

A Christian View of Science
RMPC Adult Sunday School Class, Fall 2008
By Benjamin Richards

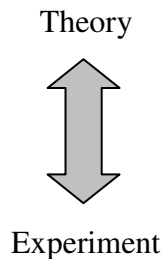
Lesson 2: Theological Foundations

I. Review

We reviewed from last week the goals, motivation, method and thesis of the class. We also presented the definition of science that will be used for the remainder of the quarter:

Richards' definition of science: The systematic and rigorous investigation of physical reality by means of empirical investigations and logical theoretical descriptions for the purpose of discovering and understanding the laws that govern the physical universe. "To think God's thoughts after Him." (Kepler)

The picture we drew of science from this definition is that there is a constant back-and-forth interaction between theory (logical theoretical descriptions) and experiments (empirical investigations). Theory guides and interprets experimental data and suggests new experiments, and experiments in turn confirm or refute theory, guide future theoretical investigations, or present unexplained data that requires theoretical explanation. There is ongoing feedback in both directions between theory and experiment:



We noted that on the basis of this definition, science is not the same as technology, which may produce new devices and inventions without advances in understanding of the processes underlying them; it is not the same as observations, which may be carefully undertaken without attention to explaining what is observed; and finally it is not the same as predictions, which may also be successfully made without understanding the causes that make the phenomena recur with regularity.

II. Background

We discussed the background of today's class, specifically why theology is relevant to understanding epistemology and science. We noted that during the 16th century a major cultural upheaval began: the Protestant Reformation. The Reformation was on the one hand, a widespread religious revival of the hearts of people toward God, and on the other hand an assertion of the primacy of the Bible as God's Word as being the highest

criterion for truth. This revival and emphasis on the Bible led to the widespread translation of the Bible into the common languages of the people, and produced, for the first time in history, an entire culture whose basic worldview was derived from the Bible. This adoption of the Biblical worldview by European culture was of course never perfect, and it was under attack as soon as it began. Nevertheless, it became the dominant conceptual framework of Western culture. This Biblical worldview gave rise to the cultural triumphs of the west: reason, education, capitalism, limited government, the abolition of slavery, women's rights, technology, and science.

But no sooner had Western culture begun to attain to achievements unparalleled in world history on the basis of its Biblical worldview, than it began to think that it could keep those achievements while rejecting the Bible and the God of the Bible which had provided the foundations for them. We read the parable of the prodigal son, who took the inheritance of his father and then ran away in rebellion to squander his father's wealth on riotous living. He was soon out of money and found himself tending pigs and longing to eat what the pigs ate. In the same way, we argued that Western culture took the intellectual riches of God, and then rejected Him and His Word. The intellectual inheritance that Western culture took from the Bible was enormous, and we have lived off of it for several hundred years. But it was not infinite, and *we have now used up our capital*. We are intellectually bankrupt as a culture, but we refuse to repent and return to the one "in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden." We would rather commit intellectual suicide.

But Christians are children of our Father, and all of His riches are still at our disposal! We need to reexamine this inheritance, and in *every field* make every thought captive to Christ. Today we look at what part of our theological inheritance is relevant to knowledge and science. We will be assuming historic, Biblical, Reformed Christianity throughout this quarter. We will not develop the full doctrines, but draw out only those aspects that are most important to the scientific endeavor.

III. Theological Foundations

Doctrine of God

(1) The Trinity. We suggested that the most fundamental teaching of Christianity is the doctrine of the Trinity. As John Calvin put it in his *Institutes*, ". . . the Father and the Son and the Spirit are one God; and yet neither is the Son the Father, nor the Spirit the Son, but they are distinct." So the doctrine of the Trinity states that we have one God, who is three persons: in other words, in the Being of God, there is unity, and there is diversity; there is One, and there are Many.

(2) Self-existence. God created all reality, and so only God is self-existent and self-determinate. This gives rise to the very important Creator/creature distinction. There is an absolute division in reality between the self-existent Creator God and His creation. All facts are what they are by virtue of their place in God's plan.

(3) Knowability and Incomprehensibility: The Bible asserts both the knowability of God and the incomprehensibility of God. In John 17:3, the Lord Jesus says that the reason that

He has come to earth is so that we may know God. In Isaiah 55:8-9, God says that “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways . . . As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my thoughts higher than your thoughts, and my ways than your ways.” We can know God truly, but we cannot know Him exhaustively. God has revealed Himself to us with words (human language) and in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, but because He is the infinite Creator God, and we are finite creatures (the Creator/creature distinction), we cannot hope to plumb the depths of the Being of God with our finite minds.

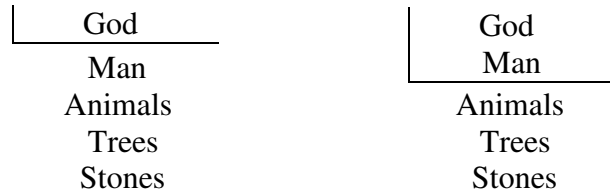
(4) The knowability/incomprehensibility of God, as well as the doctrine of the Trinity, bring us face to face with the subject of the One and the Many. This is one of the most crucial topics of the entire semester, and will be recurring again and again as we progress. It is formulated as follows: *all created reality, because it is created by the Trinitarian God of the Bible, reflects His being in terms of the One and the Many.* Everywhere we turn in creation, we are faced with one and many, or unity and diversity. Some aspects of this feature of reality are enumerated in the following list:

<u>One/Universals</u>	<u>Many/Particulars</u>
Unity	Diversity
Transcendence	Immanence
Knowability	Incomprehensibility
Objectivity	Subjectivity
Laws (systems)	Facts
Being	Becoming
Necessity	Chance
Rationalism	Empiricism
Ideas (abstract)	Objects (concrete)
Determinism	Freedom
Permanence	Change
Theory	Practice
Authority	Independence
Rationality	Irrationality
Order	Chaos

We called this feature of reality *the fundamental dialectic of created reality*. The dialectic, or the problem of the One and the Many, is the controlling problem in all human thought. Just as it is impossible to exhaust the Being of God with our finite human minds, so it is impossible to exhaustively penetrate the dialectic of created reality, since it reflects God’s being. We noted that this is not a result of sin, but rather it is a result of finitude. We raised the question of whether the One or the Three in the Being of God is more ultimate, and agreed that the Biblical answer is that they are co-ultimate and co-equal. Neither the One nor the Many is more fundamental in the Being of God. Thus, we have asserted that Biblical Christianity is neither a fundamentally monist system, nor a fundamentally dualist system. It is a Trinitarian system.

Doctrine of Man

We read Genesis 1:25-28. In this passage, we saw that the man and the woman were the crowning piece of God's creative activity. They were created in the image of God, and thus were *qualitatively* different from the rest of creation. We used an illustration from Francis Schaeffer:



This illustrates that in terms of the Creator/creature distinction, God alone is divided from everything else in creation. But in terms of the image of God, God and man together are divided from the rest of creation. The image of God means that man is created *like God* in the sense that he is a spiritual being. We identified four important aspects of the image of God:

- (1) Rationality: Human beings communicate with words and language, and in this way are like God. They are capable of thinking God's thoughts after Him.
- (2) Authority: The man was given authority, or dominion, over creation. The authority is derivative, that is, it comes from God. We pointed out that a lion does not have authority over a rabbit, but that the unbelieving conception of authority, having rejected God as its legitimate source, has degenerated to just such a conception: authority is nothing but power or manipulation.
- (3) Morality: Mankind is subject to God's law, and is capable of making non-coerced decisions.
- (4) Creativity: Man can create things that didn't exist before.

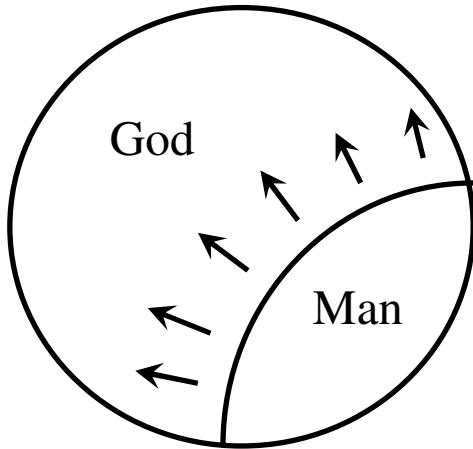
We noted that all of these aspects of creation in God's image are *derivative, not original*. For example, man does not create out of nothing like God does, he can only create using preexisting material. Thus man's creative activity is related *analogically* to God's creative activity. It is the same for (1)-(3) above.

Doctrine of Sin

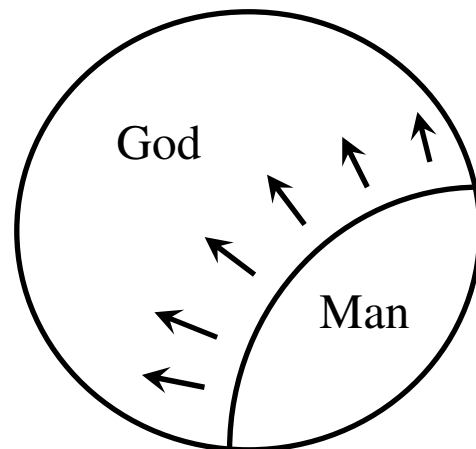
We read Genesis 2:15-17 and Genesis 3:1-7. We pointed out that the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil is more than an arbitrary test. *It is a symbol of a source of thinking and acting apart from God.* God insists that He must always be #1. Man will always be #2: either he will listen to God, or he will listen to someone else. If man submits to God he will live. If he submits to anyone else, he will die. God is insisting that

man live in light of the Creator/creature distinction. We illustrated the temptation and fall as follows:

Being:



Knowledge:



The fall of man constitutes an assertion of moral and intellectual autonomy. Adam and Eve wish to carve out for themselves a place in the sphere of Being (they will decide what they will do) and in the sphere of knowledge (they will determine what is to be believed and what is to be rejected). In this sense, the Serpent's suggestion that they will "be like God" is definitively significant. Satan encouraged Eve to be her own criterion of truth. God had made clear that *His Word* was ultimate, and that everything else was subject to it. Satan suggested that *Eve's mind* could be ultimate, and that it could judge the merits of the case of God's Word and the Serpent's Word on equal footing. He called God's Word into question, suggesting to Eve that it was up to her to decide for herself. The serpent wanted Eve to be "scientific": "You can't know anything you haven't measured!" Satan suggested to Adam and Eve that they could be #1 ("Be like God"). As a result of the fall into sin, all human beings are born in this same state of rebellion against their creator. Each individual sin represents a renewed assertion of autonomy on the part of the sinner. This is *THE* fundamental principle that controls all of unbelieving thought. We noted that this is a religious principle:

- a) *My mind will be the ultimate criterion of truth.*
- b) *My mind will legislate about what is possible and impossible.*
- c) *My mind will decide what standards of proof the Creator must meet when He speaks.*
- d) *My mind sits in judgment over God.*

The result of this apostasy from the God of the Bible is that the unbeliever is caught in the trap of the dialectic. God says "My thoughts are higher than your thoughts." If my mind sits in judgment over God this is not even possible! The autonomous human intellect cannot synthesize the poles of the dialectic, but it will destroy itself trying. It will either seize one and reject the other or it will try to force them together, but the entire venture is impossible and hopeless. As a result, the apostate mind of the rebellious creature is in unremitting, mortal combat in the created reality of the triune Creator.

We used the example of the Enlightenment versus the contemporary context of postmodernism. The Enlightenment seized on the pole of the universals and rejected the pole of the particulars. It affirmed reason, authority, determinism, objectivity, permanence, and order. Postmodern culture in turn has seized on the pole of the particulars and rejected the pole of the universals. It affirms freedom, subjectivity, chaos, irrationality, diversity, and change. We pointed out that the popular bumper stickers we see on cars either disparage something from the universals list (“Question Authority!”) or they exalt something from the particulars list (“Celebrate Diversity!”).

We asked what is the Christian view of the dialectic? It is given in the following formula:

$$100\% + 100\% = 100\%$$

This formula is not exhaustively penetrable by the human intellect. It does not fit in our finite created minds, but it fits snugly in our hearts. We looked at some examples from Christian theology:

God: One and Three - $100\% + 100\% = 100\%$

Jesus Christ: God and Man - $100\% + 100\% = 100\%$

The Bible: God’s Word and man’s word - $100\% + 100\% = 100\%$

Sovereignty and Responsibility - $100\% + 100\% = 100\%$

We noted that all apostasizing thought will refuse to submit to God in this fashion. As a result, the major heresies of Christian theology are occasioned by the trap of the dialectic. The history of human thought, in every field of knowledge, is the history of the struggle of the apostate human consciousness in the trap of the dialectic. The only escape possible is repentance and submission to the God of the Bible.