Theological Agenda*, 88.

³³ Colin E. Gunton, *The One, the Three, and the Many : God, Creation, and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge ; New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 134. Gunton’s exact words are “non-foundationalist foundations.”

nihilistic reaction that denies the validity of all the perspectives simultaneously. This is precisely what has happened with Continental postmodernity. The examination of these issues will be the burden of Chapter 4.

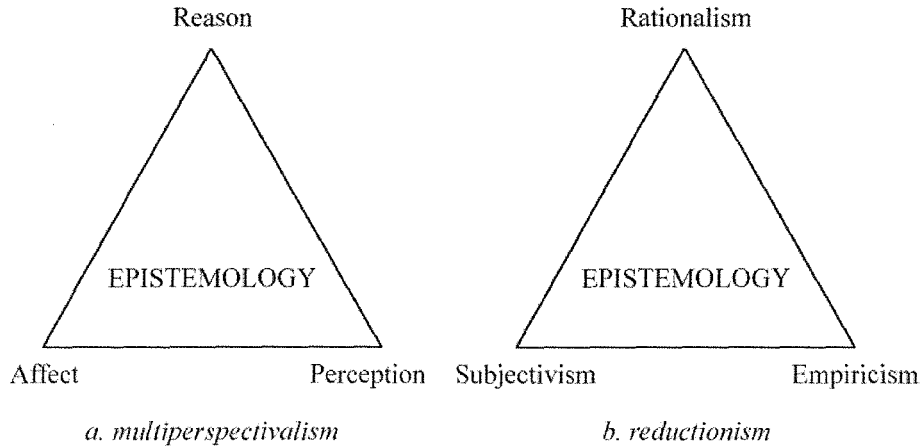


Figure 2. Multiperspectivalism vs. Epistemological Reductionism (Foundationalism)

With regard to linguistics Murphy again describes the modern-postmodern transition in terms of a change in the governing metaphor. The old image of language as a *mirror* or a *picture* has given way to the new image of language as a *tool*.³⁴ In terms of the old image, linguists tried to justify language by the *correspondence* of words or sentences to the objective world. Because this *referential* or *propositional* theory could not account for emotional or ethical statements, it necessitated the development of an *expressive* theory of language to account for everyday speech. In terms of the new image, however, language is a *tool* to accomplish projects in the social world. Thus, the new emphasis falls upon the *use* of language rather than reference or expression alone.

Having been influenced by Austin and Wittgenstein, John Frame is sympathetic to the view that the meaning of language is determined by its use in the social world.

³⁴ Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism: How Modern and Postmodern Philosophy Set the Theological Agenda*, 111.

Indeed, his multiperspectivalism has been offered as a flexible grammar to facilitate theological construction in the social worlds of church and culture. With respect to the details of the language problem, Frame adopts the triadic framework of *pragmatics*, *semantics*, and *syntactics*,³⁵ initially put forth by Charles Morris.³⁶ In terms of this framework, pragmatics emphasizes the expressive or existential aspects of speech; semantics represents the referential or situational aspects of speech, and syntactics concerns itself with the coherence or normative aspects of speech.

Because human speech-acts are grounded in the Triune God, they are established by a divine speech-act in which expression, reference, and coherence are exhaustively correlative. As a result, the pragmatic, semantic, and syntactic perspectives of human speech-acts cohere as shown below in Figure 3a. And since language is central to knowledge itself, it follows that *God's knowledge is socially constructive; human knowledge is socially reconstructive*. However, apart from the Triune God, this unity of perspectives gives way to the competing emphases of expressivism, referentialism, and structuralism as shown in Figure 3b. Moreover, since neither of these perspectives can account for language alone, a skepticism may well result, producing a backlash in which all the perspectives are held to be equally meaningless. The examination of these issues will be the objective of Chapter 5.

³⁵ Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, 93-98.

³⁶ Charles W. Morris, *Foundations of the Theory of Signs* (Chicago, Ill.: The University of Chicago Press, 1938), 6-9.

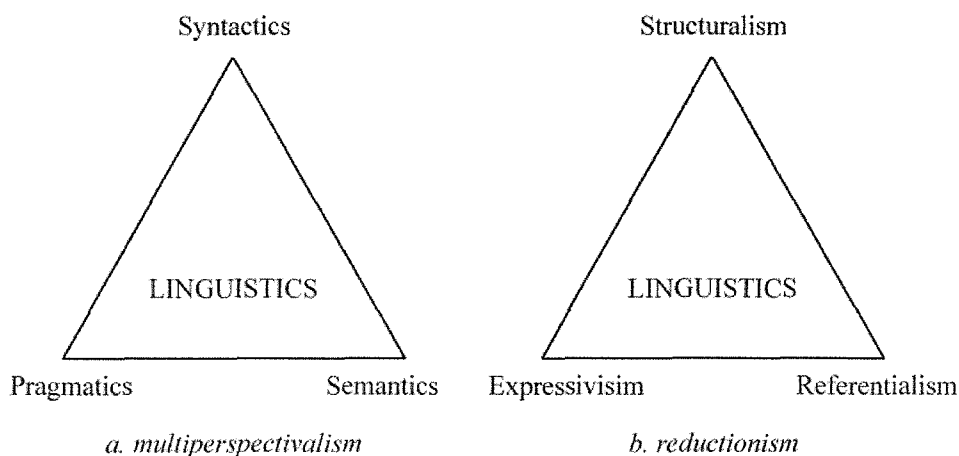


Figure 3. Multiperspectivalism vs. Linguistic Reductionism

With regard to metaphysics Nancey Murphy has not described the philosophical transition in terms of a change in the governing metaphors. While indicating that the modern mind was captivated by the picture of microscopic billiard balls (i.e. the billiard ball universe),³⁷ she gives no governing metaphor for the postmodern age. Perhaps this is because the theories of relativity, quantum mechanics, and chaos, which give rise to the new cosmology, are difficult if not impossible to visualize. Nevertheless, she does describe the difference. Because the modern age was characterized by atomism and determinism, a reductionism prevailed in which an attempt was made to reduce all sciences to the mechanical interaction of atoms (i.e. sociology > psychology > biology > chemistry > physics). By contrast, since the new scientific perspective considers relation, pattern, and organization to be as important as matter, it has a built in resistance to such reductionism. In emergence theory (complexity science), for instance, the interaction of parts gives rise to emergent wholes which cannot be reduced to the sum of their parts. Moreover, these wholes not only exist in relative independence of their parts but also

³⁷ Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism: How Modern and Postmodern Philosophy Set the Theological Agenda*, 137.

exert a reciprocal effect that causes the parts to behave differently than they would in a different context. For instance, chemical reactions behave differently in the human body than they do in a test tube. Thus, far from being reductionistic the new ontology accompanying the new science posits a reciprocal influence between parts and wholes.

While John Frame has not devoted much attention to metaphysical triads, multiperspectivalism presupposes a complex world in which parts and wholes exert a reciprocal influence on one another. In particular, it presupposes that self, world, and relation exist as real entities which interpenetrate one another perichoretically as shown below in Figure 4a. After all, in God's world *the real is the relational, and the relational is the real*. However, when the Triune God is denied, this harmony gives way to sparring matches between the adherents of idealism, materialism, and logicism as shown in Figure 4b. Here *idealism* and *materialism* signify the positions that all is thought or matter, respectively, and *logicism* has been invented to represent the position that all is law. This latter position is intended to represent that of Einstein, Spinoza, and the Stoics for whom mind and matter are both absorbed into a world of impersonal fate.

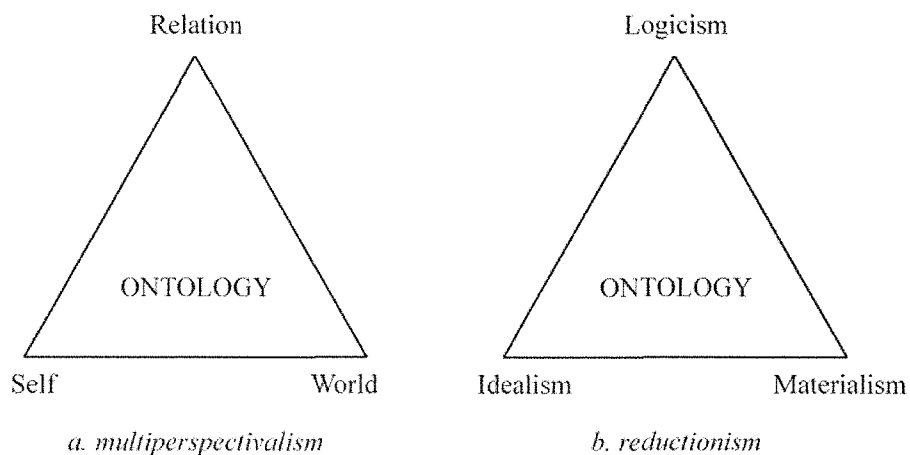


Figure 4. Multiperspectivalism vs. Ontological Reductionism

These issues will be discussed further in Chapter 6. However, since Frame has devoted little attention to the development of a triadic ontology, Chapter 6 will reverse the procedure employed in Chapters 4 and 5. Rather than using a metaphysical triad in the examination of the new ontology, the new ontology will be used to ground a metaphysical triad. Such a reversal of procedure is consistent with a non-foundational epistemology in which arguments can precede in several directions, depending upon the circumstances (see Chapter 4).

CONCLUSION: THE ROLE OF FRAME'S TRINITARIAN GRAMMAR WITHIN GRENZ'S TRINITARIAN METHOD

This chapter began with a discussion of Grenz's 3-fold theological method in which systematic theology emerges as a 3-way conversation between Biblical exegesis, doctrinal history, and the missional engagement of culture. It was in connection with this last task that multiperspectivalism was invoked as a Trinitarian grammar capable of translating the Trinitarian faith into the idiom of postmodern culture. Thus, Grenz's 3-fold theological method provides the occasion for Frame's 3-fold grammar in the execution of its cultural task. Since both the method and its enabling grammar share a fundamental threeness, however, the question arises as to whether this commonality is merely coincidental or reflective of a deep lying connection between the two.

In this regard, observe that a major difference between the method and the grammar is one of *scale*. The method applies to the church as a whole whereas the grammar has so far only been considered at the level of individuals. However, if the terms of the grammar are scaled up to the level of the church, then a comparison could be more easily made. At the scale of the church, the normative perspective would derive

from Biblical exegesis, the existential perspective would concern the life internal to the church, and the situational perspective would therefore concern the external cultural context in which the church was embedded. Moreover, according to John Frame, the existential perspective would then include the dogmatic history of the church, and the situational perspective would provide the missional context:

The “maturity” spoken of here is not the maturity of each individual, though that is implied, but the maturity of the corporate body as it grows up into Christ, its Head. It is best, then, to see the knowledge, also, as something shared by the whole body, though of course the knowledge of individuals is not irrelevant to that.

Thus it appears that there is a kind of “knowledge” possessed by the church, as well as a knowledge possessed by individuals. . . . Scripture seems to present corporate knowledge primarily as a kind of superindividual subjectivity that grows and develops as the individual does, to which the individual is related not primarily as subject to object but as member to body.³⁸

Our concept of theology as application will help us form a better view of theological progress. Theology progresses as it learns to apply God’s Word to each situation it encounters, and we have seen evidence of that throughout church history. The great strides in theological understanding come about when the church creatively and faithfully responds to difficult situations on the basis of Scripture.³⁹

As can be seen from these citations, the existential, situational, and normative perspectives at the scale of the church correspond to doctrinal history, cultural context, and Biblical exegesis in Grenz’s method. Thus, Grenz’s method is recovered by scaling Frame’s grammar up to the level of the church. As a result, the theological method is seen to be a special case of a more general Trinitarian grammar applied to a particular set of problems at a particular scale of reality. Given this fact, the use of multiperspectivalism in conjunction with Grenz’s methodology is inherently correct, not fortuitous.

³⁸ Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, 159, 160.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 307.

CHAPTER 4

BEYOND IMPERSONAL FOUNDATIONALISM: TOWARD A NON-FOUNDATIONAL TRINITARIAN EPISTEMOLOGY

A nonfoundational understanding of scripture and tradition locates ultimate authority only in the action of the triune God. If we must speak of a “foundation” of Christian faith at all, then, we must speak of neither scripture nor tradition in and of themselves, but only of the triune God who is disclosed in polyphonic fashion through scripture, the church, and even the world, albeit always normatively through scripture.

Stanley Grenz and John Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*

Among the various strains of postmodernism, a common feature is the rejection of epistemological foundationalism. Simply stated, foundationalism is the view that knowledge resembles a building and is thus built one dimensionally upward from indubitable foundations and is therefore reducible to these foundations in turn. Because modern epistemology was foundationalist, it was both linear and reductionistic.

In this regard, it was shown in Chapter 3 that the three basic epistemological perspectives led to three types of foundationalism in the modern era. Subjectivism (existential perspective) made the knowing subject basic to knowledge and therefore reduced knowledge to psychology. Objective empiricism (situational perspective) made discrete objects basic, producing an atomistic reductionism. Finally, rationalism (normative perspective) made reason basic so that knowledge was identified with rule based manipulation. Building upward from these foundations, it was widely assumed that the progress of knowledge would usher in a utopia of enlightenment, abundance, and world peace. Thus, in addition to foundationalism, the modern era was also characterized by a metanarrative of progress which in turn served to justify foundationalism itself. As a

result, the postmodern rejection of foundationalism is accompanied by a rejection of metanarrative as well.

In opposition to foundationalism, postmodernism sees the subjective, objective, and normative aspects of knowledge as interrelated and socially constructed. Due to this strong interdependence, knowledge is thought to be more like a web than a building. In fact, it is precisely because human beings are embedded in this web of knowledge (like flies) that they cannot extricate themselves from it to determine its foundations. Thus, in contrast to the linear movement characteristic of foundationalism, knowledge within the web occurs by way of a to and fro movement known as the *hermeneutical circle*. In the absence of any fixed reference point, however, there is no confidence that the hermeneutical circle ever converges to the truth.

In contrast to both modern foundationalism and postmodern relativism, however, multiperspectivalism offers a true third way. Because the existential, situational, and normative perspectives of knowledge are interdependent, truth is neither reductive, nor relative, but rather complex. In this regard, multiperspectivalism is substantially identical to the polyphonic approach of Stanley Grenz cited above.¹ Moreover, because human knowledge is always provisional, multiperspectivalism implies that the three perspectives of human knowledge continually adjust to one another in the mode of a hermeneutical circle. Yet, since God's exhaustive plan secures the possibility of human knowledge, this process of cyclical adjustment is viewed as converging to the truth. Thus, in sharing an emphasis on web-like knowledge and the hermeneutical circle, multiperspectivalism shares formal points of contact with postmodernity, despite material differences. For this reason it provides a means of contextualizing Trinitarian theology within Nancey

¹ Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context*, 117, 118.

Murphy's first philosophical *locus*, non-foundational epistemology. To proceed with this task, it is first necessary to turn to the theology of Cornelius Van Til.

THE METAPHYSICS OF KNOWLEDGE: THE TRINITY AS A "NON-FOUNDATIONAL FOUNDATION"

As argued in Chapters 2 and 3, Van Til sees the Trinity as foundational for human knowledge precisely because God's being is characterized by an equal ultimacy of unity and diversity and is thus non-foundational in *se*. Because each person is coterminous with the divine essence, the infinity of the divine essence is communicated to each of the persons. As a result of this infinitude, the persons exhaustively interpenetrate one another so that each person is coterminous with each of the others and with all three together. However, while the infinitude of the divine essence thus establishes the Trinitarian perichoresis, this perichoresis, in turn, establishes the infinitude of the divine essence. After all, by virtue of perichoresis the persons of the Trinity are exhaustively correlative with one another so that God is internally self-defined. And since God can therefore compare and contrast within Himself, He does not compromise His *aseity* by defining Himself as correlative to a finite world of flux. Thus, God provides the absolute foundation for human knowledge precisely because He is internally interdependent and hence non-foundational in *se*. Using Colin Gunton's expression, *God is therefore the "non-foundational foundation"*² of human knowledge.³ Van Til writes:

² Gunton, 134. Gunton's exact words are "non-foundationalist foundations."

³ Note that since God's internal relationality may be characterized as relational holiness or love, God's love is ontologically significant in establishing His transcendence. As mentioned in Chapter 2, this ontological significance of love is captured in the notion of covenant ontology. Since covenant love therefore provides the basis of human knowledge, systematic and mystical theology should converge. Furthermore, by rooting God's being in exhaustive interdependence, covenant ontology may provide a way to transcend the foundationalist approaches of Eastern and Western Trinitarianism which seek to root God's being in the

... We may express this thought philosophically by saying that for us the eternal one and many form a self-complete unity. God is absolute personality and therefore absolute individuality. He exists necessarily. He has no non-being over against himself in comparison with which he defines himself; he is internally self-defined.

Using the language of the One-and-Many question we contend that in God the one and the many are equally ultimate. Unity in God is no more fundamental than diversity, and diversity in God is no more fundamental than unity. The persons of the Trinity are mutually exhaustive of one another. The Son and the Spirit are ontologically on a par with the Father. . . . In God's being there are no particulars not related to the universal, and there is nothing universal that is not fully expressed in the particulars.⁴

As seen from this citation, God's triunity establishes His *aseity* and therewith His omniscience and omnipotence. Because God is omniscient, He knows Himself exhaustively by nature and knows creation exhaustively by virtue of His plan for it. Moreover, since He is also omnipotent, He can infallibly execute His plan to produce a creation that is exhaustively ordered and interrelated. Finally, since the eternal one and many are equally ultimate and mutually conditioning, the created one and many are equally derivative and interdependent. Thus, subjects, objects, and laws are equally basic and interrelated within creation and therefore bear no foundational relationship with respect to one another. In other words, *human knowledge is non-foundational precisely because God is Himself its "non-foundational foundation."* Van Til writes:

Applying this to the question of man's knowledge of facts, it may be said that for the human mind to know any fact truly, it must presuppose the existence of God and his plan for the universe. If we wish to know the facts of this world, we must relate these facts to laws. That is, in every knowledge transaction, we must bring the particulars of our experience into relation with universals. . . . But the most comprehensive interpretation that we can give of the facts by connecting the particulars and the universals that together constitute the universe leaves our knowledge at loose ends, unless we may presuppose God back of this world... As Christians, we hold that in this universe we deal with a derivative one and

person of the Father or in the divine essence, respectively. Rather, as argued in Chapter 2, God is absolute because He is relative, and He is relative because He is absolute.

⁴ Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 25, 26.

many, which can be brought into fruitful relation with one another because, back of both, we have in God, the original One and Many. If we are to have coherence in our experience, there must be a correspondence of our experience to the eternally coherent experience of God. Human knowledge ultimately rests upon the internal coherence within the Godhead; our knowledge rests upon the ontological Trinity as its presupposition.⁵

While the subjective, objective, and normative aspects of human knowledge ultimately cohere with one another, such coherence is not always obvious from the human perspective. Because human beings are finite analogs of God, human knowledge is a finite analog of God's infinite knowledge. Consequently, while God's knowledge of Himself and the world is comprehensive, human knowledge, though true, is never comprehensive. Thus, God and the world remain incomprehensible to humanity, despite their apprehensibility. After all, as a finite analog of God's thought, human thought lacks exhaustive coherence precisely because it lacks exhaustive correspondence to God's exhaustive coherence. As a result of its analogical status, human knowledge is therefore characterized by *seeming* paradox (i.e. paradox for humanity, but not for God):

We see then that our knowledge of the universe must be true since we are creatures of God who has made both us and the universe. Then too our knowledge of the universe cannot be comprehensive because our knowledge of God cannot be comprehensive.

A word must here be said about the question of antinomies. It will readily be inferred what as Christians we mean by antinomies. They are involved in the fact that human knowledge can never be completely comprehensive knowledge. Every knowledge transaction has in it somewhere a reference point to God. Now since God is not fully comprehensible to us we are bound to come into what seems to be contradiction in all our knowledge. Our knowledge is analogical and therefore must be paradoxical. We say that if there is to be any true knowledge at all there must be in God an absolute system of knowledge. We therefore insist that everything must be related to that absolute system of God. Yet we ourselves cannot fully understand that system.⁶

⁵ Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 22, 23.

⁶ Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 44.

Through his emphasis on *seeming* paradox, Van Til offers a third way between the modern exclusion of paradox and its postmodern embrace. Moreover, in advancing a Trinitarian epistemology, Van Til extends his notion of paradox to the very roots of knowledge itself. After all, since *the Trinity is the “non-foundational foundation” of humanity’s non-foundational knowledge*, such knowledge is rooted in a seemingly paradoxical equality of unity and diversity. Indeed, because human knowledge is analogical, it is not only confronted by paradox but grounded in paradox as well.

MULTIPERSPECTIVALISM VS. EPISTEMOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONALISM

As mentioned in Chapter 3, a consequence of Trinitarian epistemology is the equal ultimacy of subjects, objects, and laws and thus the interpenetration of the existential (subjective), situational (objective), and normative (conventional) perspectives of human knowledge. Because these perspectives are equally derivative and interdependent, none can be absolutized and made foundational to the others. Rather *the three perspectives of human knowledge together share a “non-foundational foundation” in the Triune God* for whom the existential, situational, and normative perspectives of knowledge are exhaustively coterminous. For this reason Trinitarian epistemology embodies *multiperspectivalism* as shown below in Figure 5a.

Because multiperspectivalism involves an interpenetration of three distinct perspectives, it is both polycentric *and* relational. In this regard, it is distinct from both the monocentric epistemology of modern foundationalism and the decentered epistemology of postmodern relativism. While postmodern epistemology is symbolized

by a *net* or a *web*, modern epistemology is symbolized as a *building*.⁷ Consistent with this latter picture modern philosophers sought indubitable *foundations* for the *edifice* of knowledge. Moreover, in contrast to the complex truth of multiperspectivalism, foundationalism gave rise to a simple, reductive, and monocentric notion of truth. Thus, the foundationalist impulse was both the cause and the result of the modern desire to approach epistemology in abstraction from metaphysics, thereby denying relationality. As a result, modern thought became mired in the *egocentric predicament*, an inability to transcend epistemic subjectivity. To highlight these characteristics the present section will recount the story of modern philosophy as a prelude to a subsequent analysis. The comparison between multiperspectivalism and postmodern epistemology will be reserved for the following section. As will become increasingly evident in the discussion below, the story of modern philosophy is the story of competing foundationalisms as shown in Figure 5b. The story of modern philosophy begins with Descartes.

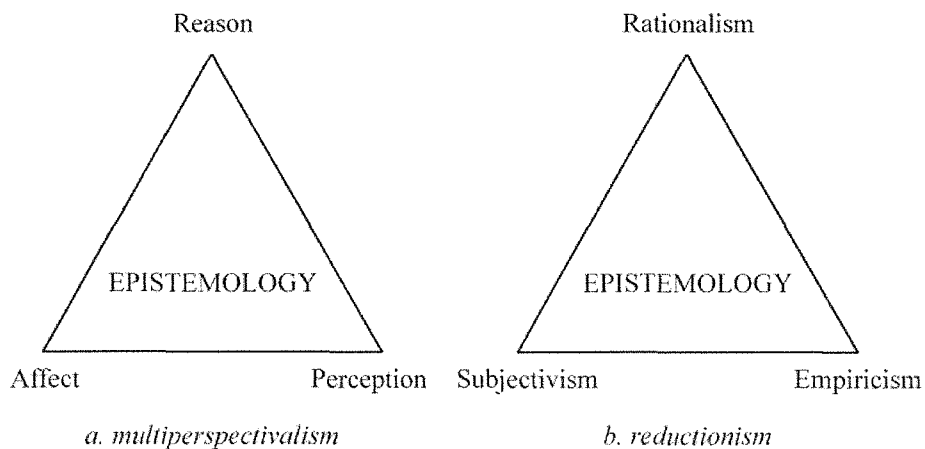


Figure 5. Multiperspectivalism vs. Epistemological Reductionism

⁷ Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism: How Modern and Postmodern Philosophy Set the Theological Agenda*, 88.

Descartes lived during a period of intense religious warfare, and therefore sought a rational foundation that could transcend religious differences and reunify society. Breaking with the scholastic tradition, he sought to doubt everything imaginable and to build his philosophy only upon that which remained. Through his method of doubt, he became convinced that he could not doubt the fact that he existed as a doubter: “*cogito ergo sum* (I think therefore I am).” He therefore attempted to ground his philosophy upon a firm starting point in the mind and then to reason outward, first to God and thence to the surrounding world. Given his subjective starting point, Descartes may fairly be called a subjectivist. However, since he also believed in “clear and distinct ideas” capable of reaching the mind from without (i.e. ideas of God), he may also be called a rationalist and an *a priorist*. Because this latter classification has also stuck, Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz are commonly grouped together as the *Continental Rationalists*.

While Descartes began within the human mind, empiricism initially began from without. According to John Locke, the objects of the outer world have a real existence which determines the ideas of human thought through sense impressions. The objective empiricism of Locke, however, gave way first to the idealism of Berkeley and then to the subjective empiricism of David Hume. Berkeley believed that objects existed only when they were perceived, and Hume argued that sense impressions were mental phenomena alone since the organism only had access to the output of these sensations, not their input (i.e. supposed objects). Because the sense impressions were discrete, all laws connecting these impressions were inferred rather than observed. For instance, when one billiard ball strikes another, cause and effect can only be inferred from the collision because the actual observations relate only to contiguity in space and time. Moreover, since the mind itself

is never observed, the mind also dissolves into a sea of discreet sensations which lack coherence among themselves. The result of Hume's philosophy was therefore to produce an extreme skepticism by dissolving the external world, physical laws, and even the mind itself into atomic sensations. It also represented a regression to a Cartesian subjectivism in contrast to the objective empiricism of Locke. This oscillation between an objective and a subjective empiricism would come to characterize the empirical movement.

Kant attempted to counter Hume's skepticism by bringing the *a priori* reason of Descartes into conversation with the *a posteriori* sense impressions of Hume. According to Kant, the mind is active in supplying both the individual forms (concepts) through which perceptions are grasped *and* the syntactic connections linking the forms together: "Concepts without percepts are empty; percepts without concepts are blind." Because the world is therefore perceived through mental concepts supplied *a priori*, the *phenomenal* world of perception differs from the *noumenal* world of real existence. Moreover, because these perceptions are linked through an *a priori* syntactic structure, the phenomenal world is logically ordered, despite the fact that the noumenal world provides the input in the form of discrete sense impressions. Because this *syntactic structure* is also supplied by the mind *a priori*, Kant's methodology is called *synthetic a priori reasoning*. It is also referred to as *transcendental reasoning* because it attempts to delineate the *transcendental conditions* that must be satisfied *a priori* for knowledge to be possible. While Kant tried to retain an element of realism through his noumenal world, his philosophy clearly tended in a subjectivist direction and established a subjectivist trajectory that became even more pronounced in some of his followers. Because he

believed that the *a priori* structures of the mind are the same for people of all times and places, his subjectivism could fairly be called a universal subjectivism (see Chapter 5).

While Kantianism persisted as a school of thought through the 19th and 20th Centuries, three additional schools were Kantian offshoots: Romanticism, Idealism, and Positivism. Romanticism tried to make contact with Kant's noumenal world through intuition, rather than reason. According to the Romantics, both the human subject and the objective world were alike products of the World Soul who was trying to come to expression through human action in the world. To reach the noumenal world, it was therefore necessary to descend within the self and thereby unite with the World Soul. Thus, while the phenomenal-noumenal divide could not be transcended by reason, the noumenal world could be reached indirectly through feeling, intuition, or the will.

Idealism pursued a similar path using reason, rather than intuition, as the unifying factor. According to Hegel, the World Spirit is seeking to come to complete self consciousness within human history through a dialectical process. This dialectical process resembles human thought in which an opposition between thesis and antithesis is transcended in a greater synthesis. Since subject and object are simply opposing moments in the same dialectical process, the end result of history will be the absorption of both subject and object into a complete rational system in which their opposition is transcended. Thus, the phenomenal-noumenal distinction is merely provisional since ultimately and therefore eschatologically "the real is the rational, and the rational is the real." While Hegel's system is typically classified as a species of rationalism, it could just as well be described as subjectivist because it is a mere projection of the thought process onto the plane of history.

The third group of Kant's successors was the positivists. Positivism retained Kant's phenomenalism while rejecting his *a priori* conceptual and syntactic structures. As a result, the phenomena were regarded as prior to thought, rather than the reverse. Moreover, because these phenomena were also discrete, positivism resembled the subjective empiricism of David Hume. According to August Comte, the founder of positivism, history had progressed from religion to metaphysics and finally to positivism, within which scientific laws were regarded as mere correlations of phenomena, having no metaphysical extension to things themselves. In the late 19th Century, these views became entrenched in Vienna through the work of the physicist Ernst Mach.

During the 19th Century, empiricism remained strong in Britain. In the late 19th and early 20th Centuries, it was blended with new techniques of logical analysis to yield a movement known as Logical Atomism or analytic philosophy. Within this philosophy complex propositions were logically analyzed into their atomic components which could then be individually verified through their correspondence with reality. Logical Atomism thus embodied an objective empiricism of the Lockean type. Through Ludwig Wittgenstein this philosophy was transplanted to his native Vienna and combined with positivism to yield a movement known as logical positivism which was virtually identical to Logical Atomism except that it embodied a subjective empiricism of the Humean type.

Also at the turn of the century, a new philosophical movement was given birth through the field of structural linguistics. As described in greater detail in Chapter 5, the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure advanced the revolutionary thesis that language was a product of neither subjective expression nor objective reference, but was rather a linguistic structure of the social system. However, because language is central to thought,

Saussure's thesis implied that epistemology was governed by social norms, a fact which brought sociology and anthropology into conversation with philosophy. As should be evident from this description, structuralism embodied a normative view of knowledge. Since structuralism marks the beginning of the "linguistic turn," however, it marks the beginning of the end of the modern period.

As seen from this brief overview of the modern period, modern philosophy is a story of competing foundationalisms. While none of these views was purely subjective, objective, or normative, such emphases were clearly evident. The subjectivist tendency was pronounced in Cartesian rationalism, Humean empiricism, Kantian idealism, Romantic aestheticism, Comptean positivism, and Logical Positivism. The objective element predominated in Lockean empiricism and Logical Atomism. Normative views were represented in Continental Rationalism (Spinoza and Leibniz), Hegelian idealism, and structural linguistics. From this comparison it can be seen the modern period was characterized not only by foundationalism, but also by a predominance of the subjectivist view. As mentioned above, these twin characteristics are both the results and the causes of the modern tendency to approach epistemology in abstraction from metaphysics, thereby denying relationality. After all, once a subjective starting point is taken in abstraction from the surrounding world, it becomes impossible to reconnect thought with the world through purely epistemological (i.e. subjective) considerations. Thus, modern philosophy became subject to the egocentric predicament and then exhausted itself in trying to solve the subject-object problem. The repeated failure to solve this problem eventually caused philosophers to seek epistemological bedrock in the "linguistic turn."

Viewing the modern age retrospectively during the early to mid 20th Century, Van Til could see its three centuries of development panoramically. Having studied idealistic philosophy at Princeton during the 1920s, Van Til saw that Kant had brought the egocentric predicament to complete self consciousness in his philosophy. Moreover, since Kant had penetrated to the central core of modernity, Van Til believed that Kant was *formally* correct in his transcendental analysis of knowledge. The central issue clearly was one of determining the transcendental conditions that made knowledge *a priori* possible. Nevertheless, while agreeing with Kant's formal analysis, Van Til disagreed with his material content. Rather than *a priori* structures of the human mind, the only transcendental condition capable of securing knowledge was the existence of the Triune God in whom subject and object are coterminous.

While Van Til failed to include the norm of knowledge in his analysis, this deficiency was corrected by John Frame. As argued previously, Trinitarian perichoresis produces an interpenetration of the existential, situational, and normative perspectives of knowledge, an interpenetration which is original within God's being and derivative within human thought. Thus, in place of the monocentric view of foundationalist reductionism, multiperspectivalism posits a polycentric view of perichoretic relationality. In terms of multiperspectivalism both the foundationalism and the egocentric predicament of the Enlightenment are to be expected from a movement that cut its ties with tradition and sought to build a *house* of knowledge apart from the Triune God. Van Til writes:

. . . All aspects being equally created, no one aspect of reality may be regarded as more ultimate than another. Thus the created *one and many* may in this respect be said to be *equal* to one another; they are equally derived and equally dependent upon God who sustains them both. The

particulars or facts of the universe do and must act in accord with universals or laws. Thus there is order in the created universe. On the other hand, the laws may not and can never reduce the particulars to abstract particulars or reduce their individuality in any manner....⁸

MULTIPERSPECTIVALISM VS. THE WEB OF KNOWLEDGE

As indicated above, the metaphor of a web of knowledge has replaced that of a building as modern foundationalism has given way to postmodern relationality. While the image of a net avoids the problems of foundationalism, it has problems of its own. The present section will therefore try to delineate these problems and respond to them within the framework of multiperspectivalism. With regard to its origins, Nancey Murphy traces the web metaphor to the writings of W. V. O. Quine.⁹ Quine writes:

The totality of our so-called knowledge or beliefs, from the most casual matters of geography and history to the profoundest laws of atomic physics or even of pure mathematics and logic, is a man-made fabric which impinges on experience only along the edges. Or, to change the figure, total science is like a field of force whose boundary conditions are experience. A conflict with experience at the periphery occasions re-adjustments in the interior of the field. Truth values have to be redistributed over some of our statements. Re-evaluation of some statements entails re-evaluation of others, because of their logical interconnections—the logical laws being in turn simply certain further statements of the system, certain further elements of the field. Having re-evaluated one statement we must re-evaluate some others, which may be statements logically connected with the first or may be the statements of logical connections themselves. But the total field is so underdetermined by its boundary conditions, experience, that there is much latitude of choice as to what statements to re-evaluate in the light of any single contrary experience. No particular experiences are linked with any particular statements in the interior of the field, except indirectly through considerations of equilibrium affecting the field as a whole.¹⁰

⁸ Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 27.

⁹ Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism: How Modern and Postmodern Philosophy Set the Theological Agenda*, 88.

¹⁰ Willard Van Orman Quine, *From a Logical Point of View: 9 Logico-Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1953), 42, 43.

As seen from this citation, Quine's view of knowledge is non-foundationalist. Reasoning does not proceed one dimensionally upward from an indubitable foundation but rather can proceed in several directions through the web. As a result, there is reciprocity between theory and data. On the one hand, the theory is data based since anomalous "experience at the periphery occasions readjustments" within the web. On the other hand, data are also theory laden since these readjustments are "underdetermined" and are frankly made to absorb the data into the web.¹¹

While avoiding foundationalist reductionism, Quine's approach has its own set of problems. In referring to the web as a "man-made fabric" including the laws of "pure mathematics and logic," Quine simultaneously elevates human subjectivity and destroys the normativity of logic and mathematics. Moreover, while Quine does grant a role to "experience at the periphery," such experience leaves the web of knowledge "underdetermined." As a result, "there is much latitude" in choosing how to reconstruct the web "in the light of any single contrary experience."

Accordingly, Quine's web is plagued by three practical problems. First, in the absence of binding norms and with only a slight role given to experience at the periphery, it would seem that the process of "web spinning" was largely subjective. Second, given the underdetermination of this "web spinning" by experience, it would also seem that several competing webs could account for the same experience, thereby raising the problem of relativity. Finally, since a web is an extended network of links and nodal points, the image of a web itself is problematic in connoting a situation which is decentered. Since nodes are compressed to dimensionless points, they are nothing in

¹¹ Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism: How Modern and Postmodern Philosophy Set the Theological Agenda*, 94.

themselves and thus derive their identity from adjacent nodes which in turn derive their identity from nodes still farther a field, and so on. The result is that the relationships (i.e. links) absorb the *relata* (i.e. nodes) and thus become meaningless due to vacuity.

With regard to the first issue, Quine's position is highly subjective because it suffers from the lack of normative and objective constraints. Granted that some norms (language) are socially constructed, other norms like logic and mathematics constitute preexisting constraints which are discovered, not invented by humanity. Moreover, according to the new cosmology (see Chapter 6), the world is also *objectively* interrelated. In contrast to Quine's picture, therefore, human knowledge involves the perspectival interpenetration of three different types of webs so that the human subject interweaves the normative and objective webs into the web of knowledge. Since the interweaving of these three webs constitutes the single web of reality, knowledge is continuous with reality in a multiperspectival framework. This profound coherence results from the fact that the Triune God is Himself an exhaustive web of coherence, standing above the created web as its "*non-foundational foundation*." Thus, human knowledge grows against the backdrop of God's exhaustive coherence. Van Til writes:

The whole meaning of any fact is exhausted by its position in and relation to the plan of God. This implies that every fact is related to every other fact. God's plan is a unit. And it is this unity of the plan of God, founded as it is in the very being of God, that [*sic*] gives the unity that we look for between all the finite facts. If one should maintain that one fact can be fully understood without reference to all other facts, he is as much antitheistic as when he should maintain that one fact can be understood without reference to God.¹²

Something of this was brought out when we said that God's knowledge of himself and God's knowledge of the facts of the universe must be the standard of our knowledge. God is completely self-conscious and therefore knows himself and all things analytically. There is in God's

¹² Van Til, *A Survey of Christian Epistemology*, 6.

thought complete coherence. Keeping this in mind, we may say that if we are to have coherence in our thinking it will have to be a coherence that corresponds to God's coherence. Accordingly, our coherence will never be completely inclusive in the way that God's coherence is completely inclusive. Our coherence will be no more than an analogy of the coherence of God. Yet because it is based upon God's coherence it will be true knowledge.¹³

In addition to subjectivity, Quine's web also raises the specter of relativity. If the web of knowledge truly is "underdetermined" by experience, then several competing webs could be spun in order to explain the same "experience." Moreover, since the criteria of proof would then be internal to the webs themselves, there would be no metacriterion standing above the several webs to which adherents of different webs could appeal in the adjudication of their competing truth claims. While such a situation arises in a small way between adherents of different scientific paradigms, the issue of circular reasoning becomes particularly acute in the debate between different world views.

This problem was anticipated by Van Til nearly 80 years ago. Van Til argued that at the level of a religious world view, there was no way to avoid circular reasoning because the world view itself determined the presuppositions, the conclusion, and the standards of proof. Since differing standards of proof eliminated the possibility of direct argumentation, Van Til proposed an indirect method by which one would enter into the opponent's circle in order to reduce it to absurdity. In this regard, one would show that the competing system is incapable of establishing its own central values on the basis of its own resources in accordance with its own internal standards of proof. Then one would ask the opponent to enter the Christian circle to see that Christianity *is* capable of maintaining its core values on the basis of Christian resources using Christian standards of proof. This method of indirect argument is called argument by presupposition. Its goal

¹³ Ibid., 200.

is to show that a competing system not only fails on its own terms but also must presuppose Christianity and live parasitically upon it in order to function at all. Thus, according to Van Til, Christian relationality need not imply relativity:

The method of reasoning by presupposition may be said to be indirect rather than direct. The issue between believers and non-believers in Christian theism cannot be settled by a direct appeal to “facts” or “laws” whose nature and significance is already agreed upon by both parties to the debate. The question is rather as to what is the final reference-point required to make the “facts” and “laws” intelligible. The question is as to what the “facts” and “laws” really are. Are they what the non-Christian methodology assumes that they are? Are they what the Christian theistic methodology presupposes they are?

The answer to this question cannot be finally settled by any direct discussion of “facts.” It must, in the last analysis, be settled indirectly. The Christian apologist must place himself upon the position of his opponent, assuming the correctness of his method merely for argument’s sake, in order to show him that on such a position the “facts” are not facts and the “laws” are not laws. He must also ask the non-Christian to place himself upon the Christian position for argument’s sake in order that he may be shown that only upon such a basis do “facts” and “laws” appear intelligible.

To admit one’s own presuppositions and to point out the presuppositions of others is therefore to maintain that all reasoning is, in the nature of the case, *circular reasoning*. The starting point, the method, and the conclusion are always involved in one another.¹⁴

Having examined the problems of subjectivity and relativity, it remains to address the third problem mentioned above, namely the appropriateness of the web metaphor to capture a relational view of knowledge. In this regard, the question of choosing a good metaphor is no trifling matter since metaphors often govern human thought.¹⁵ Indeed, as argued above, modern thought was itself stifled by the prevailing image of knowledge as a building. Now the problem with the web metaphor is that the nodes are compressed to dimensionless points so that they are nothing in themselves and thus derive their identity from adjacent nodes which in turn derive their identity from nodes still farther a field, and

¹⁴ Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 100, 101.

¹⁵ Lakoff and Johnson.

so on. The connotation of the web metaphor is thus one of decenteredness in which relationships absorb *relata* and thereby become meaningless. In contrast to the atomistic reductionism of modernity, therefore, the web image runs the opposite risk of complete vacuity. Moreover, since the knowing subject becomes embedded (absorbed) like a fly in this web, all sense of orientation is lost in a seemingly infinite sea of nodes and links. To paraphrase a popular saying, “one cannot see the web for the nodes.” The resulting epistemic disorientation has been nicely captured by Van Til:

An illustration may indicate more clearly what is meant. Suppose we think of a man made of water in an infinitely extended and bottomless ocean of water. Desiring to get out of the water, he makes a ladder of water. He sets this ladder upon the water and against the water and then attempts to climb out of the water.¹⁶

Multiperspectivalism avoids the deficiencies of the web picture because it is polycentric, rather than decentered. Because it is polycentric, relationships and *relata* are equally ultimate and mutually conditioning. Thus, multiperspectivalism posits a relational holism which is not vacuous. Since the three perspectives each retain their distinct centers while including the whole, human knowledge is characterized by checks and balances between objective correspondence, normative coherence, and a subjective intuition. Moreover, *since the Triune God stands above the whole as its “non-foundational foundation,”* the interrelation of distinct centers takes place within an overall vertical orientation.

THE HERMENEUTICAL CIRCLE

As indicated above, the image of a web of knowledge implies reciprocity between theory and data. Since anomalous “experience at the periphery occasions readjustments”

¹⁶ Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 102.

within the web, the theory is data based. However, since the web is “underdetermined” by this data, the data is also theory laden because there is then great latitude in how one incorporates this data into the web. Because of this reciprocity, the web is characterized by a to and fro movement between theory and data which differs from the linear motion of foundationalist strategies of the inductive (empiricism) or deductive (rationalism) type. Rather than linear movements of induction or deduction alone, web-like knowledge demands a cyclic alternation of inductive and deductive phases in which the whole and the parts are provisionally constructed from one another. This process of interdependent, cyclical iteration is known as the *hermeneutical circle*. The reciprocity implied by such a circle is especially pronounced in Thomas Kuhn’s philosophy of science.

According to Kuhn, the defining structural unit of science is the paradigm. A paradigm is a theoretical matrix within which data are defined and which is itself supported by the data. Thus, scientific theories involve a hermeneutical circle in which the theories are data based, and data are theory laden. Due to this circularity, Kuhn holds that shifts in the dominant paradigm also change the “facts” of observation:

Those theories, of course, do “fit the facts,” but only by transforming previously accessible information into facts that, for the preceding paradigm, had not existed at all. And that means that theories too do not evolve piecemeal to fit facts that were there all the time. Rather, they emerge together with the facts they fit from a revolutionary reformulation of the preceding scientific tradition, a tradition within which the knowledge-mediated relationship between the scientist and nature was not quite the same.¹⁷

Because paradigms have radical epistemological implications, paradigm shifts produce discontinuous changes within a scientific tradition. According to Kuhn, scientific progress consists of relatively long periods of continuous growth, punctuated by the

¹⁷ Kuhn, 141.

discontinuous breaks of scientific revolutions. During *normal science*, progress is quantitative and continuous because a dominant paradigm holds sway. *Scientific revolutions*, however, produce qualitative breaks (discontinuities) in the tradition. Consequently, because paradigms define the facts as well as the theory, a paradigm shift causes the pre and post revolutionary phases of a tradition to differ in kind, and therefore to be theoretically and factually *incommensurable* with one another.¹⁸ As a result, scientific progress becomes hard to define. Presumably, the new paradigm integrates more data with greater economy, but because it is incommensurable with the older tradition, it cannot be said to bring one closer to the truth:

These last paragraphs point the directions in which I believe a more refined solution of the problem of progress in the sciences must be sought. Perhaps they indicate that scientific progress is not quite what we had taken it to be. But they simultaneously show that a sort of progress will inevitably characterize the scientific enterprise so long as such an enterprise survives. In the sciences there need not be progress of another sort. We may, to be more precise, have to relinquish the notion, explicit or implicit, that changes of paradigm carry scientists and those who learn from them closer and closer to the truth.¹⁹

In contrast to Kuhn, Van Til offers a more positive view. As indicated above, Van Til believes that human knowledge is analogical of God's knowledge, and that human knowledge therefore grows against the background of total coherence. The manner in which this takes place is through a variation of the hermeneutical circle which Van Til calls the "method of implication." Because unity and diversity are interdependent within a Trinitarian epistemology, the method of implication is characterized by cyclical iterations of alternating inductive and deductive phases. Through these iterations human beings "implicate" themselves ever more deeply into God's truth through a spiraling

¹⁸ For instance, in the Copernican Revolution, the change from a geocentric to a heliocentric paradigm resulted in a corresponding change from geocentric to heliocentric facts.

¹⁹ Kuhn, 170.

process which advances forward even as it twists. In changing the metaphor from a circle to a spiral, Van Til brings the imagery into alignment with his conviction that human knowledge grows in depth and breadth through this process:

The method of implication as outlined above is circular reasoning. Or we may call it spiral reasoning. We must go round and round a thing to see more of its dimensions and to know more about it, in general, unless we are larger than that which we are investigating. Unless we are larger than God we cannot reason about him any other way, than by a transcendental or circular argument.²⁰

But for us the time series brings forth that which is new for us. Accordingly, we have to synthesize the new facts with the old facts. Then when we have done that we must proceed once more to see what the new facts thus related to the old facts together reveal about God and reality in general. In this respect the process of knowledge is a growth into the truth. For this reason we have spoken of the Christian theistic method as the method of *implication* into the truth of God. It is reasoning in a spiral fashion rather than in a linear fashion. Accordingly, we have said that we can use the old terms deduction and induction if only we remember that they must be thought of as elements in this one process of implication into the truth of God. If we begin the course of spiral reasoning at any point in the finite universe, as we must because that is the proximate starting point of all reasoning, we can call the method of implication into the truth of God a *transcendental method*. That is, we must seek to determine what presuppositions are necessary to any object of knowledge in order that it may be intelligible to us.²¹

As should be evident from these citations, the axis of Van Til's spiral is horizontal to signify progression in time. The bottom of each loop represents creation, and the top represents God. The image therefore evokes a continuous circular motion of inductive ascent and deductive descent which advances forward through time. Moreover, because the higher level (God) provides the *a priori* conditions for knowledge of the lower level (creation), the method is also called "transcendental."

²⁰ Van Til, *A Survey of Christian Epistemology*, 12.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 200, 201.

As should be readily apparent from this discussion, the respective circularities of Kuhn and Van Til differ in their concepts of progress. While both approaches posit reciprocity between induction and deduction, Van Til offers an ever widening spiral, whereas Kuhn offers at most an infinite series of incommensurable circles. This divergence may be traced to material differences and to differences in scale. While they both use a transcendental method, Van Til presupposes a transcendent Person, and not a finite paradigm. Because of this difference, Van Til's circles are as wide as existence itself, whereas Kuhn's are no broader than a particular scientific tradition. Thus, despite their revolutionary implications, Kuhn's paradigm shifts are localized and therefore do not prevent the progress of knowledge as a whole. Furthermore, for Van Til, God is the all knowing creator who not only establishes the criteria of intelligibility but also guarantees the continuity and progress of the scientific metanarrative. By contrast, since Kuhn's circles do not include God, he can offer no basis for scientific knowledge and hence no assurance of scientific progress. In fact, this is an issue that Kuhn prefers to avoid:

It is not only the scientific community that must be special. The world of which that community is a part must also possess quite special characteristics, and we are no closer than we were at the start to knowing what these must be. That problem—What must the world be like in order that man may know it?—was not, however, created by this essay. On the contrary, it is as old as science itself, and it remains unanswered. But it need not be answered in this place.²²

In contrast to Kuhn, Van Til sees humanity's spiraling activity as a growth into a pre-established truth. Using the language of multiperspectivalism, the existential, situational, and normative perspectives of knowledge give rise to this circular activity since they constantly adjust to one another in the integration of

²² Kuhn, 173.

new data. For God, however, the three perspectives suffer no such adjustments because His knowledge is already exhaustive. In fact, it is precisely this constancy of God's perspectives that provides the epistemological center toward which the cyclical adjustment of human perspectives converges. After all, God has not only established the criteria for intelligibility, but also the means and end of the humanity's cultural project. Thus, human knowledge is ultimately progressive because the hermeneutical circle is sustained by an eternal circle of perichoretic exhaustion:

To this we should add that the Trinity, as taught in the Scriptures, gives the most basic description possible of God as the principium essendi of knowledge for man. The whole problem of knowledge has constantly been that of bringing the one and the many together. . . . When God existed alone, there was no time universe, and there were no new facts arising. The only knowledge activity that existed was completed in the circuit of the mutually exhaustive personalities of the triune God. It is only with respect to man that we can speak of a relation of the a priori and the a posteriori elements of knowledge. Such a distinction cannot exist in God. The plurality of the Godhead cannot be compared with the arising of new facts as we see it in the created universe. The plurality of God is as eternal as the unity of God.²³

. . . we are happy to accept the charge of circular reasoning. Our reasoning frankly depends upon the revelation of God, whose "reasoning" is within the internal-eternal circularity of the three persons of the Trinity. It is only if we frankly depend for the validity of our reasoning upon this internal circular reasoning in the triune God that we can escape trying in vain to reason in circles in a vacuum of pure contingency.²⁴

CONCLUSION

The burden of this chapter has been to set forth the epistemological implications of the *Trinity as the "non-foundational foundation" of human knowledge*. Because the

²³ Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 10.

²⁴ Van Til, *A Survey of Christian Epistemology*, 202.

persons of the Trinity are exhaustively correlative of one another and interdependent, God is non-foundational in regard to His own being. Moreover, since the Triune God has created a world in which unity and diversity are equally derivative, *this non-foundational God is Himself the foundation of humanity's non-foundational knowledge.*

As a result of this metaphysical conception, several epistemological consequences follow. First, since subjects, objects, and laws have an equal ontological status within the created order; the existential, situational, and normative perspectives of human knowledge are *interdependent* and *irreducible*. Thus, multiperspectivalism embodies a polycentric relationality that opposes both the monocentricity of modern foundationalism as well as the decenteredness of postmodern relativism. Second, since foundationalism is thereby excluded, human knowledge proceeds by way of a hermeneutical circle rather than a linear movement. Finally, since all aspects of created reality are interrelated by the plan of God, human knowledge is a progressive growth into a pre-established truth. Thus, God not only establishes the conditions of intelligibility but also the means and the end of humanity's scientific metanarrative. As this narrative progresses, the hermeneutical circle converges to the truth because it is created by, sustained by, and attracted into an eternal circle of Trinitarian perichoresis. Thus, from beginning to end and at all points in between, *the Trinity is the "non-foundational foundation" of humanity's non-foundational knowledge.*

CHAPTER 5

THE NAMED GOD AND THE QUESTION OF LANGUAGE: TOWARD A TRINITARIAN SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVISM

It is in this respect that the act of God naming God emerges as a triune or Trinitarian act. Present in this act of naming are Namer, Named, and Name. Moreover, all three are constituted by the act. The second of the three is constituted as the one who is Named by the Namer, of course. But the first is likewise constituted as the Namer of the Named, who receives back the bestowed Name. And insofar as the Name is bound up with the very essence of its bearer, the third emerges as the Name shared by the Namer and the Named. Exchanging substantive for dynamic language leads to the conclusion that the act involves Naming, Being Named, and Name Sharing.

What is presented in the New Testament as an event involving Jesus, his heavenly Father, and the divine Spirit suggests a transcendent, eternal dynamic of naming within the life of the triune God. Stating the dynamic in classical Trinitarian terms, the eternal Father of the Son bestows the divine name, which is his own, eternally on the Son of the Father, who eternally returns to the Father what he has received. And this Name shared by the Namer and the Named is concretized as the person of the Holy Spirit.

Stanley Grenz, *The Named God and the Question of Being*

Of the many factors giving rise to the postmodern outlook, a major influence is an epistemological view known as social constructivism which arises from reflections on language. According to this view, knowledge is constructed, not referential, and thus non-objective. Moreover, since the concepts used in the construction of knowledge are socially, not individually derived, such knowledge is not truly subjective either. Rather, since both the subject and the object of knowledge are defined in terms of socially determined categories, both are social constructs which therefore emerge from, and dissolve into the cultural-linguistic system of one's social group. So understood, social constructivism stands as a *tertium quid* in relation to the subject-object epistemology of the modern period and is thus thoroughly postmodern.

As indicated above, social constructivism emerged from the *linguistic turn* in 20th Century philosophy. Early in that century, the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure

began a movement known as *structuralism* which treated language as a social system. Moreover, by mid-century, Wittgenstein had abandoned the referential view of language and had begun to view speech in terms of socially determined *language-games*. While these two approaches were clearly different, their common denominator was a social view of language, a fact which made epistemology socially and culturally relative. After all, since language is central to knowledge, a social view of language necessarily implied a social epistemology. Moreover, since the subject and object of knowledge were thus linguistically defined, the effect of this social epistemology was to reduce the subject and object of knowledge to the status of social constructs. So understood, the effect of social constructivism was to overcome the subject-object split by dissolving both entities into the social system. In its more extreme forms, this view attacked the very possibility of knowledge, not only by making knowledge culturally relative and thus non-universal, but also by attacking the very possibility of objectivity and subjectivity themselves.

To respond to this situation from a Christian perspective, it is necessary to affirm the valid insights of social constructivism without sacrificing the objectivity and the subjectivity of knowledge. As should be evident from the citation above,¹ the solution to this dilemma lies within the doctrine of the Trinity. As a self-naming God, God's being is socially constructed through language. Furthermore, since the Namer, the Named, and the Name are coterminous with the essence of God and with one another, God's being is characterized by perfect subjectivity, objectivity, and social normativity. As a result, God's socially constructed knowledge of Himself is at the same time perfectly objective and subjective. And since the creation is an objective result of God's social construction,

¹ Stanley J. Grenz, *The Named God and the Question of Being : A Trinitarian Theo-Ontology*, 1st ed. (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 290.

the same conclusions hold for God's knowledge of creation first of all and thence for humanity's derivative and finite knowledge. *God's knowledge is socially constructive; human knowledge is socially reconstructive.*

By holding forth the possibility of socially constructed, objective and subjective knowledge, Trinitarian theology offers a third way between postmodern social relativism on the one hand and modern objectivism and subjectivism on the other. Yet, because Trinitarian theology has formal points of contact with social constructivism, it will be possible to contextualize Trinitarian theology within the second philosophical *locus* identified by Nancey Murphy, socially constructive linguistics. To this end it will first be helpful to consider the Trinitarian theology of Cornelius Van Til.

THE TRINITY AND THE METAPHYSICS OF LANGUAGE

Since social constructivism derives from the social dimension of language, it follows that a subjectively and objectively valid social constructivism requires a subjectively and objectively valid language. Thus, the importance of the Trinity for human knowledge lies in the inter-subjective and objective social ground that the Trinity provides for language itself. In other words, not only is God's being socially constructed as a result of the intra-Trinitarian language; this intra-Trinitarian language is itself subjectively and objectively grounded in God's social being. After all, by virtue of perichoresis the three persons of the Trinity are coterminous with the divine essence and with one another. There is thus a reciprocity between God's being and His internal action. Van Til writes:

We may express this thought philosophically by saying that for us the eternal one and many form a self-complete unity. God is absolute

personality and therefore absolute individuality. He exists necessarily. He has no non-being over against himself in comparison with which he defines himself; he is internally self-defined.

Using the language of the One-and-Many question we contend that in God the one and the many are equally ultimate. Unity in God is no more fundamental than diversity, and diversity in God is no more fundamental than unity. The persons of the Trinity are mutually exhaustive of one another. The Son and the Spirit are ontologically on a par with the Father. . . .In God's being there are no particulars not related to the universal and there is nothing universal that is not fully expressed in the particulars.²

As implied by this passage, the infinity of the divine essence is communicated to each of the persons, establishing the possibility of perichoresis (i.e. mutual exhaustion). Moreover, as a result of perichoresis, there is a complete interpenetration of each person with one another and with the divine society as a whole. Since the subjective, objective, and normative (i.e. social-conventional, etc.) perspectives of knowledge therefore interpenetrate exhaustively, the infinity of the divine essence establishes the possibility of eternal, intra-Trinitarian communication through the mediation of infinite, perichoretically interacting persons. Thus, God's being constitutes the very possibility of intra-Trinitarian communication.

On the other hand, it is equally true that this intra-Trinitarian communication establishes God's being as noted by Grenz above. This result follows from the fact that God's internal self communication allows him to compare and contrast within His own being. Because He is therefore internally self defined, He does not compromise His *aseity* by defining Himself relative to external reality, but rather bestows existence on external reality and defines it in terms of Himself. Thus, not only does God's being ground the intra-Trinitarian communication, this communication, in turn, grounds God's being. Because the three persons define one another through interactive communication, God's

² Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 25, 26.

being is established from within rather than from without. Thus, the intra-Trinitarian communication guards the *aseity* of God and hence the infinity of the divine essence.

Another way of putting the matter is to say that God's being is socially constructed through covenantal love. A covenant implies a structured, personal relationship which involves subjective, objective, and normative (i.e. social-conventional) factors. So understood, love is the subjective side of covenant, and covenant is the structural (i.e. social-conventional) side of love, both of which sides presuppose objectivity as their field of operation. Consequently, since God's being demonstrates a perfect harmony between subjectivity, objectivity, and normativity (social conventionality), it follows that God is an internally covenanted being, characterized by structured relationships and modes of interaction.

The significance of this fact for human knowledge and language is that subjectivism, objectivism, and normativity (i.e. social conventionality) constitute the three approaches in which humanity has sought (and failed to obtain) an indubitable foundation for knowledge and language. That all these attempts have failed is not surprising when one considers the fact that knowledge and speech both involve subjects making assertions about objects in accordance with social conventions or norms. However, apart from a covenantal, Trinitarian ontology, in which unity and diversity (or distinction and relation) are equally ultimate, there remains no basis upon which to assert the equal ultimacy of these three aspects. Thus, the only proper foundation of knowledge and language is the triune God, a God who is socially constructed through covenant and therefore objective in His existence, and subjective in His personal depth. In other words, *God's knowledge is socially constructive; human knowledge is socially reconstructive.*

Before applying these insights to the problems of human language and knowledge, however, it is first necessary to consider the rise of social constructivism in greater detail.

THE LINGUISTIC TURN AND THE EMERGENCE OF SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVISM

As shown in Chapter 4, Enlightenment epistemology was characterized by an oscillation between objective and subjective views as various philosophers sought a foundation for knowledge. In fact, it was the repeated failure to solve the subject-object problem and thereby establish an epistemological foundation that eventually gave rise to the *linguistic turn*. In this regard, Descartes' subjective rationalism was answered by Locke's objective empiricism only to give way to the subjective and skeptical empiricism of David Hume. Immanuel Kant tried to bring the two streams together by holding that rational concepts influence empirical percepts and that such concepts arise from universal, *a priori* structures of the human mind.

In the wake of the Kantian synthesis, however, the two strands again unraveled. The Romanticists and Idealists developed the subjective (whether emotional or rational) side of Kant while the Positivists developed a phenomenological empiricism. An approach to the philosophy of language known as *hermeneutics* grew out of these various movements, forming a trajectory that began with Friedrich Schleiermacher and continued into the 20th Century through the work of Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer.^{3, 4, 5}

³ Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 98-112.

⁴ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons : New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description with Special Reference to Heidegger, Bultmann, Gadamer, and Wittgenstein*, 1st American ed. (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1980).

⁵ Charles R. Bambach, *Heidegger, Dilthey, and the Crisis of Historicism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995).

In Britain, by contrast, the traditional empirical approach continued through the philosophy of Mill and then became wedded to new techniques of logical analysis through the work Moore and Russell. The result was a philosophical movement known alternately as *analytic philosophy* or *logical atomism*. Moreover, through the writings of Russell's graduate student, Ludwig Wittgenstein, this logical-empirical approach was merged with positivism in Vienna to form a new movement known as *logical positivism*. Out of these various movements, a referential theory of language developed which sought to base language upon correspondence to either the external world or sense impressions. Throughout its history, this logical-empirical approach tended to oscillate between a Lockean objectivism (Logical Atomism) and a Humean subjectivism (Logical Positivism).

Finally, with regard to 19th Century linguistics itself, the discovery that many of the languages of Europe were related to Sanskrit and thus part of a more general Indo-European family gave rise to a comparative linguistic approach that sought to trace the evolution of languages over time.^{6, 7} Because of its strong focus on etymologies, however, this approach was atomistic as well as diachronic.

With respect to all of these ideas, the approach of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure was revolutionary. Instead of adopting a *diachronic* approach that traced the evolution of languages over time, Saussure employed a *synchronic* approach that studied language as an interrelated system at a given time. In this regard, Saussure distinguished between the acts of speech which he called *parole* and the system of language standing behind acts of speech which he called *langue*. Because his focus was on the speech

⁶ Stephen R. Anderson and David Lightfoot, *The Language Organ : Linguistics as Cognitive Physiology* (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 5-12.

⁷ Leonard Bloomfield, *Language* (New York,; H. Holt and Company, 1933), 11-20.

system rather than concrete speech acts, he rejected both an objective and a subjective approach to language. Thus, words were neither names for concrete things nor names for subjective ideas. Words could not be based on ideas because words were themselves necessary for the formation of ideas.⁸ Additionally, words were not based on objects because they were part of a language system standing behind (and thus enabling) referential speech. Rather, words (or signs as Saussure called them) were a conjunction of a mental concept and a mental sound-image:

The linguistic sign unites, not a thing and a name, but a concept and a sound-image. The latter is not the material sound, a purely physical thing, but the psychological imprint of the sound, the impression that it makes on our senses. The sound-image is sensory, and if I happen to call it “material,” it is only in that sense, and by way of opposing it to the other term of the association, the concept, which is generally more abstract.⁹

A unique consequence follows from Saussure’s definition of the sign. If words are based on a conjunction of concepts (rather than things) with mental sound-images (rather than actual sounds), and if words are not based on ideas either, then word meaning can only derive from interrelationships within a linguistic system. Hence, Saussure’s approach was termed *structuralism* to denote the fact that meaning follows from the structure of a linguistic system rather than objective reference, subjective ideas, or etymologies:

Language is a system of interdependent terms in which the value of each term results solely from the simultaneous presence of the others. . . If words stood for pre-existing concepts, they would all have exact equivalents in meaning from one language to the next; but this is not true. . . When they are said to correspond to concepts, it is understood that the concepts are purely differential and defined not by their positive content but negatively by their relations with the other terms of the system. Their most precise characteristic is in being what the others are not. . . Everything that has been said up to this point boils down to this: in

⁸ Saussure and others, 111,112.

⁹ Ibid., 66.

language there are only differences. Even more important: a difference generally implies positive terms between which the difference is set up; but in language there are only differences *without positive terms*.¹⁰

Based on Saussure's description, words have no positive content of their own. Since their meaning is determined solely by differential relations to other words, their value is imputed rather than intrinsic. Thus, linguistic signs are arbitrary since their values follow from the roles they play within a linguistic system. However, if the value of these arbitrary signs is regulated by the linguistic system, rather than by objective or subjective references, then it follows that linguistics is a social phenomenon because in the absence of fixed reference points, only the community can fix linguistic value:

The arbitrary nature of the sign explains in turn why the social fact alone can create a linguistic system. The community is necessary if values that owe their existence solely to usage and general acceptance are to be set up; by himself the individual is incapable of fixing a single value.¹¹

Given the centrality of language to knowledge, the effect of Saussure's structuralism was to make epistemology itself a social phenomenon and thus to bring sociology and anthropology into conversation with philosophy through their common linguistic interface. While the radical nature of this move was not recognized immediately, Saussure's linguistics eventually led to structuralist approaches in anthropology and the eventual deconstruction of subjectivity and objectivity themselves by the French poststructuralists, Lyotard, Foucault, and Derrida.

At the same time that Saussure was developing structural linguistics, an opposed philosophy of language was growing in England. G. E. Moore was developing his *analytic philosophy* which sought to break down complex propositions (molecular propositions) into their propositional components (atomic propositions) which could, in

¹⁰ Ibid., 114,116,117,120.

¹¹ Ibid., 113.

turn, be individually compared to the external world. Once the truth values of the atomic propositions had been obtained, the truth values of the molecular propositions could be determined through logic. Stimulated both by Moore's analytic efforts and Frege's logic, Bertrand Russell developed an epistemology known as *logical atomism*. The goal of logical atomism was to apply logical analysis to language in order to render propositions that could be empirically assessed through comparison to the external world. Consistent with this program, Russell's graduate student, Ludwig Wittgenstein, initially advocated a picture theory of language in which language was said to picture (or mirror) the world. Wittgenstein transplanted these views to his native Vienna where they were merged with positivism to yield a related movement known as *logical positivism*. Whereas logical atomism had sought to verify statements by their correspondence to the external world, logical positivism sought to assess truth solely by correspondence to sensation. Accordingly, logical positivism developed a *verifiability criterion* in which all statements not subject to empirical verification were rejected as unscientific and hence metaphysical. The common thread running through all of these movements was an empirical epistemology coupled with logical analysis and a referential theory of language.

Midway through the 20th Century, however, Wittgenstein abandoned these empirical views and opted for a linguistic approach with social overtones. Whereas Saussure had concentrated on the linguistic system (*langue*) rather than concrete speech acts (*parole*), Wittgenstein adopted a *praxis* oriented approach in which the speaker was embedded in life. In contrast to his previous views which allowed only for empirically verifiable statements, Wittgenstein now allowed for a variety of statements whose truth was measured not by external correspondence but rather by their utility in various life

situations. Accordingly, he approached the philosophy of language as a series of *language-games* which he referred to as *life-forms*. Truth was therefore measured by the utility of a statement within a particular language-game with different types of statements being appropriate (and therefore true) for different language-games:

But how many kinds of sentence are there? Say assertion, question, and command?—There are *countless* kinds: countless different kinds of use of what we call “symbols”, “words”, “sentences”. And this multiplicity is not something fixed, given once for all; but new types of language, new language-games, as we may say, come into existence, and others become obsolete and get forgotten. (We can get a *rough picture* of this from the changes in mathematics.)

Here the term “language-game” is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the speaking of language is part of an activity, or of a life-form.

Review the multiplicity of language-games in the following examples and in others: giving orders, and obeying them; describing the appearance of an object, or giving its measurements; constructing an object from a description (a drawing); reporting an event; speculating about the event; forming and testing a hypothesis; presenting the results of an experiment in tables and diagrams; making up a story, and reading it; play-acting; singing catches; guessing riddles; making a joke; telling it; solving a problem in practical arithmetic; translating from one language into another; requesting, thanking, cursing, greeting, praying.

It is interesting to compare the multiplicity of the tools in language and of the ways they are used, the multiplicity of kinds of word and sentence, with what logicians have said about the structure of language.¹²

Wittgenstein never defined precisely what he meant by language-games because it would have violated his own philosophy to do so. Since Wittgenstein believed that people are embedded in language, there could be no privileged access to reality outside of language from which to define language-games objectively. In other words, the attempt to define language games would simply have been to play a language-game of a different

¹² Wittgenstein, sect. 23.

sort.¹³ Nevertheless, while Wittgenstein did not define his concept more fully, its social overtones are evident from his notion of *praxis* within a form of life:

After long reflection on such matters, Wittgenstein came to the conclusion that there could be no underlying logical structure to the world to which our minds must adhere, or *vice versa*. In the last analysis, the propositions of logic appear to us to be valid simply because of the processes of our education and upbringing. The propositions of logic reflect the rules of language, and these are known to us by our use of language in everyday life and linguistic experience. It is also through the use of language that we come to know, tacitly, which sentences in language are well-formed and meaningful, having a proper logical structure, and which are improperly constructed gibberish. Since Wittgenstein expressed these ideas even in relation to logic, let alone scientific hypotheses and theories, he was in fact putting forward views that were forerunners of those held by modern sociology-of-knowledge theorists, whose ideas I shall refer to again in Chapter 9. That is, Wittgenstein was giving expression in *Philosophical Investigations* to the view that meaning, and thereby knowledge, reside in the last analysis in social practices, particularly with respect to language.

The work of the later Wittgenstein was also influential in leading to the important 'concepts-influence-percepts' thesis that is now widely accepted by philosophers of science.¹⁴

From this discussion the social implications of Wittgenstein's later philosophy clearly emerge. While Wittgenstein's approach was clearly different than Saussure's,¹⁵ both positions eventually brought sociology and anthropology into conversation with philosophy, thereby contributing to Anglo-American and Continental postmodernity, respectively. Like Immanuel Kant both of the above positions imply that concepts influence percepts. However, whereas Kant had sought to base these concepts in universal *a-priori* structures of the human mind, the postmodern twist has been to locate these concepts in the social group. Thus, in place of Kant's universal individualism (all

¹³ Jean François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Brian Massumi, *Theory and History of Literature* ; V. 10 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 88, n. 33.

¹⁴ David Oldroyd, *The Arch of Knowledge: An Introductory Study of the History of the Philosophy and Methodology of Science* (New York and London: Methuen, 1986), 229, 230.

¹⁵ For a brief comparison of the similarities and differences between the respective approaches of Saussure and Wittgenstein see Thiselton, 428-431.

individuals are universally alike), the new perspective is one of communal pluralism (all communities are different) which is often called multiculturalism. Since the culture here provides the categories through which one defines oneself and the surrounding world, the effect of this view is not only to make epistemology culturally relative but also to dissolve the subject and object of knowledge into the social group:

The conviction that each person is embedded in a particular human community leads to a corporate understanding of truth. Postmoderns believe that not only our specific beliefs but also our understanding of truth itself is rooted in the community in which we participate. They reject the Enlightenment quest for universal, supracultural, timeless truth in favor of searching out truth as the expression of a specific community. They believe that truth consists in the ground rules that facilitate personal well-being in community and the well-being of the community as a whole.

In this sense, then, postmodern truth is relative to the community in which a person participates. And since there are many human communities, there are necessarily many different truths. Most postmoderns make the leap of believing that this plurality of truths can exist alongside one another. The postmodern consciousness, therefore, entails a radical kind of relativism and pluralism.

Of course, relativism and pluralism are not new. But the postmodern variety differs from the older forms. The relativistic pluralism of late modernity was highly individualistic; it elevated personal taste and personal choice as the be-all and end-all. Its maxims were “To each his/her own” and “Everyone has a right to his/her own opinion.”

The postmodern consciousness, in contrast, focuses on the group. Postmoderns live in self-contained social groups, each of which has its own language, beliefs, and values. As a result, postmodern relativistic pluralism seeks to give place to the “local” nature of truth. Beliefs are held to be true within the context of the communities that espouse them.¹⁶

If truth is relative to one’s culture or social group, then truth itself fractures along cultural lines, and there remains no universal truth for all times and places. And while it may seem that such a view would affect only the more obvious cultural phenomena like ethics and religion, the social epistemology stemming from the linguistic turn has even

¹⁶ Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 14, 15.

brought scientific truth into question. In *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*,¹⁷ Thomas Kuhn argued that science is governed by paradigms which determine how scientists view reality (see Chapter 4) and which are themselves socially inculcated within the scientific community through the process of scientific education. Since scientific theories are therefore socially constructed and non-objective, scientific progress merely involves a series of shifts from one socially constructed paradigm to another and thus does not bring science any closer to the truth. Now since Kuhn acknowledged his debt to B. L. Whorf's *Language, Thought, and Reality* in the preface to his work,¹⁸ it is evident that social constructivism entered Kuhn's philosophy of science through the philosophy of language. Building upon Kuhn's work, these views were even more radically employed by David Bloor in the "Strong Program" of the sociology of scientific knowledge. Thus, as seen through the lens of philosophy of science, the effect of the linguistic turn has been to bring knowledge itself into question. That is to say, the *postmodern turn* has itself piggybacked on the *linguistic turn*:

. . . The story begins with the crisis of logical positivism/empiricism in the 1950s sparked by Quine's rebellion. The decisive turning point was the publication of Kuhn's *Structure of Scientific Revolutions* in 1962. Problems Quine and Kuhn discerned in theorizing empirical science seemed to require "semantic ascent" into philosophy of language for resolution. Here the "causal theory of reference" of Hilary Putnam and others assumed salience. But reflections upon the general "linguistic turn" led some prophets (e.g., Richard Rorty) to proclaim the "end of epistemology." The linguistic turn prompted two further impulses: the "historicization of reason" and the "social construction of knowledge." That is, to grasp science it was felt necessary, first, to situate it in historical process, and second, to situate it in social context. The first impulse led to what came to be called the "marriage" of the history of science with the philosophy of science, and the second to what came to be called the "sociology of scientific knowledge" (SSK). Imre Lakatos, Larry Laudan, and "naturalized epistemology" pursued the first agenda. The

¹⁷ Kuhn.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, vi.

“Strong Program” of David Bloor and Barry Barnes instantiated the second. . .¹⁹

THE SOCIAL GOD AND THE CONSTRUCTIVE WORD

Having examined the emergence of social constructivism and its resulting skepticism, it is necessary to develop an adequate Christian response. As stated above, such a response must maintain the valid insights of social epistemology without sacrificing objective and subjective knowledge. It is precisely here, however, that the Christian position meets the challenge since it involves the notion of a social God who creates an objective world through His omnipotent and omniscient Word. Consequently, since the creation comes into existence by virtue of the divine speech, the world itself is socially constructed, linguistically defined, and objective. Moreover, since this same act of creation also accounts for societies of human subjects, this objective creation of the social God also accounts for the subjective, objective, and social aspects of human knowledge. Thus, *God’s knowledge is socially constructive; human knowledge is socially reconstructive*. It remains to show how this result is guaranteed by God’s social nature.

As mentioned above, God’s being involves a complete interpenetration of the divine persons by virtue of perichoresis. Thus, within God’s being subjectivity, objectivity, and social normativity (i.e. conventionality) mutually exhaust one another. Because each of the persons is on an ontological par with each of the others, subjectivity and objectivity interpenetrate without residue. Moreover, because each person is on an ontological par with the entire divine community, subjectivity and objectivity interpenetrate with social normativity (conventionality), again without residue.

¹⁹ John H. Zammuto, *A Nice Derangement of Epistemes: Post-Positivism in the Study of Science from Quine to Latour* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 3.

Consequently, within God's being, the intra-Trinitarian speech manifests a *ruled* subjective and objective fullness because it is eternally in accordance with the subjectivity, objectivity, and social normativity (conventionality) of God. Moreover, since God is Himself identified with His Word, this intra-Trinitarian speech is both reflective and productive of the divine reality. Within God's being, therefore, *the real is the verbal, and the verbal is the real*.

However, if God's speech is productive of His own infinite reality, then it is also productive of the finite creation. Since *the verbal is the real* within God's infinite being, His external word suffices *a fortiori* to give reality to the finite creation. Moreover, since all three persons of the Trinity are involved in creating and sustaining the world, the world represents an objective, socially constructed product. Furthermore, within God's being the verbal is not merely the real (objective), but also the social (normative) and the psychological (subjective). Consequently, God's external word not only gives objective existence to the world, but also psycho-social existence to societies of human beings who image God both as individuals and as societies. Thus, the creation emerges as a divine analog which manifests the subjective, objective, and social properties of God on a finite scale. Because the world results from the constructive word of the social God, human knowledge reflects the covenant fullness which inheres in God's being by nature, albeit on a finite scale. The subjective, objective, and social (normative) aspects of human knowledge are therefore equally derivative aspects of the created order which image their divine archetypes. Thus, *God's knowledge is socially constructive; human knowledge is socially reconstructive*. Van Til writes:

. . . It were quite legitimate and true to say that the foundation of all personal activity among men must be based upon the personality of one

ultimate person, namely, the person of God, if only it be understood that this ultimate personality of God is a triune personality. In the Trinity there is completely personal relationship without residue. And for that reason it may be said that man's actions are all personal too. Man's surroundings are shot through with personality because all things are related to the infinitely personal God. But when we have said that the surroundings of man are really completely personalized, we have also established the fact of the representational principle. All of man's acts must be representational of the acts of God. Even the persons of the Trinity are mutually representational. They are exhaustively representational of one another. Because he is a creature, man must, in his thinking, his feeling and his willing, be representative of God. There is no other way open for him. He could, in the nature of the case, think nothing at all unless he thought God's thoughts after him, and this is representational thinking. Thus man's thought is representative of God's thought, but not exhaustively representative. . . . Since the whole being of God, if we may in all reverence say so, is built upon the representational plan, it was impossible for God to create except upon the representational plan. This pertains to every individual human being, but it pertains just as well with respect to the race as a whole. If there was to be a personal relationship between finite persons—and none other is conceivable—there would have to be representational relationship. . . .²⁰

HUMAN LANGUAGE AND THE QUESTION OF ANALOGY

Having examined the theological basis for an integrated view of knowledge and language, it is necessary to apply these results to the human situation. In particular, it is necessary to show how the socially constructed knowledge of humanity can retain its objectivity and subjectivity. With regard to these concerns, the present section will use the concept of analogy to establish both the equality and the interrelation of the subjective, objective, and socially normative perspectives in human language.

As noted in the discussion above, various attempts have been made to ground human language in subjective expression, objective reference, and linguistic convention. In the 1930s Charles Morris realized that each of these three aspects is interrelated with

²⁰ Van Til, *A Survey of Christian Epistemology*, 78, 79.

the others and essential to language as a whole. Accordingly, Morris stressed this interrelation by referring to these three aspects as the *pragmatic*, *semantic*, and *syntactic* dimensions of a single process of *semiosis* (i.e., sign making). So understood, Morris' three dimensions of language fit within Frame's multiperspectival framework as shown below in Figure 6a. Morris writes:

The full characterization of a language may now be given: *A language in the full semiotical sense of the term is any inter-subjective set of sign vehicles whose usage is determined by syntactical, semantical, and pragmatical rules.*²¹

Since the current tendency is in the direction of specialized research in syntactics, semantics, or pragmatics, it is well to stress emphatically the interrelations of these disciplines within semiotic [*sic*]. Indeed, semiotic [*sic*], in so far as it is more than these disciplines, is mainly concerned with their interrelations, and so with the unitary character of semiosis which these disciplines individually ignore.

One aspect of the interrelation is indicated in the fact that while each of the component disciplines deals in one way or another with signs, none of them can define the term 'sign' and, hence, cannot define themselves.²²

Since Morris' three dimensions are interdependent within the single process of semiosis, each dimension requires the others and so is incapable of describing the whole apart from the other two. Thus, none of the three dimensions is foundational to the others or to the process as a whole. Indeed, as indicated by Morris, each of the dimensions taken individually is incompetent to define semiosis in general or even its own particular semiotic emphasis. Rather since each forms a *perspective* on the others and on the whole, the attempt to make one of these perspectives foundational to the others leads to linguistic reductionism and thus (assuming Frame's analysis) a three way debate between the partisans of expressivism, referentialism, and structuralism as shown in Figure 6b.

²¹ Morris, 35.

²² Ibid., 52.

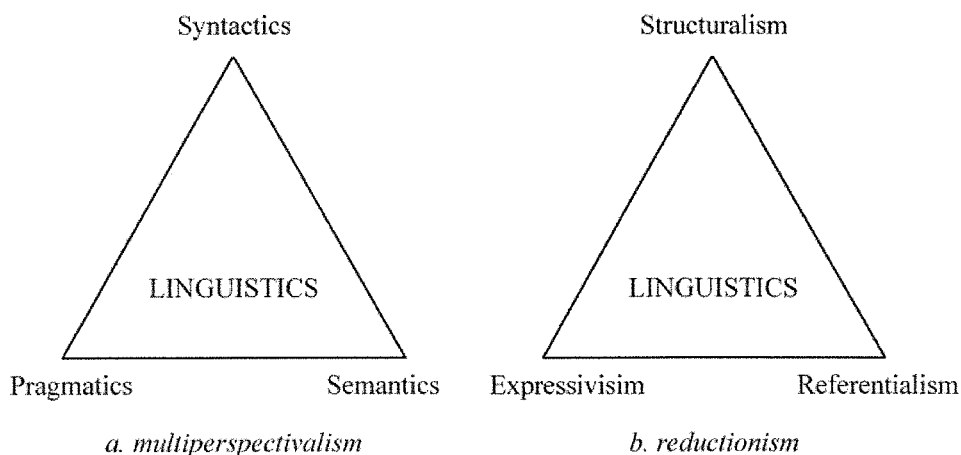


Figure 6. Multiperspectivalism vs. Linguistic Reductionism

Because these immanent perspectives therefore provide no linguistic foundation, it is necessary to seek a transcendent ground for human language. In this regard, it was mentioned above that within God's being, subjectivity, objectivity, and social normativity interpenetrate exhaustively. As a consequence, God's internal speech is characterized by pragmatic, semantic, and syntactic perfection. Human speech, by contrast, is effective only because it is the created analog of God's speech and thus grounded in the divine original. Consequently, the pragmatic, semantic, and syntactic dimensions of human speech interrelate because they are the respective analogs of their divine counterparts. However, because they are finite analogs, their interrelation is only partial rather than exhaustive and is moreover divinely mediated rather than direct. In other words, human discourse is itself characterized by perichoresis, albeit in a finite and mediated way.

Given this fact, the subjective, objective, and normative aspects of human speech or knowledge do not interpenetrate without residue. As a consequence, the social aspect of knowledge, though truly significant, cannot monopolize epistemology to the exclusion of the subjective and objective aspects. Thus, even in Thomas Kuhn's philosophy of

science in which the social aspect of knowledge is pronounced, the objective and subjective aspects assert their rights in times of paradigm shifts. For instance, in the shift from Newtonian to Einsteinian mechanics, the accumulation of experimental anomalies brought the Newtonian framework into question from an objective perspective. Moreover, the new framework arose from the subjective creativity and imagination of Albert Einstein. In this transition, the social aspect of knowledge was also evident in the effort required to dislodge the entrenched Newtonian view. Consequently, while the social aspect of knowledge is clearly important, it is not coterminous with the other two and so cannot monopolize them. Indeed, it does not even do so in God in whom the three perspectives exhaustively interpenetrate.

However, as paradigm shifts in science clearly demonstrate, human knowledge, though influenced by factors of objective correspondence, is never completely objective either. All human thought views reality through a grid that is largely socially constructed. Since direct contact with reality is never achieved, it might seem as though the progress of knowledge would grind to a halt in the sands of pessimism. From a purely immanent perspective, this would be a natural conclusion. For the Christian, however, such pessimism is not warranted because objective knowledge exists for God and has been vouchsafed by Him to humanity. Moreover, He has given humanity its scientific task and has established its eventual success, despite human error, by guaranteeing true, though partial knowledge to humanity. Thus, as the wheels of history turn, and the scientific edifice grows toward its predetermined heights, the ultimate issue is not whether human knowledge is social or objective as commonly understood. Rather the ultimate issue is the fact that the socially constructed knowledge of humanity has its objective grounding in

the socially constructed knowledge of God. After all, *God's knowledge is socially constructive; human knowledge is socially reconstructive*. Van Til writes:

For God, coherence is the term that comes first. There was coherence in God's plan before there was any space-time fact to which his knowledge might correspond, or which might correspond to his knowledge. On the other hand, when we think of human knowledge, correspondence is of primary importance. If there is to be true coherence in our knowledge there must be correspondence between our ideas of facts and God's ideas of these facts. Or rather we should say that our ideas must correspond to God's ideas.²³

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVISM AND THE DISSOLUTION OF THE POSTMODERN SELF

Apart from a frequent loss of objectivity, postmodernism is also plagued by the loss of subjectivity. This phenomenon is variously referred to as the *loss of the postmodern self*, the *dissolution of the postmodern self*, or the *de-centered self*. The dissolution of the postmodern self results from three related factors. First, by virtue of postmodernism's social epistemology, the self is constructed in community. Second, since the person participates in a plurality of communities, this self is distributed over several communities, constructed differently in each, and hence fractured. Third, because there is no overarching metanarrative which holds the entire society together, there is no metacommunity which integrates the competing microcommunities and which would therefore serve to integrate the fractured self. The result is that the self fractures into a hodgepodge of discreet, unrelated roles through its distribution over a plurality of discreet social networks.

In this regard, the importance of metanarrative to the social self follows from the fact that communities derive their identities from both the *synchronic* interactions with

²³ Van Til, *A Survey of Christian Epistemology*, 3.

their surrounding environments and from the *diachronic* connections to their past. In other words, communities have histories which define their identities. They therefore have an event structure which is historically extended and socially embodied. Indeed, living communities *are* socially embodied stories which have not yet reached their ends, be they happy or sad. Consequently, when there is no metanarrative to hold a society together, the society splinters into competing local communities defined by local narratives (or stories). Thus, the breaking up of the grand narratives which characterized the modern age results in a fracturing of the self who is then defined by competing stories and their related social networks. Lyotard writes:

What is new in all of this is that the old poles of attraction represented by nation-states, parties, professions, institutions, and historical traditions are losing their attraction. And it does not look as though they will be replaced, at least not on their former scale. . . A *self* does not amount to much, but no self is an island; each exists in a fabric of relations that is now more complex and mobile than ever before. Young or old, man or woman, rich or poor, a person is always located at “nodal points” of specific communication circuits, however tiny these may be. . . It should now be clear from which perspective I chose language games as my general methodological approach. I am not claiming that the *entirety* of social relations is of this nature—that will remain an open question. But there is no need to resort to some fiction of social origins to establish that language games are the minimum relation required for society to exist: even before he is born, if only by virtue of the name he is given, the human child is already positioned as the referent in the story recounted by those around him, in relation to which he will inevitably chart his course.²⁴

The social subject itself seems to dissolve in this dissemination of language games. The social bond is linguistic, but it is not woven with a single thread. It is a fabric formed by the intersection of at least two (and in reality an indeterminate number) of language games, obeying different rules.²⁵

According to Lyotard, the breakup of metanarratives and the consequent dissolution of the self defines the *postmodern condition*. The Enlightenment philosophers

²⁴ Lyotard, 14, 15.

²⁵ Ibid., 40, 41.

had sought to avoid religious conflicts by distancing themselves from metanarratives and asserting truths that were timeless and universal. Unwittingly, however, they simply substituted secular metanarratives for the religious ones. Among the new metanarratives were those which attempted to justify knowledge by promising peace, prosperity, and political and religious emancipation through scientific progress.²⁶ What characterizes the postmodern condition, however, is the realization that even these secular metanarratives are bankrupt. According to Lyotard, therefore, postmodernism does not seek to replace modern with postmodern metanarratives, but rather to attack all totalizing metanarratives and thus to adjust to an environment characterized by communal pluralism and competing local narratives:

. . . I will use the term *modern* to designate any science that legitimates itself with reference to a metadiscourse of this kind making an explicit appeal to some grand narrative, such as the dialectics of Spirit, the hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation of the rational or working subject, or the creation of wealth. For example, the rule of consensus between the sender and addressee of a statement with truth-value is deemed acceptable if it is cast in terms of a possible unanimity between rational minds: this is the Enlightenment narrative, in which the hero of knowledge works toward a good ethico-political end—universal peace. As can be seen from this example, if a metanarrative implying a philosophy of history is used to legitimate knowledge, questions are raised concerning the validity of the institutions governing the social bond: these must be legitimated as well. Thus justice is consigned to the grand narrative in the same way as truth.

Simplifying to the extreme, I define *postmodern* as incredulity toward metanarratives.²⁷

From what was said in the previous section, this line of reasoning is faulty on two counts. First, since the subjective, objective, and social-conventional (normative) perspectives of human knowledge interpenetrate partially rather than exhaustively, the social-conventional perspective cannot monopolize human knowledge. With regard to

²⁶ Ibid., 31, 32.

²⁷ Ibid., xxiii, xxiv.

human societies, therefore, the self is not socially constructed without residue, but only partially so. With regard to the divine community, however, the subjective, objective, and social-conventional (normative) perspectives do exhaustively interpenetrate so that it may truly be said that the human self is socially constructed without residue by the Trinity.

Accordingly, the human self may attain integration through a personal relationship with the triune God who stands above the world as a metacommunity and whose metanarrative encompasses the entire span of human history. With respect to salvation, this metanarrative is known as the *missio Dei*. The Father sends the Son into the world to secure salvation for humanity through his death and resurrection. The Father and the Son send the Holy Spirit into the world to apply this salvation to the hearts and lives of God's people, and to gather them into Christ's body, the church. Finally, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit send the church into the world to introduce others to the reign of God so that through the church and in the power of the Holy Spirit all things can be gathered unto Christ and thence turned over to the Father who is all in all.

In salvation, therefore, one integrates his/her many local narratives into God's one metanarrative and joins the community of God's people which socially embodies this metanarrative in every culture and extends it historically through time. Within this context the integration of the self is both *already* and *not yet*. The Christian enjoys the "first fruits" of this integration in the present time and yet awaits the *eschaton* in which God will achieve the fullness of integration by weaving all the seemingly disparate narrative threads into one seamless whole. Ultimately, therefore, the self is not fractured because it is socially constructed by the triune God whose metacommunity and metanarrative trump all local varieties. In other words, the self is ultimately integrated

because it is defined by God's all encompassing language-game and may therefore seek to reconstruct this integration in a partial manner on the finite level of human society.

After all, God's knowledge is socially constructive; human knowledge is socially reconstructive.

CONCLUSION

The burden of the present chapter has been to trace the rise of social constructivism within postmodern philosophy and to analyze its effects from a Trinitarian perspective. In this regard, it was shown that due to the epistemological centrality of language, social constructivism arose from the linguistic turn in 20th Century philosophy since social approaches to language necessarily implied a social epistemology. In making knowledge relative to the community, however, the effect was not only to fracture knowledge along community lines but also to reduce the subject and object of knowledge to the status of social constructs. Thus, the effect was not only to question the universality of truth, but even more radically, subjectivity and objectivity themselves.

To respond to this situation from a Trinitarian perspective, the attempt was made to retain the valid insights of social constructivism without sacrificing subjectivity, objectivity, or the universality of truth. To this end it was argued that human knowledge is subjective, objective, *and* social because the world was personally, objectively, and socially constructed by the God who is subjective, objective, and social Himself. Thus, the subjective, objective, and socially normative aspects of language and human knowledge are not to be sought in themselves alone or in their interrelations with one another, but rather in the triune God in whom subjectivity, objectivity, and social

normativity (social-conventionality) interpenetrate exhaustively. Ultimately, human thought and language are covenantal in nature and thus can only be grounded in the God who *is* covenant Himself.

So understood, the Trinitarian position outlined above offers a third way between postmodern social relativism on the one hand, and the subjectivism and objectivism of modernity on the other. In contrast to all these options, the Christian view offers an alternative that is personal, absolute, and communitarian all at once and which champions an ultimate truth that is universal. As a result, science may attain to relative objectivity because the socially constructed knowledge of humanity has its objective basis in the socially constructed knowledge of God. Likewise, by virtue of the death and resurrection of Christ, the individual may find subjective integration within the language-game of God and within the community of God's redeemed people. After all, since God *is* community, covenant, and love Himself, He is total meaning as well as total goodness. Humanity may therefore find meaning in the reconstruction of the prior and ultimate meaning which God has expressed in general and special revelation.

God's knowledge is socially constructive; human knowledge is socially reconstructive.

CHAPTER 6

THE SOCIAL GOD AND THE RELATIONAL COSMOS: TOWARD A TRINITARIAN ONTOLOGY OF SCIENCE

The ingenious use of perichoresis to describe the manner in which the Trinitarian persons are constituted by the mutuality of relationships within the life of the triune God opened the way for the development of a dynamic ontology of persons-in-relationship or persons-in-communion. This ontology characterizes the essential nature of personhood as consisting of mutuality and interdependence. According to this understanding, “communion does not threaten personal particularity,” as John Zizioulas notes, “it is constitutive of it.” By offering the impetus toward a thoroughgoing relational ontology, the concept of perichoresis opens the way as well for an ontology that takes seriously and in fact ensures the integrity of both the “one” and the “many,” preserving both within the dynamic of interrelations.

Stanley Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*

Behind the diversity of postmodernism lies a central philosophical concept. This concept is dynamic relationality, and it gives rise to various other ideas which characterize the divergent streams of postmodernism: non-foundationalism, paradoxical knowledge, emergent order, and social constructivism. Because these elements can be differently combined, postmodernism is quite diverse. However, by focusing on the common elements, it is possible to see unity beneath this diversity and thus to appreciate the pronounced contrast between modernism and postmodernism.

The modern era was mechanistic and viewed change as the result of fixed laws applied to fixed substances. Change was simply a reconfiguration of atomic units within a static order. Moreover, an atomistic reductionism prevailed which sought the essence of things by breaking them into bits. As the “fundamental” particles failed to “materialize,” however, some began to suspect that particles were themselves manifestations of underlying fields, and thus relationally defined. Accordingly, a dynamic relationality

began to replace the foundationalism of atomistic reductionism. Moreover, in quantum mechanics paradoxical knowledge in the form of the wave-particle duality was traced to the interaction (relationality) between the observer and the quantum object. Finally, in dynamic systems theory, relationality was shown to produce the phenomenon of emergent order. Thus, dynamic relationality gave rise to the postmodern concepts of non-foundationalism, paradoxical knowledge, and emergence.

As evident from the citation above,¹ however, dynamic relationality is also central to the doctrine of the Trinity. Thus, the Trinity provides an obvious point of contact between Christianity and postmodernism, especially as in light of Nancey Murphy's third philosophical *locus*, holistic relational ontology. Classically understood, God consists of an eternal essence exhaustively expressed in each of three interacting persons. Thus, relationality and *relata* (things related) are equally basic within God's being, and so are God's eternity and dynamism. A Trinitarian metaphysic therefore challenges atomism and monism alike as well as the extremes of eternal staticism and ultimate flux. Rather, because God is both eternally dynamic and internally relational, a Trinitarian metaphysic is able to account for both the stability and the dynamism of a created universe in which *relata* and relationships are equally ultimate and mutually conditioning. To clarify these implications, it will be helpful to consider the Trinitarian theology of Cornelius Van Til.

THE METAPHYSICS OF RELATIONALITY: THE TRINITY AS ETERNAL AND DYNAMIC

Christianity sets forth a two-layer metaphysics consisting of the eternal God and the created universe. Whereas God is infinite and self-dependent, the creation is finite

¹ Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei*, 317.

and dependent upon God. Accordingly, God must be both eternal and dynamic to guarantee the world's stability as well as its vibrant relationality. As argued by Van Til, this eternal dynamism both derives from and characterizes the Trinity itself:

In what has been said it is the triune personal God of Scripture that is in view. God exists in himself as a triune self-consciously active being. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are each a personality and together constitute the exhaustively personal God. There is an eternal, internal self-conscious interaction between the three persons of the Godhead. They are co-substantial. Each is as much God as are the other two. The Son and the Spirit do not derive their being from the Father. The diversity and the unity in the Godhead are therefore equally ultimate; they are exhaustively correlative to one another and not correlative to anything else.²

From a human point of view, of course, it is paradoxical to affirm that God is both eternal and dynamic. After all, the finite mind attempts to interpret eternity in temporal categories, rather than the reverse. However, when temporal categories become ultimate, human thought is driven to univocal or equivocal extremes. Thus, eternity reduces to either endless time (flux) or to the abstract negative of time (staticism). The result is that eternity is either swallowed by dynamism or stands in polar contrast to it. However, when the human mind reasons analogically, it subjects itself to God's revelation and thus to the ultimacy of eternal categories. By faith human thought embraces the paradox of an eternal dynamism, thus avoiding the pitfalls of eternal staticism and temporal flux:

Thus the abstract way of negation, which assumes the ability of man to engage in independent predication, frustrates itself, it seeks an eternal world, and ends up by finding one which is nothing but a negative counterpart of the spatio-temporal universe. Such a being may be either deistically or pantheistically conceived. In both cases, the difference between Creator and creature is really ignored.

Accordingly, we begin our thought about the infinity of God by insisting that the fullness of the being of God is back of the active fullness and variety in the spatio-temporal world. Scripture leads us in this respect. It has no hesitation in speaking anthropomorphically of God. It ascribes all manner of activity to him. Of this activity we cannot think otherwise than

² Van Til, *Apologetics*, 8.

spatially and temporally. So we are face to face with the choice either of thinking of God as altogether like unto ourselves, or of thinking ourselves the finite analogues of the fullness of his being. As we cannot do the first without wiping out the difference between Creator and creature, we are compelled to do the latter.

Thinking of the infinity of God in relation to time in this manner, we therefore think of that fullness of internal activity of which the movement in the temporally conditioned universe is a created replica. God is self-determinatively internally active.³

While God's eternity is necessarily consistent with His dynamism, the human mind cannot harmonize these qualities without residue. However, while it cannot harmonize these qualities directly, it can show that God's eternity and dynamism not only fail to contradict but also positively require one another. The key to this demonstration may be found, once again, in a consideration of the intra-Trinitarian relationships:

We may express this thought philosophically by saying that for us the eternal one and many form a self-complete unity. God is absolute personality and therefore absolute individuality. He exists necessarily. He has no non-being over against himself in comparison with which he defines himself; he is internally self-defined.

Using the language of the One-and-Many question we contend that in God the one and the many are equally ultimate. Unity in God is no more fundamental than diversity, and diversity in God is no more fundamental than unity. The persons of the Trinity are mutually exhaustive of one another. The Son and the Spirit are ontologically on a par with the Father. . . In God's being there are no particulars not related to the universal, and there is nothing universal that is not fully expressed in the particulars.⁴

As seen from this description, God's essence (the universal) is fully expressed in the persons (the particulars). Since God's eternity is associated with His essence, each of the persons together with their dynamic interaction is thereby rendered eternal. On the other hand, since there is a diversity of persons within the one being of God, God is internally correlative and can therefore compare and contrast within His own being. Thus, God does not compromise His *aseity*--and

³ Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 212.

⁴ Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 25, 26.

therewith His eternity--by defining Himself in contrast to a world of nonbeing. Rather, by virtue of God's internal self-interaction, God is internally self-defined. Consequently, not only does the eternity of God's essence establish the dynamic relationality of the persons, but also the dynamic relationality of the persons establishes God's *aseity*, and therewith the eternity of the divine essence. In other words, God is dynamic because He is eternal, and He is eternal because He is dynamic. In God, *the real is the relational, and the relational is the real*.

RELATIONALITY AND THE REVOLUTION IN SCIENCE

Having examined the eternal dynamism of God, it is next necessary to consider the relational ontology which "emerged" in 20th Century science. Through a series of paradigm shifts, this relational conception eventually impacted all scales of reality, producing a new cosmology. In particular, these shifts gave rise to the notions of non-foundationalism, paradoxical knowledge, and emergent order which would eventually prove integral to postmodernism. Of course, certain positions, such as non-foundationalism and paradoxical knowledge, have a long history within mystical traditions which predate postmodernism by millennia. So perhaps the radical nature of postmodernism is not so much the novelty of postmodern ideas as it is the incorporation of ancient mysticism in new and unexpected places, the heart of 20th Century science.

The short version of the story begins in 1905 with the special theory of relativity. According to Albert Einstein, the constancy of the speed of light implies that the relative motion (i.e., dynamic relationality) between two reference frames will alter the values of mass, length, and time which observers in different frames will impute to the same object

or event. The implications of this fact were both revolutionary and weird. For instance, a moving object appears shorter to a stationary observer while its internal time seems to flow more slowly. To inculcate these strange ideas, physics professors used to say, “Moving cigars are shorter, but they last longer.” In addition, by demonstrating the equivalence of mass and energy, Einstein showed that objects were really events. However, the radical nature of the Einstein’s theory was not restricted to the values of mass, length, and time, but rather extended to an alteration of the meaning of these parameters. As the building blocks of classical physics, they had been regarded as independent, conceptual atoms. Einstein, however, destroyed their foundational status by incorporating them into a relational system. Henceforth, mass would be grouped with energy as mass-energy, and space would be grouped with time as space-time.

In 1915 Einstein set forth the more radical theory of general relativity which applied a field conception to the entire cosmos.⁵ In this theory Einstein reduced mass-energy and space-time to a single field characterized by an abstract, non-Euclidean geometry. Massive bodies were condensations of the field which served to anchor the field lines, while the field lines, in turn, determined the curvature of the bodies’ motion. Thus, the gravitational effect on moving bodies was interpreted as a space-time curvature. The monistic implications of Einstein’s thought and the dynamic relationality of his conception are evident in his introduction to Max Jammer’s *Concepts of Space*:

The victory over the concept of absolute space or over that of the inertial system became possible only because the concept of the material object was gradually replaced as the fundamental concept of physics by

⁵ For a discussion of the scientific, theological, and philosophical implications of relativistic and quantum cosmology from a variety of perspectives see Robert J. Russell, Nancey C. Murphy, and C. J. Isham, *Quantum Cosmology and the Laws of Nature : Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action*, 2nd ed., 5 vols., A Series on Divine Action in Scientific Perspective ; (Vatican City State; Berkeley, Calif.: Vatican Observatory ; Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences, 1996; reprint, 1999).

that of the field. Under the influence of Faraday and Maxwell the notion developed that the whole of physical reality could perhaps be represented as a field whose components depend on four space-time parameters. If the laws of this field are in general covariant, that is, are not dependent on a particular choice of coordinate system, then the introduction of an independent (absolute) space is no longer necessary. That which constitutes the spatial character of reality is then simply the four-dimensionality of the field. There is then no 'empty' space, that is, there is no space without a field.⁶

Although Einstein's conception was radical, he was still a deterministic thinker.

He could not accept the indeterminism of quantum mechanics⁷ and therefore spent the last half of his career in a futile search for a unified field which would combine quantum mechanics with gravity and electromagnetism in a deterministic way. Though he eventually acknowledged the predictive success of quantum mechanics, his monistic and deterministic instincts resisted the theory as a final solution:

Quantum mechanics is very worthy of regard, but an inner voice tells me that it is not the true Jacob. The theory yields much, but it hardly brings us close to the secret of the Old One. In any case, I am convinced He does not play dice.⁸

For the latter decades of his life, Einstein's (often imaginary) debating partner was Niels Bohr, the founder of the Copenhagen School of quantum mechanics.⁹ In contrast to Einstein, Bohr was a more critical realist and therefore sought epistemological rather than ontological explanations of phenomena such as wave-particle duality. Under certain conditions light would exhibit wave behavior while under different conditions

⁶ Albert Einstein, introduction to Max Jammer, *Concepts of Space: The History of Theories of Space in Physics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1954), xv.

⁷ In fact, Einstein was himself one of the founders of quantum mechanics. His Nobel Prize had been for his 1905 paper on the photoelectric effect, not for his paper on special relativity.

⁸ Max Jammer, *Einstein and Religion: Physics and Theology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 221.

⁹ For a discussion of the scientific, theological, and philosophical aspects of quantum mechanics from a variety of perspectives see Robert John Russell and others, eds., *Quantum Mechanics: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action, A Series on Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action* (Vatican City State; Berkeley, CA: Vatican Observatory; Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences, 2001).

particle behavior was observed. Moreover, a similar wave-particle duality was observed in the behavior of particles such as electrons. In resolving this paradox, Bohr noticed that these mutually exclusive behaviors corresponded to mutually exclusive experimental arrangements. Moreover, since one could not see the quantum object itself, what one actually observed was the interaction of the quantum object with the measuring apparatus. Finally, since the quantum object was extremely small, the act of measurement inevitably altered the measured behavior itself, producing differing types of behavior for different experimental arrangements. Thus, Bohr traced the quantum paradox to the relationality between the quantum object and the participant-observer. In a move pregnant with postmodern overtones, Bohr connected the quantum and Taoist notions of paradox:¹⁰

. . . we must realize that the situation met with in modern atomic theory is entirely unprecedented in the history of physical science. Indeed, the whole conceptual structure of classical physics, brought to so wonderful a unification and completion by Einstein's work, rests on the assumption, well adapted to our daily experience of physical phenomena, that it is possible to discriminate between the behavior of material objects and the question of their observation. For a parallel to the lesson of atomic theory regarding the limited applicability of such customary idealisations, we must in fact turn to quite other branches of science, such as psychology, or even to that kind of epistemological problems with which already thinkers like Buddha and Lao Tse have been confronted, when trying to harmonize our position as spectators and actors in the great drama of existence. Still, the recognition of an analogy in the purely logical character of the problems which present themselves in so widely separated fields of human interest does in no way imply acceptance in atomic physics of any mysticism foreign to the true spirit of science, but on the contrary it gives us an incitation to examine whether the straightforward solution of the unexpected paradoxes met with in the application of our simplest concepts to atomic phenomena might not help us to clarify conceptual difficulties in other domains of experience.¹¹

¹⁰ The strength of this epistemological connection in Bohr's mind is revealed by the fact that he had the yin-yang symbol placed on his coat of arms when he was knighted in 1947.

¹¹ Niels Henrik David Bohr, *Atomic Physics and Human Knowledge* (New York,: Wiley, 1958), 19, 20.

As shown above, the postmodern notion of paradox has its scientific touchstone in quantum epistemology. However, Bohr did not limit himself to epistemological explanation. After his student Werner Heisenberg derived the uncertainty principle, Bohr began to interpret quantum probability in a fully ontological sense. Moreover, with the later development of quantum field theory, ontological probability was incorporated into quantum fields. Thus, whereas the modern mind had regarded unity and flux as polar opposites, quantum field theory set forth the paradoxical specter of a monistic indeterminism. Moreover, whereas Bohr had been reserved in drawing connections between physics and mysticism, these connections were boldly set forth in later years through books such as *The Tao of Physics*.¹² Finally, to the extent that such a field theory defines postmodern ontology on a popular level,¹³ postmodernism is characterized by a *coincidentia oppositorum* in the manner of German Romanticism, Taoism, and Zen.¹⁴

While chance became entrenched in quantum mechanics, determinism was making a comeback through chaos theory. To characterize unusual phenomena like fluid turbulence, scientists and mathematicians began playing with nonlinear dynamics. Nonlinear dynamics arise when dynamic systems have strong internal couplings between their components, which produce system wide relationality. In chaos theory, nonlinear dynamics are used to explain seemingly random behaviors in terms of an underlying

¹² Fritjof Capra, *The Tao of Physics : An Exploration of the Parallels between Modern Physics and Eastern Mysticism*, 4th ed. (Boston: Shambhala, 2000).

¹³ Leonard I. Sweet, *Quantum Spirituality : A Postmodern Apologetic*, 1st ed. (Dayton, Ohio: Whaleprints, 1991).

¹⁴ For an interesting examination of the structural connections between postmodernism, German Romanticism, and Eastern mysticism see Dennis McCort, *Going Beyond the Pairs : The Coincidence of Opposites in German Romanticism, Zen, and Deconstruction* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001). Since postmodernism has strong affinities with both German Romanticism and scientific field theories, the role of German Romanticism in spurring the development of field theory constitutes another interesting thread in this fabric of connection. For the connection between German Romanticism and the origin of field theory see L. Pearce Williams, *The Origins of Field Theory*, Random House Studies in the History of Science ; (New York,: Random House, 1966).

order. In complexity theory, nonlinear dynamics are used to explain the emergence of coherent patterns in self organizing systems.¹⁵ Thus, the concept of emergence, which is a central postmodern idea, is itself a consequence of dynamic relationality.

With regard to chaos theory, mathematicians showed that seemingly random behavior could be produced from simple, deterministic equations. Thus, chaos theory set forth the strange hybrid of deterministic, unpredictable systems. An example of such a phenomenon in nature is the weather which is governed by fluid turbulence. Although chaos theory may eventually provide a deterministic basis for turbulence, the weather will remain unpredictable. The reason for this is that the nonlinear equations of chaos theory rapidly amplify small perturbations into large scale effects. This phenomenon is referred to as “the butterfly effect” because it is said that a butterfly flapping his wings in Beijing today will affect the weather in Los Angeles two weeks from now.

Through its unique combination of determinism and unpredictability, chaos theory offers a direct challenge to the Enlightenment. Descartes had assumed that the world was metaphysically deterministic and epistemologically predictable, whereas Hume took the opposite positions. In a height of arrogance, Kant assumed that nature was metaphysically indeterministic but that he could nevertheless predict it epistemologically. In contrast to all these approaches, chaos theory says that nature is fundamentally deterministic but not always predictable. Thus, one may neither predict it exhaustively, nor negatively declare it random. Rather it carries a deeply complex and relational order which corresponds on a finite level to the infinite mystery of God.

¹⁵ For a discussion of the scientific, theological, and philosophical implications of chaos and complexity science from a variety of perspectives see Robert J. Russell and others, *Chaos and Complexity : Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action*, 2nd ed., A Series On "Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action" (Vatican City State; Berkeley, Calif.: Vatican Observatory Publications ; Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences, 1997).

To make this connection it is first necessary to distinguish between Christian and Pagan concepts of mystery. For paganism both God and humanity are surrounded by the irrational so that mystery is ultimate for both. For Christianity, by contrast, there is mystery only for humanity since God knows Himself and His creation exhaustively. Pagan mystery is thus like a dark and bottomless abyss, whereas Christian mystery is like a blinding light. The Trinity, therefore, is a rational mystery and hence the mysterious source of the creation's rationality. Van Til writes:

As Christians we say that this is a mystery that is beyond our comprehension. It surely is. God himself, in the totality of his existence, is above our comprehension. At the same time, this mysterious God is mysterious because he is, within himself, wholly rational. It is not as though we can first, apart from Scripture, determine the fact that there must be a triune God if there is to be rationality. If we are Christians, all our interpretation is in terms of this God of whom we speak. It is he who has first revealed himself in his creation before we could know anything of him. But if there is one thing that seems clear from Scripture it is that there are no brute uninterpreted facts. In God's being considered apart from his relation to the world, being and consciousness are coterminous. And because this is so, the facts of the world are created facts, facts brought into existence as the result of a fully self-conscious act on the part of God. So then, though we cannot tell why the Godhead should exist tri-personally, we can understand something of the fact, after we are told that God exists as a triune being, that the unity and the plurality of this world has back of it a God in whom unity and plurality are equally ultimate. Thus we may say that this world, in some of its aspects at least, shows analogy to the Trinity. This world is made by God and, therefore, to the extent that it is capable of doing so, it may be thought of as revealing God as he exists. And God exists as a triune being.¹⁶

If the world reveals God, however, it should reflect His mystery as well as His rationality. Thus, just as God is both incomprehensible yet truly apprehensible, so the world should be a rational mystery which is only partially penetrable to the human mind. Consequently, to the extent that chaos theory invokes a deeply relational order beneath chaotic surface phenomena, it suggests a rational mystery of creation:

¹⁶ Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 230.

If we speak therefore of the incomprehensibility of God, what is meant is that God's revelation to man is never exhaustively understood by man. As by his revelation to man God says something about himself, so that man knows something about everything that exists, so it is equally true that there is nothing that man knows exhaustively. It is as impossible for man to know himself or any of the objects of the universe about him exhaustively as it is impossible for man to know God exhaustively. For man must know himself or anything else in the created universe in relation to the self-contained God. Unless he can know God exhaustively he cannot know anything else exhaustively.¹⁷

Apart from chaos theory, another application of nonlinear dynamics is complexity science. Whereas chaos theory explains seemingly random behavior in time, complexity theory describes the emergence of order in self organizing systems. This phenomenon is best introduced by way of an example:

One can picture the essence of what is going on by thinking of a large array of electric light bulbs, each of which is either on or off. Every bulb is correlated with two other bulbs somewhere else in the array. The system develops in steps and the form of the correlation implies that the state of a bulb at the next step depends upon the present states of its correlates. If the net contains 10,000 elements, there are about 10^{3000} states of illumination in which the array might be found. However, it turns out that a net started off in a random configuration does not just twinkle away haphazardly forever, but very soon settles down to cycling through only about a hundred different patterns of on/off illumination. This represents the spontaneous generation of an altogether astonishing degree of order.¹⁸

As should be obvious from this example, emergent order results from dynamic relationality. If the bulbs were not interconnected, they would blink independently of one another with the result that there would be an utter chaos of about 10^{3000} possible combinations. However, when each bulb is connected with just 2 others, a relatively small number of ordered patterns begin to emerge. This emergent order is produced by the dynamic relationality which results from three basic types of relational constraints:

¹⁷ Ibid., 164.

¹⁸ John Polkinghorne, *Science and the Trinity: The Christian Encounter with Reality* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), 82, 83.

bottom-up (part-whole), top-down (whole-part), and lateral (part-part). In the absence of lateral (part-part) connections, the bulks blink independently so that only bottom-up (part-whole) causality prevails. Under these conditions, the behavior of the whole is strictly reducible to the behavior of the parts. However, when lateral (part-part) connections are added between the bulbs, a top-down (whole-part) constraint also comes into play since the shape of the whole determines the types of interconnections available near the boundaries.

In a way, these three types of relations mirror various intra-Trinitarian relations identified in Chapter 2: person-essence (*complicatio*), essence-person (*explicatio*), and person-person (*implicatio*). The main point, however, is that emergence is the result of a core Trinitarian principle, dynamic relationality. Moreover, given the fact that living systems also self organize, other postmodern concepts like social constructionism readily assimilate to emergence theory. In fact, emergent churches self consciously employ a relational ecclesiology both to facilitate self organization¹⁹ and to socially embody the *imago Dei*.²⁰ Of course, such divine imaging presupposes a recognized parallelism between emergence theory and Trinitarian relationality. Moreover, since Leonard Sweet has referred to emergence theory as “the generating science of postmodernity,”²¹ the parallelism mentioned above relates to the very core of postmodernity. Given this fact, emergence theory provides an obvious point of contact for Trinitarian contextualization. After all, in both cases, *the real is the relational, and the relational is the real*.

¹⁹ Dwight Friesen, “A Relational Hermeneutic toward Connective Ecclesiology” (doctoral dissertation, George Fox Evangelical Seminary, 2005).

²⁰ Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei*.

²¹ Leonard I. Sweet, *Soul Tsunami: Sink or Swim in New Millenium Culture* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1999), 80.

RELATIONALITY AND THE QUESTION OF REDUCTIONISM

As mentioned above, emergence is a holistic phenomenon which cannot be reduced to the sum of its parts precisely because top-down and lateral forms of causation compliment the bottom-up variety. By contrast, reductive systems derive from bottom-up causation alone and are thus reducible to the sum of their parts. Given these differences, the philosophical implications of emergence run counter to the reductionism which has dominated modern science and philosophy since Laplace. Reductionism reached its height in logical positivism with the dream of reducing all sciences to physics, and thence to atomic interactions (i.e., sociology > psychology > biology > chemistry > physics.) In a similar way, behaviorist psychology sought to “reduce” mental processes to brain activity. For reductionist philosophers the focus was on things rather than relationships.

In this regard, Nancey Murphy delineates three types of reductionism.²²

Metaphysical reductionism states that things are made of atoms, and *methodological reductionism* constitutes a research strategy of breaking complex things down into their component parts. According to Murphy, these types of reductionism are harmless. However, *epistemological* or *causal reductionism* is pernicious because it attempts to dismiss all higher-level concepts and laws as epiphenomena reducible to lower levels.

In opposition to this latter reductionism, Murphy advances a philosophy known as *emergent monism* or *non-reductive physicalism*. As a species of physicalism, this philosophy opposes both idealism and mind-body dualism. But because it is non-reductive, it also opposes atomistic materialism as well.²³ In this philosophy, reality segregates itself into distinct hierarchical levels which interrelate without reduction.

²² Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism: How Modern and Postmodern Philosophy Set the Theological Agenda*, 65.

²³ *Ibid.*, 136, 137.

Thus, it is impossible to reduce biology to chemistry because biology often supplies a independent top-down constraint that alters the behavior of chemical reactions. After all, chemical reactions behave differently within a living organism than they do in a flask. Of course, the atoms and molecules remain the same, but their behavior is changed by their incorporation into a different network of relationships in a higher level context.²⁴ Thus, there is reciprocal causality between higher and lower levels:

With each step upward in the hierarchy of biological order, novel properties emerge that were not present at the simpler levels of organization. These emergent properties result from interactions between components. A molecule such as a protein has attributes not exhibited by any of its component atoms, and a cell is certainly much more than a bag of molecules. If the intricate organization of the human brain is disrupted by a head injury, that organ ceases to function properly even though all of its parts may still be present. And the organism is a living whole greater than the sum of its parts.²⁵

At the same time that causal relations from below are being loosened, emergent laws (laws relating variables at the higher level) are coming to be seen as significant in their own right, not merely as special cases of lower-level laws. "A hierarchical arraying of parts of the physical universe has been *stabilized*, each part with its quasistable ontology and quasistable effective theory, and the partitioning is fairly well understood."²⁶

If strict causal reductionism is denied, and autonomous, higher-level laws governing emergent properties and processes are recognized, the door is open to an even more thorough rejection of reductionism: the recognition of top-down or whole-part causation. It is now coming to be widely recognized in a variety of sciences that interactions at the lower levels cannot be predicted by looking at the structure of those levels alone. Higher-level variables, which cannot be reduced to lower-level properties or processes, have genuine causal impact. Biochemists were among the first to notice this: chemical reactions do not work the same in a flask as

²⁴ For a discussion of the scientific, theological, and philosophical implications of biology from a variety of perspectives see Robert John Russell, William R. Stoeger, and S. J. and Francisco J. Ayala, eds., *Evolutionary and Molecular Biology: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action*, 1st ed., 5 vols., A Series on Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action (Vatican City State; Berkeley, CA: Vatican Observatory; Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences, 1998).

²⁵ Neil A. Campbell, *Biology*, 2nd ed. (Redwood City: Benjamin/Cummings, 1990), 2, cited in Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism: How Modern and Postmodern Philosophy Set the Theological Agenda*, 139.

²⁶ Silvan S. Schweber, "Physics, Community and the Crisis in Physical Theory," *Physics Today* (1993): 38.

they do within a living organism. The relatively new science of ecology is based on recognition that organisms function differently in different environments. Thus, in general, the higher-level system, which is constituted by the entity and its environment, needs to be considered in giving a complete causal account.²⁷

As seen from this discussion, higher-level properties are not always reducible to lower-level properties. To express this non-reducibility more formally, Murphy uses the concept of supervenience.²⁸ This notion is best introduced by way of an example. In experiments on human perception, a slight electrical shock can be experienced as either a mild burn or a slight chill, depending upon a prior verbal suggestion which changes the anticipations of the subject.²⁹ Since the physical stimulus is the same in both cases, the perception cannot be reduced to a merely neurological level. In other words, the perception of a chill, though dependent upon the brain, is not reducible to a neurological shock response because it also depends upon a higher-level circumstance (the suggestion) which is not thus reducible. Formally stated, a higher-level property *B* (the perception of a chill) is said to supervene on a lower-level property *A* (the shock), if and only if, something's being *A* (the shock) in circumstance *c* (the suggestion) constitutes its being *B* (the perception of a chill). Since supervenient states can be realized in many ways (chills without shocks) and since the same subvenient state can produce different supervenient states (shocks without chills), the two levels, though related, are mutually irreducible.

As demonstrated formally through the notion of supervenience, reality manifests a stratification of levels which runs counter to atomism, monism, and dualism. The

²⁷ Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism: How Modern and Postmodern Philosophy Set the Theological Agenda*, 140.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 141-143.

²⁹ Warren S. Brown, Nancey C. Murphy, and H. Newton Malony, *Whatever Happened to the Soul? : Scientific and Theological Portraits of Human Nature*, Theology and the Sciences (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 137.

decoupling between levels is the result of an intense coupling within them which produces emergent order. Thus, reality is like a cascade in which a fundamental threeness of relationships (bottom-up, top-down, and lateral or *complicatio*, *explicatio*, and *implicatio*) repeats itself with fractal regularity down to the very depths of being. What “emerges,” then, is a relational universe in which relationships and *relata* are equally ultimate and which therefore mirrors the Trinity as a finite analog. After all, in both cases, *the real is the relational, and the relational is the real*.

RELATIONALITY AND MULTIPERSPECTIVALISM

Since emergence theory explains hierarchical order via relational ontology, it provides a metaphysical basis for multiperspectivalism. As mentioned in Chapter 3, John Frame has developed a Trinitarian grammar in which ethics, epistemology, and metaphysics are each characterized by a perichoretic interpenetration of three distinct perspectives: existential (subjective); situational (objective), and normative (legal). The relationship of these perspectives is illustrated for both ontology and epistemology in Figure 7 below. Based upon the results of the previous section, a metaphysical basis for the relation and distinction between these three perspectives can be now posited through the recognition that the various strata of reality--physics, chemistry, biology, psychology, and sociology--are themselves distinct and related.

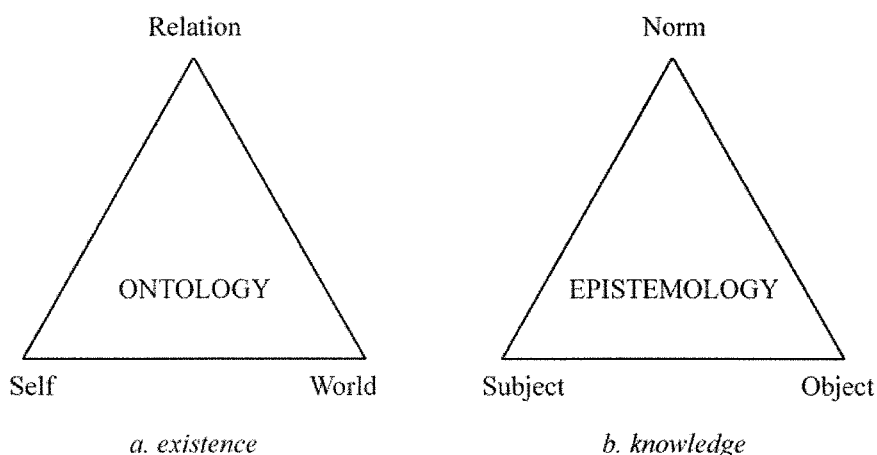


Figure 7. Multiperspectivalism in Ontology and Epistemology

First, since sociology cannot be reduced to psychology, biology, chemistry, or physics, cultural-linguistic norms are unique social emergents which not only depend upon human subjectivity and the objective world but which also affect them through downward causation. With regard to psychological dependence, cultural-linguistic norms can only emerge from a group of people, not a flock of geese. And the dependence upon the physical environment is likewise evident from the many words which the Eskimos use to distinguish shades of white. With respect to downward causation, however, “human mental and spiritual capacities arise out of the complex ordering of our physical selves in their social environment.”³⁰ And through technology the physical world is caused to behave differently than it would have apart from a social context with cultural-linguistic norms. Thus, the social norms are both distinct from, and related to human subjectivity and the objective world. Moreover, human subjectivity and the objective world are also distinct yet related. On the one hand, as an emergent property of the brain, the mind is both distinct from the brain and connected to it. Thus, the mind is directly

³⁰ Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism: How Modern and Postmodern Philosophy Set the Theological Agenda*, 93.

connected to the nervous system and thence to the external world via sensory perception.³¹ Yet, since the mind can also affect the world through downward causation, it also remains distinct. Consequently, by safeguarding both the distinctions and relations between mind, society, and world, the relational phenomenon of emergence makes knowledge of the external world possible, thereby transcending the egocentric predicament of modern philosophy:

The nonreductive physicalist view does not postulate a substance or entity, the mind or soul, as the seat of mental or spiritual powers, but rather attributes mental and spiritual properties to the entire person, understood as a complex physical and social organism. Since mental states or attributes are states of the whole person, no special causal problems arise. This view of mental states as arising from the functioning of the nervous system is consistent with what we know from science about the interactions between brain states and mental states: measurable effects on the central nervous system have psychological consequences; many psychological or mental states have physiological consequences.

The crucial difference between reductive and nonreductive physicalism is that for the reductive physicalists the meaning and efficacy of the mental is an illusion—it is really only the laws of physics that make things happen. For the nonreductive physicalist human beings are more than mere aggregates of atoms, and the activities that we class as mental and spiritual are at least as important to the course of events as the purely physical aspects.³²

The postmodern replacement for modern individualism recognizes that the social level has an integrity of its own, not reducible to the level pertaining to the individual, and, in fact, social systems condition individual characteristics and behavior. This rejection of pure individualism has consequences for the social sciences, political philosophy, and ethics.³³

³¹ For a discussion of the scientific, theological, and philosophical implications of neuro-biology from a variety of perspectives see Robert John Russell and others, eds., *Neuroscience and the Person: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action*, 1st ed., 5 vols., A Series on Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action (Vatican City State; Berkeley, CA: Vatican Observatory; Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences, 2002).

³² Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism: How Modern and Postmodern Philosophy Set the Theological Agenda*, 150.

³³ *Ibid.*, 151, 152.

As argued above, the phenomenon of emergence moves epistemology beyond the egocentric predicament of the Enlightenment. Operating within the categories of the Enlightenment, there was no way to preserve both the distinction and the relation between the subject and the object of knowledge. For the idealists the subject swallowed the object, while for the dualists the two were wrenched apart. Finally, for the reductive materialists the object swallowed the subject. In contrast to all of these options, nonreductive physicalists hold the mind to be an emergent phenomenon both distinct from and dependent upon the body. Thus, it is neither an immaterial substance immune to physical stimuli, nor is it merely an epiphenomenon. Rather, the relational ontology of emergence provides for both the mind's distinct structure and its relation to the world. Once again, *the real is the relational, and the relational is the real.*

CONCLUSION

The thrust of the present chapter has been to relate the dynamic relationality of the Trinity to that of the world. Since God *is* an eternal essence exhaustively expressed in each of three dynamically interacting persons, God is both eternally dynamic and internally relational. Moreover, since God is thus a community within Himself, He is internally self sufficient (*a se*) and therefore independent of the creation. Accordingly, He does not adjust Himself to a preexisting creation, but rather creates the cosmos as a finite analog of Himself. Thus, the dynamic relationality of creation reflects the Trinitarian relationality on a finite scale.

As noted above, this relational cosmology has emerged due to a series of paradigm shifts in 20th Century science. Special relativity set forth the relational nature of

mass, length, and time, undercutting their foundational status. In quantum mechanics, the wave-particle paradox was traced to the dynamic interaction between the quantum object and the participant-observer. Finally, the study of nonlinear dynamics gave rise to chaos and complexity theory, a subject which Leonard Sweet has called “the generating science of postmodernity.”³⁴ Because complex systems generate a nonreductive, emergent order, the dynamic relationality of these systems produces the hierarchical strata of reality: physics, chemistry, biology, psychology, sociology, etc. In fact, since the mind is likely an emergent property of the brain, this relational view may well overcome the Enlightenment’s subject-object split by connecting the mind to the organs of perception.

At a deeper level, however, a relational view advances a profound and unique metaphysics as the basis for these interesting phenomena. After all, to say that the world is relational is to say that *relata* and relationships are equally ultimate. And since such a view affirms an equal ultimacy of unity and diversity, it offers a true third way between modern atomism and the monism of Romantic postmodern strains. Indeed, the hierarchical stratification noted above manifests this simultaneous unity-in-diversity and would be unthinkable in either an atomistic or a monistic world. Consequently, while complexity theory is “the generating science of postmodernity,” its relationality is best explained in terms of a Trinitarian metaphysic, and this fact provides an opportunity to relate the Trinity to the very heart of postmodernity. After all, by virtue of creation God’s relational nature is reflected in God’s relational world. In both cases *the real is the relational, and the relational is the real*.

³⁴ Sweet, *Soul Tsunami: Sink or Swim in New Millenium Culture*, 80.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION: MULTIPERSPECTIVALISM AND THE *MISSIO DEI*

The dynamic of glorification is not limited to us. Nor does our glorification involve us in isolation from the rest of creation.

Rather, the experience of glorification through the act of giving glory to God encompasses all creation, and all creation together. We are glorified together with creation.

As we have seen, this glorification occurs *through* the Son—through the union of all creation in the Son (Col. 1:15-20). In the dynamic of glorification we actually participate in the eternal relationship between the Father and the Son—who is the Spirit within us bringing us to glorify the Father through the Son. Therefore, the eternal community ultimately means the participation of creation through the Spirit in the glory of—even in the life of—the Triune God (2 Peter 1:4).

This participation of creation in the Son's glorification of the Father and in the Father's glorification of the Son marks the consummation of the Spirit's work. As the Spirit of the relationship between the Father and the Son, he is the Completer of both the dynamic within the Triune God and God's work in the world. In this way, the Spirit eternally glorifies the Father and the Son both within the divine life and by completing the mission of God in bringing creation to share in this eternal glorification.

What the Holy Spirit effects at the consummation is but the heightening of what he is already accomplishing in the brokenness of our present experience. Ultimately, therefore, the eternal community is the renewal of our earthly enjoyment of fellowship, the Spirit's radical perfecting of the community we now share. Seen in this light, our glorious future does not come as a stranger, but as a mysterious, yet welcomed friend. The eternal glorification in which we participate is nothing else but the community for which we were created.

Stanley Grenz, *Created for Community*

The purpose of this book has been to contextualize Trinitarian theology within postmodern philosophy, and vice versa. In Chapters 4-6, Van Til's Trinitarian theology has been used to apply the Trinitarian vision of Stanley Grenz, evident in the citation above,¹ to the three philosophical targets identified by Nancey Murphy: non-foundational

¹ Stanley J. Grenz, *Created for Community: Connecting Christian Belief with Christian Living*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 295, 296.

epistemology, socially constructive linguistics, and holistic relational ontology.² In this regard, the process of explication has been facilitated by the use of multiperspectivalism, a Trinitarian grammar developed by Van Til's former student John M. Frame. Having performed the first task of contextualization in Chapters 4-6, it now remains to perform the second so that postmodern philosophy may also be contextualized within the framework of Trinitarian theology. This will be accomplished through a Trinitarian integration of Chapters 4-6.

As will be shown below, multiperspectivalism provides the integrating grammar which draws these topics into a single framework. However, as noted above by Grenz, wholeness is something that increases over time, reaching its culmination in the eschatological Kingdom of God. To speak about bringing things into a whole, therefore, is implicitly to invoke the Christian metanarrative in which the move toward wholeness finds its context. For these reasons, the following discussion will begin with the Christian story as it comes to expression in a theological concept known as the *missio Dei*. Once this over arching context has been discussed, the more limited problem of providing the Trinitarian integration of Chapters 4-6 will be addressed.

ESCHATOLOGICAL WHOLENESS AND THE *MISSIO DEI*

As noted by Grenz above,³ the role of the Holy Spirit is to draw everything together into a community. As the bond of communion between the Father and the Son, the Spirit draws the entire creation into their triune fellowship. Thus, the Spirit draws all things together and in so doing draws them forward toward a perfect unity in the

² Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism: How Modern and Postmodern Philosophy Set the Theological Agenda*, 1-3, 152, 152.

³Grenz, *Created for Community: Connecting Christian Belief with Christian Living*, 295, 296.

eschaton. For this reason the Bible portrays the Spirit's work as both communal (2 Cor. 13:14) and eschatological (Acts 2:17). Using the language of Saussure, these twin aspects of the Spirit's task will be referred to as *synchronic* and *diachronic*, respectively.⁴ Synchronically the Spirit works first to gather the church and then to gather all things into the church. Diachronically the Spirit works to draw the church and all things forward to their ultimate communion in the eschatological kingdom of God.

The relation of these two aspects is given by a Trinitarian metanarrative which describes God's redemptive program in history. Using the Trinitarian language of Chapter 2, this metanarrative depicts God as unfolding Himself into the world (*explicatio*), weaving the creation together with the divine life (*implicatio*), and finally folding the creation together into the divine life (*complicatio*), while yet maintaining its distinctness. More specifically, the Father sends the Son into the world (*explicatio*); the Father and the Son together send the Holy Spirit (*explicatio*), and the Three together then send the church (*explicatio*). Through the church the Spirit weaves things together with the divine life (*implicatio*) and then draws them forward and together in Christ (*complicatio*) who will eventually turn them back over to the Father (*complicatio*) so that God may be all in all (*complicatio*) (1 Cor. 15:24-28). The end result of this program will be the arrival of the eschatological Kingdom of God in which there will be a perfect communion (*complicatio*) between creation, humanity, and the Triune God who is Himself community. Because this metanarrative describes the mission of God, Protestant theologians in the late 1950s began to refer to this historical program as the *missio Dei*.⁵

⁴ Saussure and others, 91-95.

⁵ H. H. Rosin, *Missio Dei: An Examination of the Origin, Contents and Function of the Term in Protestant Missiological Discussion* (Leiden: Inter-university Institute for Missiological and Ecumenical Research, 1972).

Since the church is the social embodiment of the *missio Dei*, Trinitarian missiology enters into the very ontology of the church. As a result, the church continually repeats the Trinitarian pattern of *explicatio*, *implicatio*, and *complicatio*. However, since the church may neither escape to the future nor live in the past, it mirrors this diachronic pattern synchronically for the age and the place in which God has set it. Given this fact, the 21st Century Western church is called to enact this pattern in a postmodern world by mirroring the centrifugal and centripetal motions of the *missio Dei*. Thus, the church is called to *explicate* God's Word for the postmodern culture (centrifugal thrust), to *implicate* this culture into new patterns of relationship (centripetal thrust), and finally to *complicate* (i.e. fold together) all things within these new patterns of connectivity (centripetal thrust). With regard to the first task, the Trinitarian faith was explicated for, and contextualized within three *loci* of postmodern philosophy in Chapters 4-6. In this final chapter it therefore remains to implicate this material into a Trinitarian framework and thereby complicate it through new patterns of connectivity. The result of these latter steps will be to contextualize postmodern philosophy within the framework of Trinitarian theology, thus completing the inter-contextualization.

Of course, this latter process not only involves accepting elements of postmodern culture; it also involves a great deal of excluding so that foreign elements are not incorporated into the theology of the church. This calls for a *critical* engagement with postmodern culture in terms of criteria capable of distinguishing its helpful from its harmful elements. While church history attests the fact that there are no foolproof criteria, a helpful criterion is a grammatical rule known as *final primacy*, which was developed by George Sumner, a former student of George Lindbeck's. According to final primacy,

only those elements which are consistent with the Trinitarian metanarrative and thus with the final (i.e. eschatological) primacy of Jesus Christ can be assimilated into the church's faith.⁶ For example, since the postmodern denial of metanarrative would contradict final primacy by definition, the criterion of final primacy would *a priori* exclude such a view from entering the church's theology. In this respect, the synchronic integration of postmodern ideas is subject to the diachronic criterion of final primacy since only that which can be assimilated to a retrospective narrative in which Jesus Christ has final primacy can enter the theology of the church.

MULTIPERSPECTIVALISM AND SYNCHRONIC INTEGRATION

On the basis of the discussion above, the double contextualization pursued in this book--together with the exclusion of harmful elements--is seen to be demanded by Trinitarian missiology as reflected in the *missio Dei*. As this diachronic pattern is mirrored synchronically by the church, the centrifugal thrust of explication is followed by a centripetal integrative thrust. Having performed the former task in Chapters 4-6, it remains to weave this material into a Trinitarian framework and draw it together.

In this regard, the integration of the material in Chapters 4-6 can be accomplished by using multiperspectivalism as the integrating grammar. As argued in Chapter 3, epistemology, metaphysics, and ethics each require a 3-fold formulation consisting of interpenetrating subjective, objective, and normative perspectives. However, since the respective foci of epistemology, metaphysics, and ethics are subjectivity (knowledge), objectivity (existence), and normativity (behavior), it follows that these three subject

⁶ George R. Sumner, *The First and the Last: The Claim of Jesus Christ and the Claims of Other Religious Traditions* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2004), 16-21.

areas can themselves be arranged within a triadic framework as metaperspectives upon one another and hence upon reality as a whole. A warrant for such integration comes from two of John Frame's observations:

The three disciplines are closely related to one another. Metaphysics must account for ethical norms as part of the overall structure of reality, and for the possibility of knowledge within that structure. Epistemology must presuppose some elements of metaphysics, and it must understand the ethical norms to which the human quest for knowledge is itself subject. And ethics presupposes metaphysics and epistemology, because it must deal with behavior in the real world, and it must defend the knowability of the norms it proposes for behavior.⁷

. . . "Norm," "object," and "subject" all refer to the same reality; they cover the same territory. But each attributes a different function to reality. "Norm" attributes to reality the capacity to govern intelligent subjects. "Object" attributes to reality the property of being *knowable* by intelligent subjects. "Subject" indicates that reality is inseparable from the subject himself and is to be found in and through his own experience.⁸

When epistemology, metaphysics, and ethics are woven together perspectivally, a triad of triads is obtained as shown below in Figure 8. While Figure 8 includes the triads of epistemology and metaphysics from Chapters 4 and 6, it is missing the speech triad from Chapter 5. This deficiency can be corrected by first recognizing that speech is a normative entity since it provides the social norms for relating subject and object. Thus, the speech triad from Chapter 5 can be substituted for the ethical triad in Figure 8 to yield Figure 9. This move is possible because multiperspectivalism is a flexible grammar capable of integrating a variety of entities into triadic relationships of subject, object, and norm. As can be readily observed, Figure 9 provides a single framework integrating the material covered in Chapters 4-6.

⁷ John M. Frame and Cornelius Van Til, *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Pub., 1995), 52.

⁸ Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, 402.

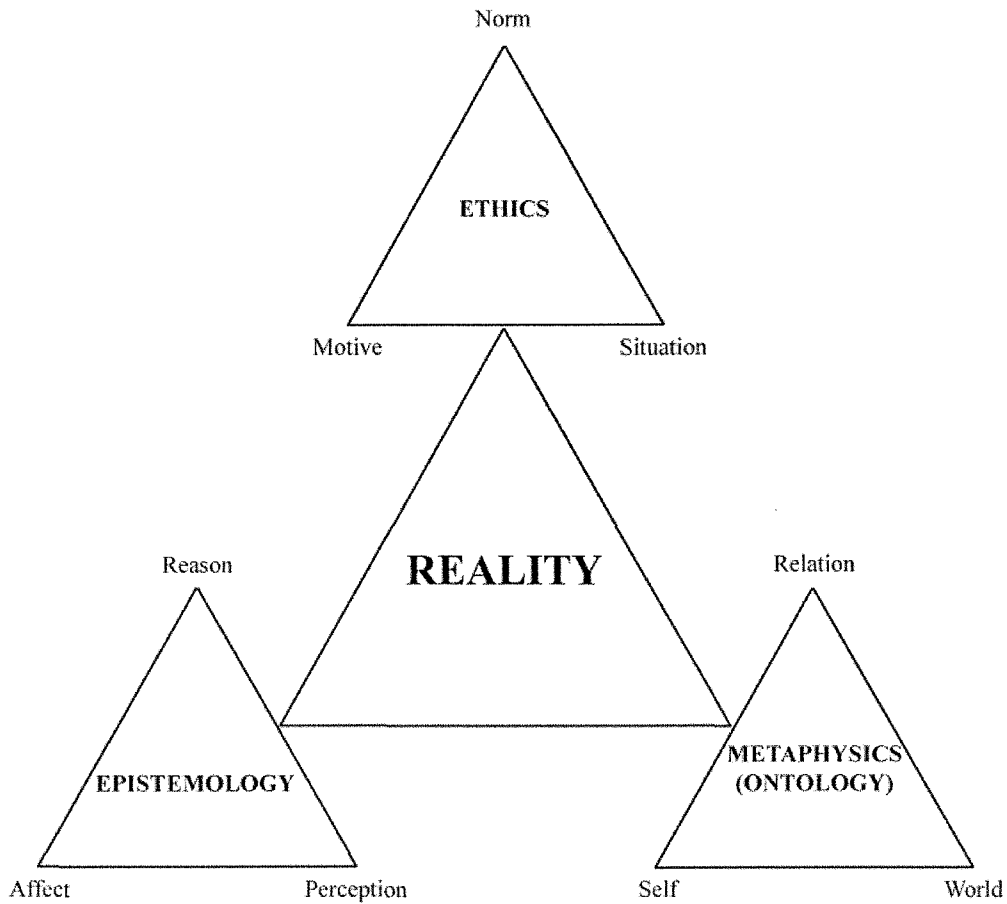


Figure 8. Multiperspectivalism as an Integrating Grammar

With regard to its appropriateness, the integration achieved in Figure 9 satisfies Grenz's threefold theological method because it is Biblically faithful, doctrinally sound, and culturally relevant. With regard to this cultural relevance, it integrates Trinitarian theology with the three philosophical *loci* identified by Nancey Murphy, and then incorporates these *loci* into a single Trinitarian framework. Moreover, the manner of this integration is consistent with the *loci* themselves. First, Figure 9 shows the overall integration to be relational, not foundational. Second, Figure 9 results from the *application* of a *constructive* grammar which is defined by a particular rule based connectivity. Thus, the integration is also consistent with socially constructive linguistics.

Finally, Figure 9 embodies the complex diversity-in-unity of a holistic relational ontology because it relates real entities in a perspectival manner that is ontologically grounded in the Trinity. Thus, the adequacy of the integration derives from the fact that multiperspectivalism is a non-foundational, constructive grammar which is ontologically grounded and therefore suited to the embodiment of complex truth.

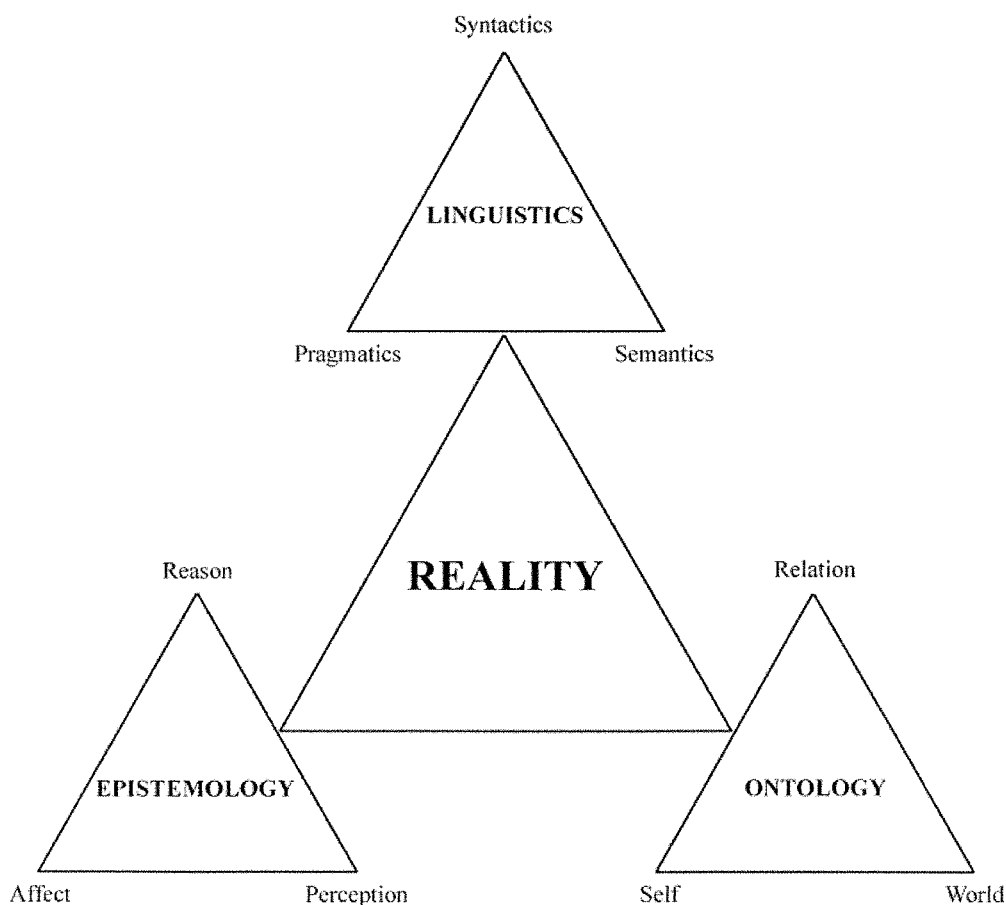


Figure 9. Multiperspectival Integration of the 3 Philosophical *Loci*

Finally, having described the integration achieved in Figure 9 and having addressed its adequacy, it remains to underscore the significance of the integration as a whole. Because of their incorporation into a Trinitarian matrix, the nature of the philosophical *loci* is changed by virtue of their new context. Whereas they previously functioned as *elements* of a secular philosophy, they now function together as

interpenetrating *perspectives* within a Trinitarian framework. In other words, rather than being impersonal statements of a generic relationality, they now reflect the perichoretic unity-in-diversity of the personal, Triune God. Thus, by virtue of their incorporation within a Trinitarian multiperspectival framework, the *loci* of postmodern philosophy have now become the *perspectives* of a *postmodern Trinitarian philosophy*.

CONCLUSION

As argued above, the inter-contextualization pursued in this book is demanded by Trinitarian missiology as reflected in the *missio Dei*. Within this missional metanarrative God explicates Himself into the world, implicates the creation into new patterns of relationship, and then draws things forward into an eschatological communion with Himself. Within the diachronic flow of history, the church mirrors this Trinitarian pattern synchronically as it explicates God's Word within the surrounding culture, implicates the creation into new patterns of relationship, and draws things into communion with the church. In the 21st Century Western church, this pattern of *explicatio*, *implicatio*, and *complicatio* must now be enacted within a postmodern culture.

To facilitate such a missional engagement, this book has sought to achieve a double contextualization by enacting the above pattern on a theoretical level. To this end the Trinitarian faith was explicated within the *loci* of postmodern philosophy (Chapters 4-6), and this philosophy was then implicated and complicated within a Trinitarian framework (Chapter 7). While the present author has no "practical" experience as an evangelist or a missiologist, it is nevertheless hoped that the theoretical integration achieved herein will help others in their practical tasks by showing the affinities that exist

between postmodern philosophy and Trinitarian theology. While this engagement must be critical and must therefore exclude many postmodern ideas, other ideas are beneficial and may therefore be incorporated within the matrix of Christian theology. To this end, it is hoped that the church will explicate the Christian faith within postmodern culture and then *critically* implicate this culture into a web of Trinitarian complexity. This two-fold engagement is both a responsibility and a privilege of the church as it fulfills its vocation within the *missio Dei*.

APPENDIX A

MULTIPERSPECTIVALISM, FRACTAL GEOMETRY, AND THE PERICHORESIS OF INFINITY

IN THE MIND'S EYE, a fractal is a way of seeing infinity.

James Gleick, *Chaos*

In Chapter 4 it was stated that multiperspectivalism embodies a polycentric relationality that opposes both the monocentric reductionism of modern foundationalism and the de-centered relationality of postmodern relativism. This raises an interesting question. If modern epistemology resembles a building, and if postmodern epistemology resembles a net, what is an appropriate metaphor for multiperspectivalism? Since each perspective includes the others and in fact becomes a center of the others, how can this perichoresis be unraveled in terms of a coherent picture? One possibility is that multiperspectivalism resembles a fractal because a fractal provides a means of visualizing infinity as noted by Gleick above.¹ Moreover, since fractals are characterized by a repeating structure and form the geometric underpinnings of complex systems, to compare multiperspectivalism to a fractal is thus to acknowledge a common element of complexity. As will be shown below, this common characteristic stems from the fact that both result from a type of perichoresis.

To see this point consider the repeating structure of multiperspectivalism shown in Figures 8 and 9. This repetition is the result of the perspectival perichoresis. Because each perspective always entails the other two, attempts to isolate or focus on a particular perspective will always “drag” the other two perspectives with it. For instance, as one attempts to focus on the vertices of the inner triangle in a “first iteration,” three new

¹ James Gleick, *Chaos : Making a New Science* (New York, N.Y., U.S.A.: Viking, 1987), 98.

triangles “sprout” from these original vertices to yield a total of 9 new vertices. If one then attempted to focus on these 9 vertices in a “second iteration,” 9 new triangles would “sprout” from them, producing 27 new vertices, and so on. In fact, this process could be repeated *ad infinitum* because the perspectives, though distinct, are inseparable. Thus, it would never be possible to reach a “scale” at which the “perspectives” could be resolved into independent “parts,” even after an infinite number of “iterations.” Thus, multiperspectivalism exhibits the fractal behavior integral to complex systems, and this fact is significant since Leonard Sweet has identified complexity theory as “the generating science of postmodernity.”²

To demonstrate this resemblance, consider the generation of the Koch snowflake shown in Figure 10 below. The process of generating this fractal begins with a simple triangle. In the first iteration a kink is placed in each of its sides. The effect of this operation is to increase the length of the perimeter by a factor of $4/3$. The second and third iterations involve placing kinks within kinks with the result that the length of the perimeter increases by the same factor of $4/3$ each time. Since the fractal is generated in the limit of an infinite number of iterations, it might seem that the length of the perimeter would become infinite in obtaining the fractal. Yet the area within the perimeter would remain finite because it would always be less than that contained within a circle drawn around the original triangle. But this raises the question as to how a finite area can be surrounded by a perimeter of infinite length.

² Sweet, *Soul Tsunami: Sink or Swim in New Millenium Culture*, 80.

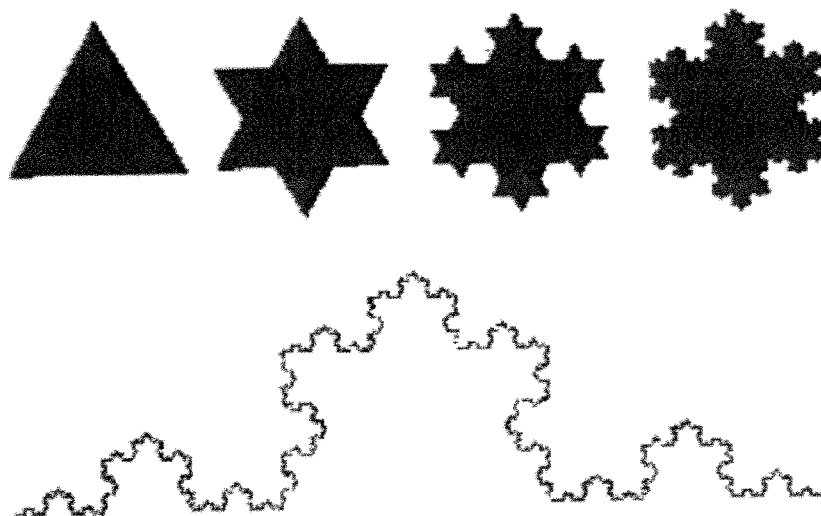


Figure 10. Generation of the Koch Snowflake

As it turns out, the solution to this dilemma is that the perimeter has no length at all because it is a fractal having a dimension $d = 1.2618$.³ Indeed, it is called a fractal because it has a fractional dimension intermediate between the integer values that define the dimensions of length ($d = 1$), area ($d = 2$), and volume ($d = 3$). Consequently, the fractal perimeter only appears to have infinite length because length is the wrong measure to capture its properties. After all, just as it would be nonsensical to ask for the length of an area or a volume, it is also nonsensical to ask for the length of something with a fractal dimension of $d = 1.2618$. Of course, if the generating process shown in Figure 10 had stopped after a finite number of iterations, it would have been possible to resolve the perimeter into a number of component lengths and then calculate its total length by beginning from the smallest scale. However, since the fractal is obtained by an infinite number of iterations (kinks within kinks within kinks *ad infinitum*), it is never possible to reach a scale at which the fractal can be resolved into component lengths.

³ Gleick, 102.

In a similar manner, due to the perichoretic interpenetration of perspectives within a multiperspectival framework, it is never possible to reach a scale at which the perspectives can be resolved into independent parts. Thus, multiperspectivalism reveals a repeating structure similar to that of fractal geometry and for similar reasons. In the case of the Koch snowflake, this behavior is due to the perichoretic interpenetration of kinks. In the case of multiperspectivalism, it is due to the perichoretic interpenetration of perspectives. Moreover, both seek to represent a truth that is neither simple, nor elusive, but rather complex. Consequently, while it would be a metaphorical stretch to say that multiperspectivalism is a fractal, it is no stretch to suggest that fractal geometry provides a compact metaphor with which to picture the perichoretic infinity of multiperspectivalism. After all, such a metaphor seeks only to capture the *finite infinity* of created human knowledge and not the *divine infinity* of the Trinity Itself.

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