



Essays on Knowing,
Beauty, Ethics and Reality

Wharf and Bearings

III

Ralph C. Ennis

Wharf and Bearings III

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Knowing, Beauty, Ethics and Reality*

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Knowing, Beauty, Goodness and Reality

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Introduction to WB Series

As land dwelling beings, when we are at sea, two thoughts are always in mind—even if in the back of our minds. Where’s the wharf—a safe place to dock? What’s my bearing—which direction am I going and will it in time get me to a safe wharf?

We all need safe places. Fundamentally, life is filled with uncertainties. Sometimes we feel in control or at minimal risk of danger, but that is always only temporary. Our common human experience inevitably involves risks of the unknown. And through death, not to be feared, we journey to an eternal wharf in Jesus.

We all need a bearing that will get us where we want to go while preserving the ability to plot a course to a safe place. We can play far from this wharf, but we desire home.

Wharf and Bearings Series, a collection of essays, poems and a short story, is intended to present a journey—my journey. I share it with the hope that it will give some guidance as you seek your bearings and wharf throughout your life.

At no time are these essays to be considered exhaustive, they are pathways I have taken to find wharf and bearings for me. And collectively, they represent “philosophical peace” for me.



I dedicate this series to my wife of 40 years (in 2013), our four children and their spouses and our 13+ grandchildren and the generations to follow! Here's an overview of the series:

Wharf and Bearings ONE:
Hope and Beholding the Triune God

Wharf and Bearings TWO:
Spirituality and the Triune God

Wharf and Bearings THREE:
Knowing, Beauty, Ethics and Reality

Wharf and Bearings FOUR:
Love, Longings, Success and Consequences

Wharf and Bearings FIVE:
Poems from the Soul

Wharf and Bearing SIX:
Oneness in Marriage

Wharf and Bearings SEVEN:
The Mind, Decisions and Artificial Intelligence

Wharf and Bearing EIGHT:
World View and Culture

Wharf and Bearing NINE:
Gospel Implications

Wharf and Bearing TEN:
Our Times and Futures

*"... we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power,
and the wonders He has done ..."
Psalm 78:4 -6*

Relational Knowledge *in a Modern and Postmodern World*

As Western society shifts from a predominately modern orientation to a postmodern perspective¹, many issues arise for the Christian thinker. Among these is the question of knowledge.

The purpose of the paper is to briefly posit a framework for understanding a Biblical view of knowledge—a view that is deeply rooted in the relationship of the Triune God directed to humanity. This will not be an exhaustive work, but rather a sketch work that may help us negotiate an understanding of knowledge within the new cultural currents of postmodernity and the rescinding, or at least moderating, currents of modernity. Moreover, the paper is written for those who have faith in the Triune God; it is not intended to address the starting places that an unbelieving audience might have.

Over the past few centuries, many within the believing community have adapted modern ways of thinking. If we now embrace the idea that absolute certainty of knowledge is a failed experiment, are we then left to embrace postmodernity's relativism? *This paper makes a case that a Biblical understanding of knowledge will lead not to clinging to objective, detached truth systems of modernity or shifting to a relativism of postmodernity but rather to an embrace of relational truth firmly grounded in the omnipresence of the Triune God Who is ultimate reality.*

First, it should be noted that a pursuit of knowledge with absolute certainty is substantially rejected within a postmodern framework. Knowledge statements with absolute certainty are viewed within postmodernity as an impossible project—except to state, paradoxically, the absolute that uncertainty is inevitable. Nevertheless the relevancy of establishing convictions based in knowledge (with various degrees of certainty) is established through the pragmatics of making daily decisions within a global context.²

This paper attempts to articulate a Biblical view of knowledge. That view cannot be characterized as either modern or postmodern. Rather, it is fundamentally based in a relationship with the Triune God Who is ultimate reality. In asserting this stating point, one might assume a slippage of reason. In modernity and postmodernity there is an underlying construct that the human mind is the ultimate judge of knowledge. In modernity the assumption is that the mind can find true knowledge. In postmodernity, this certainty is eroded and at best we have culturally constructed truths within certain contexts. This assumption of human judgment is at once reasonable and problematic. The reasonableness is derived from the sense that knowledge is viewed as “our” knowledge—thus only human reason is capable of making this judgment. Even as modernity has sought objective truths, the goal has always pointed to human acquisition of truths that are verifiable through human reasoning. Postmodernity has challenged the foundations of such knowing and thus any knowledge derived by a modern process. However in both perspectives, the human mind still exists at the ultimate judge of knowledge. Though reasonable, human judgment, as the ultimate arbitrator of knowledge, is nevertheless problematic. Humanity, with its many shifting positions on a vast array of topics, has displayed the difficulty of coming to a lasting knowledge that is accepted across

¹ The use of the word modernity in this paper refers to a way of reasoning that seeks to yield verifiable objective truth, and postmodernity refers to a philosophical stance that erodes the possibility absolute truth.

² Humanity is faced with making decisions and we base those decisions on some construct of prior knowledge related to the current decision options that will impact future consequences.

cultures and generations. This assumption of the priority of the human mind (with few or many limits) places a benchmark within the project of knowledge that is both reasonable and very much an assumption.

Within a Biblical understanding of knowledge, assumptions also arise. This view dismisses the human mind as the ultimate judge of knowledge because ultimate reality is viewed as the transcendent Triune God. Our relationship to Him is thus fundamental to our acquisition of knowledge within certainty limits. This assumption requires humility of heart and mind as a starting point. This assertion of the Triune God as ultimate reality is fundamental to a Biblical view of knowledge, a view that will be called “**relational knowledge**”.

Relational knowledge, based in God as ultimate reality and His relationship to the creation, may seem like a leap of faith for some. And to some extent it is. But it is based upon the evidence of the dependency of humanity. Since, as humans, we have distinct limitations bounded by birth and death, any attempt to establish humanity as an ultimate arbitrator of truth is presumptuous. Thus we surrender to our obvious frailty and decide that God has spoken to us from Scripture.³

To assert that God is ultimate reality is to believe that He alone is independent and transcendent. And yet we must not leave this assertion of knowledge dangling. The remaining topics are written to support our knowing of God Who is ultimate reality. However, this support is never conclusive to the mind for the Triune God is relational. And thus in relationship with Him, we experience Him as ultimate reality. Without some acceptance of His Being as ultimate reality, there is no objective, verifiable system of reasoned logic that can arrive at this position. But given this assumption of God as ultimate reality, the reasonableness of this assertion is affirmed through the experience of His being.

A discussion of a Biblical understanding of relational knowledge requires a look at 1) the guidance of the *Holy Spirit* 2) the embodiment of knowledge as *Jesus* Who is the Word, 3) the special revelation of living words of the Triune Omni-present God through the *Scripture*, 4) the universe as a silent language of God—His *general revelation*, 5) *human language* as a primary conveyor of knowledge, 6) knowledge as *limited* since we see a poor reflections of ultimate reality, shadows of heavenly things and faith, 7) knowledge decisions requiring various degrees of *trust*, 8) human *conscience* seeking to avoid that which is false, 9) *degrees of certainty* and probabilistic cause and effect over varying timeframes, 10) knowledge as *neither objective or relative* but rather relational, 11) our view of knowledge impacting our *transmission* of knowledge, including interpretation, education, socialization and spiritual transformation and 12) the *purpose of knowledge* to reveal and explore the glory and Person of the Triune God Who is ultimate reality. Figure 1 depicts these factors that we will consider in moving toward a Biblical understanding of relational knowledge.

³ This paper will not deal with the rationality of believing that there is a God and that He has spoken through the Scriptures. Rather this paper explores a Biblical understanding of knowledge.

The Triune God is Ultimate Reality



God speaks to us through His ...

1. Holy Spirit
2. Jesus
3. Scripture
4. General Revelation.



This relational knowledge ...

5. Is negotiated through human language
6. Has limits
7. Involves grammar, logic and rhetoric
8. Requires trust
9. Involves our consciences
10. Offers degrees of certainty
11. Is neither an objective or relative view of knowledge
12. Can be transmitted within humanity
13. Always has the purpose of revealing and glorifying God.

Figure 1: Toward a Biblical View of Relational Knowledge

THE TRIUNE GOD, WHO IS ULTIMATE REALITY, SPEAKS TO US

HOLY SPIRIT. The Spirit of God is active in our knowledge. He comes to convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment (John 16:8-11) and to guide us into truth (John 16: 13). Furthermore, the gifts of the Spirit include knowledge and wisdom as well as faith (1 Corinthians 12: 8, 9). To imagine that humanity can understand knowledge of ultimate reality apart from the Spirit of God would be idolatrous of the human mind.

As humans we are called to be open to the Spirit of God. We are called to the place of humility that assumes we are not the final arbitrators of truth about reality. This humble place requires a deep sense of human depravity framed within our dependency. Thus embracing heart attitudes of surrender to God and submission to His Spirit are necessary as we relate to God and experience the joy of knowing Him as ultimate reality.

JESUS, THE WORD. Jesus is the mysterious embodiment of knowledge. Jesus is the Word (John 1:1). He is the truth. He is the way. He is the life (John 14:6).

Thus, knowledge is fundamentally relational in nature. That central relationship is with Jesus. These relational ties may be weak or strong, at peace or hostile, recent or distant. Yet knowledge is experienced through our relationship with ultimate reality—with the Triune God and through the Mediator Jesus. This applies even for those who do not acknowledge God as ultimate reality (see Romans 1:18-23 and Ephesians 4:17-19); their relationship with God is broken but in reality the relationship still exist, if only in a hostile state.

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. (Colossians 1:15-17)

God calls us to know, to relationally experience the Word, Jesus—Who is God. Consider Psalm 34:8: “Taste and see that the Lord is good.” And Romans 2:4 proclaims God reveals His truth through His kindness. The key to understanding Scripture is within the Person of Jesus. And in Him we find that which is good and kind and wise for living life.

SCRIPTURE. The belief in the special revelation of living words of God is foundational to the Christian faith. The Bible is explicit—it is the Word of God. Moreover, these are living words (Hebrews 5:12). The Author (I AM) is Present, not distant or absent, as one reads and meditates on Scripture. This belief transcends a human author’s ability to speak to an audience. As humans, our presence is limited and diminishes over time. However, we trust a trustworthy and present Author. He is the Spirit of God Who speaks to our hearts through the Living Word of Scripture.

Scripture also affirms the relational aspect of knowledge. Psalm 119 proclaims this connectivity between knowledge and relationship with ultimate reality. The passage “The earth is filled with Your love O Lord; teach me Your decrees” (Psalm 119:64) implies this connectivity.

GENERAL REVELATION. The universe can be seen as a silent language communicating to the hearts and minds of people from all languages (Psalm 19:1-6; Romans 1:20). This knowing is described by the Psalmist as a “voice” and a “speech” that “displays knowledge”. What is clear is

that God is displaying His glory before all humanity. Thus, He draws us to Himself as we acknowledge Him as Creator. However, as humanity often does, we turn a deaf ear to this “speech” and often worship the creation rather than the Creator.

God’s presence is particularly expressed (and unfortunately can be especially distorted) through human beings that God created in His image. Knowledge of God “shows up” in much of our language and cultural artifacts. Our lot as humans is to sift through written, spoken, touch, taste, olfactory and visual data to form our convictions regarding ultimate reality and paths to living life well.

A note of caution is needed at this point. Though God is pouring forth speech through the heavens, it would be wrong to assume this means we are to look to the heavenly bodies as in astrology (which is expressly forbidden by Scripture) to find the specific will of God for our lives—to hear a word from God. Rather we should not neglect to see that the heavens tell us some things, but not everything, about the nature of God. And by extension, all of the natural world points to God Who is ultimate reality and Who is omnipresent.

THE NATURE AND PURPOSE OF RELATIONAL KNOWLEDGE

HUMAN LANGUAGE. Knowledge can be culturally and creatively constructed within human language. This may sound like a postmodern statement. However, God gave Adam and Eve a profound ability—the ability to describe and manage their world with language. God could have just as easily dictated words for Adam and Eve to memorize, instead He made language dynamic. Thus, a Biblical view of knowledge must include the ability of humanity to create and interpret language—to create knowledge about reality and even to imagine that which is not real.

It is within the cultural community of believers that we understand, interpret and communicate the Living Word of God. Our understanding of Scripture is shaped within this creative cultural process. We cannot eliminate all our cultural frameworks as we seek to understand the meaning of Scripture. This does not imply that Scripture can be freely manipulated to say that which we desire. It does mean that we should seek to understand the original cultural contexts within the Scripture as we read, study and meditate on Scripture. And that we apply the Scriptures within our creative cultural contexts; we are called to take our understandings of God and act upon them with the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

And yet as with many good things God has given us (worship, sexuality, food, etc.), He has given boundaries to human creativity. We must continually honor God and not violate His revealed Word. And we must continue to be creative in our living and knowing as we seek to accomplish the first directives of God to humanity: “be fruitful ... multiply ... rule”.

Moreover, God has given believers spiritual gifts. Included are knowledge, wisdom and prophecy. These all deal in the currency of human language. And these gifts are for service within the boundaries of the Scriptures—the revealed knowledge from God.

Furthermore, we often have a sense of knowing even when words fail to describe the experience. For instance, the knowledge of a physical touch in human interaction defies adequate words. Words are only a shadow of this reality. Try as we may we fail to capture the extent of our knowledge of such acts which may be intended as tender loving or brutal hate. And yet to the receiver of these

physical touches, there remains a lingering knowledge. Wordless knowledge often arises as our sense of sight, smell, touch, taste and hearing (devoid of words such as music and wind) are engaged in the reality about and within us.

LIMITS OF KNOWLEDGE. Our knowledge (individually and corporately) is always a poor reflection of ultimate reality or a shadow of heavenly things that requires faith within an earthly existence. As much as we humans desire absolute certainty, that certainty is not to be found in this earthly life. We are required to step forth in faith as we see God dimly; as we meditate on shadows of heavenly things. The limits of our humanity, specifically our location in time and space, preclude a clear view of ultimate reality, of the transcendent God.

*We see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.
1 Corinthians 13:12*

They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. Hebrews 8:5

Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for. Hebrews 11:1

Though we have Jesus (in heaven and in us), the Living Word of the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit, God has revealed to us that we still “see but a poor reflection”. Even in these scenarios, we have had to bow to uncertainty in even the simplest of matters. And these uncertainties force the play of trust and doubt. It may well be imagined that the dimensions of heaven do not translate well into the limits of the dimensions of knowing set by God within the human mind and heart while on this earth. And yet we know enough to make decisions based in some measure of trust.⁴

GRAMMAR, LOGIC & RHETORIC. All languages have grammar, logic and rhetoric. Rules of grammar show proper use of words in sentences. Rules of logic indicate paths for making an argument that results in statements of truth based on assumptions (consistency), e.g. “if .. then” statements. And rhetoric accounts for the usages of words to communicate effectively. Words in use can be posited as a logic of intellect, logic of emotion and imaged outcomes.

Without detailing grammar, logic and rhetoric, the Scriptures use these aspect of language to communicate knowledge.

TRUST DECISIONS. Knowledge decisions require trust. Christian faith can ultimately be seen as trust in One Who is trustworthy—One Who is the Author and Finisher of our faith. That trust is established through the rhetoric of the mind—a process of making decisions about the persuasive use of words regarding trustworthiness.

Trust is on a continuum with doubt, the fear of untrustworthy. Fundamentally, we live in a world that requires trust in a climate of doubt. We make decisions, thousands of them daily, and each

⁴ We humans do make decisions. And these decisions include our convictions about who we are and that which is beyond us—often including our perception of God or gods.

requires some semblance of trust, often with twinges of doubt. So it is with knowledge decisions, we trust and doubt them based in the trustworthiness of the speaker (God, others, ourselves). In a fragmented world, with little sense of ultimate connected reality, trust in self is eroded as well as trust in God or others. However, the engagement of relational trust and doubt are always aspects of knowledge.

How extensive is doubt? Let's consider the statement "I have four children". Surely I "know" this without any doubt. In common language that is reasonable. However, consider whether you "know" at this moment if all the children are alive; or if they are all really mine; or if I live in an illusion or a dream that is not reality. Thus trust can become an issue with every statement—even seemingly obvious statements because a knowledge of ultimate reality requires trust.

As we examine our knowledge, the question of trustworthy authorship comes into focus. Who will we trust? Will we trust ourselves, others and/or God to be authoritative? No knowledge decision is made without a parallel trust decision. Furthermore, framing knowledge within trust and trustworthiness further posits knowledge in relational terms and transforms the quest for knowledge from a search for objective, detached truth to a relational journey of connectivity to ultimate reality—to the Triune God.

CONSCIENCE. Our consciences play an important role in knowledge. We have an innate understanding of good and evil that can be nourished, deceived or even seared. Genesis 3 indicates that as a result of the fall we acquired a knowledge of good and evil—implicitly a fallen knowledge of morality.

Our consciences can be violated when we break "reasonable rules" of using words. We prefer that words are spoken with consistency rather than with contradictions. Such contradictions are termed false statements, inaccuracies or even deceptive lies.

However, we also acknowledge that certain inconsistencies in words are more accurately termed paradoxes—apparent contradictions that are nevertheless held to be true. Thus, the ideas of God being Three Persons in One and the sovereignty of God and free will of man are viewed as a paradox rather than contradictions. Otherwise, such a statement would have violated our reasoning and thus lead to the conclusion that this knowledge is a falsehood—a logical and in this case a moral error. More explicitly, God has given certain moral guidelines in Scripture (through historical stories, parables, poetry, moral teachings, etc.) that help guide the development of our consciences.

To view the Triune God as paradoxical to the human mind is to state that ultimate reality is paradoxical to humanity. This assertion is somewhat similar and yet significantly dissimilar to postmodernity. To relationally surrender one's heart and mind to the Triune God, Who is at once ultimate reality and paradoxical to the human mind, is a far cry from assuming that human mind is the ultimate judge of knowledge and then to conclude that knowledge is paradoxical (i.e. there are no absolutes).

DEGREES OF CERTAINTY. Degrees of certainty of knowing are impacted through probabilistic cause and effect (including pain-pleasure) over varying timeframes. Thus, individually and collectively, we have the opportunity to re-think our knowledge about reality and to affirm, modify or reject any aspect of that knowledge. This does not imply that ultimate reality is relative, but that our perspectives can and should change as we grow through experience.

A Biblical view of knowledge, however, also attests to humanity's ability to be deceived and to lie. God has provided a means for correcting these non-truths thus monitoring reliability of knowledge through probabilistic cause and effect. Effect is in play as we live life, and we can forecast various effects with varying degrees of certainty, thus probable cause and effect over the near term and longer periods of time. And the effects may seem quite different over various timeframes.

In short, "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows" (Galatians 6:7). The certainty of our knowing is reinforced or weakened through the results of our enacted knowledge. "Does God keep His promises?" or "Does this truth work in real-time life" are simple ways of stating the contingency of probabilistic cause and effect on the certainty of our knowledge.

Moreover, as we speak or write words the context helps define the meaning and the limitations of those meanings. For instance, a bumper sticker on the back of a Jeep that says "No Roads; No Rules" is not referring to the elimination of the rules of gravity in places that roads don't exist. Rather the meaning in context implies no rules for where one can drive. The certainty of this statement is again impacted by probabilistic cause and effect since certain off road experiences are impossibly (e.g. drive across a lake). Thus our language experience is laden with degrees of certainty.

RELATIVE vs. OBJECTIVE vs. RELATIONAL TRUTH. Postmodernity has championed the idea of relative truth—the notion that all truth is relative to the individual or culture context of the moment. Thus all world views and all ethics become relative.

Much of modernity has been founded in the pursuit of verifiable systems of objective truth. That objective truth is viewed to be most reliable when detached from human subjectivity or any prospect of Divine involvement beyond perhaps initial creation.

The reliability of these truth systems is established through various methodologies of verification. Scientific objective truth seeks to discover and systematize a body of words and symbols that describe the physical, psychological and social realities in this world. When applied to the spiritual world, the pursuit of objective truth seeks to describe God and His workings without acknowledging a foundational relational prerequisite to knowledge. However, Jesus said of His disciples "I have revealed you (the Father) to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word (John 17:6)."

Though one could concede that some "objective truths" are possible about God, one could also assert that a Biblical understanding of knowledge would firmly place all knowledge within a relational paradigm since the Triune God is ultimate reality. This paper takes the position that the pursuit of detached, objective knowledge, while somewhat theoretically possible, is a malnourished perspective of knowledge and ultimately can lead to a denial of God Who is all in all.

That said, the study of physics, chemistry, mathematics, etc. may seem best undertaken without a consideration of relational truth. Relational truth implies a knowledge that is connected to the Triune God Who is ultimate reality. Without this relational context, knowledge becomes fragmented and detached. And in fact much has been learned without factoring God into the physical sciences or mathematics. However, these successes should be viewed in context. As the knowledge of science is applied within human societies and within the ecosystem, a neglect of truth in relationship with ultimate reality, with the Triune God, can produce disastrous results where ethics are relevant. The ethics of science thus requires an understanding of relational truth.

This does not negate the benefits of objective truth reasoning. Mathematics [and thus much of the natural sciences] can appear detached and objective. The logical systems of mathematics work well to help produce computer science, economic theories, etc. However, the limitation of mathematics as totally detached is grasped within the relationship to spatial inference of numbers and relations and shapes. The relational view of mathematics can, but not necessarily, lead back to the One Who is ultimate reality. This detachment may even serve our extensions of mathematical relationships. However, the relational link between mathematical concepts and spatial realities doesn't allow for a total detachment.

The advantage of postmodern perspectives on knowing is that we must consider the presence of the author in determining the meaning of a statement. However, the limitation of postmodernity is its inability to account for the possibility of ultimate reality—the omnipresent God Who brings meaning to all language.

The notion of relational truth is evident in Scripture from Moses to Jesus to John. Truth is ultimately connected, even though it can be expressed at various levels of abstraction. For example, Adam had sexual relations with his wife. This was described as Adam “knew” his wife. Such knowledge was truly relational. In more abstract terms, sexually relations might be termed in quantifiable coupling units, but even this abstract venture cannot be completely detach from relational truth. Thus, all knowledge is experienced at various levels of abstraction and intimacy of relationships. This connectivity finds its ultimate meaning in the connectivity of the omnipresent God with His creation.

TRANSMISSION OF KNOWLEDGE. We transmit knowledge from one person or culture to another. The use of written, oral and non-verbal language, of images and sensory experiences—these all become elements within knowledge transmissions. All the above factors are involved as we develop efficient means of transmission for the purpose of building culture across biological generations. And from a Biblical perspective, the purpose of knowledge includes our drawing closer to the Triune God and being transformed into His image—which greatly impacts culture building and trumps its supremacy of priority.

The issue of interpretation is key within transmission of knowledge. The enterprise of interpreting the meanings of words from one person to another becomes a matter of presence. The closer in presence the author and hearer/reader are the more likelihood the hearer will gain a clear understanding of the meanings of the author. As distance grows the reader is left to interpret words with less certainty of acquiring the original meaning of the author.

The rules of interpretation are problematic. In the modern use of words, the goal of interpretation is to ascertain the original meanings of the author. In a postmodern world, this goal is less doable and thus less effort is given, esp. as presence diminishes. Thus, the deconstruction of words begins. That is, the work begins to find meanings within the words that resonate within the reader regardless of the certainty of original intent.

From a practical and Biblical understanding, we can affirm both sides and go beyond this debate. The goal of original intent is worthy and the loss of presence does impact the attainment of that goal. However, as believers we also acknowledge the omnipresence of the Author of Scripture. Thus, we are left with humility and trusting God Who is trustworthy to speak through the written words of Scripture to our hearts through the Holy Spirit and then to back up His words. We must humble

ourselves before God and each other as we seek to grow in knowledge of the Holy, and by extension all else, and as we interpret knowledge.

The enterprises of socialization and education are founded in this transmission of knowledge. The same is true for spiritual transformation as we view knowledge from the above relational perspectives.

Our view of knowledge impacts our methodologies for transmission of knowledge. Relationally grounded knowledge implies relational means for transmissions are more effective than simply “truth telling”. This is obviously true regarding the Gospel of Jesus. Simply dumping gospel words are far less effective than telling truth within the relational context of gospel living.

PURPOSE OF KNOWLEDGE. The purpose of knowledge from a Biblical perspective is to know the revealed and explorable Person and glory of the Triune God Who is ultimate reality and to experientially worship and love Him as God and be transformed into His image (Romans 12: 1, 2). This purpose allows humanity to pursue understanding the physical, psychological and spiritual world while understanding that God created all by and for Himself and is omnipresent in His creation and transcendent to it.

It is important to recognize the diversity of experiences with God through various spiritualities. In this paper we will not address a means for this diversity except to posit human understanding of the spatial construct of “beyondness” often leads to various spiritual experiences and knowledge.⁵ Furthermore, the assumption of God as ultimate reality does not imply that God is the creator and sustainer of evil. Rather God has created spiritual beings, some of whom, notably Satan and the demons, rejected God. He also created human beings with free will—and Adam and Eve, as well as their descendants, also choose the evil of rebellion toward God.⁶

Ending Remarks. A Biblical relational understanding of knowledge stands in stark contrast to both modern and postmodern perspectives. While the modern stance highlights rules for the objective pursuit of systems of knowledge, it often detaches truth from ultimate reality, from the Triune God. This modern way of knowing established the scientific method that at once serves human understanding and potentially blinds it by displacing truth from its relationship with the ultimate reality, with the Triune God, thus prioritizing objective truth as the pursuit of the human mind that becomes the ultimate judge. While the postmodern stance emphasizes the uncertainty of knowing reality and thus makes room for mystery, it neglects to acknowledge ultimate reality exists and that the Triune God is ultimate reality. Rather postmodern knowledge places human cultures as arbitrators of perspectives within each cultural context.

As we go forward in Christian thought and ministry, we must seek to articulate an accurate portrayal of knowledge from a Biblical perspective and assumption that truth is fundamentally in relation to the Triune God Who is ultimate reality. This paper has been a sketch attempt at articulating such a stance.

⁵ See *Beyondness: A Key to Various Spiritualities*, Ralph Ennis

⁶ This choice is based in an ability to subtract from that which was perfect in order to arrive at imperfection, rather than evil as a substance totally non-derived from good. Thus fundamentally, godly jealousy, an aspect of being created in the image of God, was sliced into ungodly envy, a desire to become like God, with the deletion of proper jealous’ possessiveness for God.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

How have you previously grappled with the idea of knowledge?

What might be some implications of embracing a modern view of knowledge? A postmodern view of knowledge?

How might relational knowledge impact the way you view life and God?

Decisions on Rhetoric

A Playful Response to Amy, Wittgenstein and J. Derrida

Why do I write this way?

*“It is not our aim to refine or complete the system of rules for the **use of our words** in unheard-of ways. For the clarity that we are aiming at is indeed complete clarity. But this simply means that the philosophical problems should completely disappear. The real discovery is the one that makes me capable of stopping doing philosophy when I want to. – The one that gives **philosophy peace**, so that it is no longer tormented by questions which bring itself in question.”*

– Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations 133.

*“It is at the price of this **war of language against itself** that the sense and question of its origin will be thinkable ... Language preserves the difference that preserves language.”*

– Derrida, Speech and Phenomena p. 14

In response

to Wittgenstein’s originality and authenticity,

to Wittgenstein’s search of a peaceful end to philosophy,

to Derrida’s war of language against itself,

to Derrida’s understanding of presence, and

to Amy, my daughter, whose question was heart-felt

I pen a playful rhetoric.

This subject matter will rarely engender a complete reading, so let me briefly overview the main parts.

Greetings

Of Wittgenstein & J. Derrida

Of Rhetoric – Regularities of Use

A Signature and Closing

Greetings

Such a strange collection of people to pen words to. It is to you, my daughter Amy, I begin because it was your question that most demands my response, but not to you alone. Others besides the greeting list may indeed listen but note that not all on the greeting list may. A strange letter with words to the living and the dead, to the familiar and to strangers – to people who will read out of honoring our relationship and to others, living and intended readers, who may see these words and fragments for a vast variety of reasons.

Yet it is especially to you Amy that I write for it is your question I seek to belatedly address with so feeble an attempt that some might scoff at my efforts – silence might be more preferred than dullness, clumsiness, inexactness, and brutality of formal language rules which I confess not to have mastered and without which I have managed to exist and survive, albeit with questionably richness of soul and breadth of human experience. Anyway I know you are quite capable of editing my words to reflect my thoughts – and, if you choose, to improve them.

Your question, posed years ago, resonated in my being – first because of the tender, vulnerable, and soulful way in which you posed it as my eight year old daughter and second by my inadequacy to answer for myself and third by the astonishment of my inadequacy to put in simply words an answer as thoughtful and understandable to you as your question was to me. Surely one who is capable of expressing a clear question deserves the honor of a better answer than the bumbling maze of words that proceeded from my lips – spoken with all the authority and fear of a dad to his young daughter.

Some critics, who if only in my imagination, would honor me with reading these words, might call to question my motives. “Why does he write his daughter? Has he no wife, no sons, no other daughters? Does this limited audience not belie his dysfunctions, his fears, his arrogance, his inadequacies?” To all such plays of doubt I can only reply that it was you, my daughter of eight, seated around our dinner table without the props of similar conversations, who revealed *the disquietness of your soul by exclaiming in tears “How can I know if I know anything?”* Few before or since has so eloquently and with such passion delivered such a piece of their soul trusting that my prior experience and our relationship justified such trust. And so many years later, I wish to reshape my answer to you.

But why bother? Admittedly you don’t remember the event and furthermore you have found a suitable solution for your soul in order to move forward into the ordinary affairs and complexities of life. You’ve done so much so young – lived in Russia, learned several languages including the language of love and commitment to a wonderful soul mate and marriage partner and incredible children. You’ve mastered some of the language of the natural and social sciences. Your ability to traverse the slopes of Shakespeare while tolerating the poetry of your father demonstrate your will to live well without belaboring your soulful question of knowing to the point of depression and the paralysis of doubt – a preferred philosophical diseases. And yet the question doesn’t flee so easily – if only in my soul.

If however, I thought you incapable of re-entering this soil, I would be foolish and mocking you as if you had subsequently retreated from soul anguishing questions. You haven’t retreated I think but rather done the act of bravery – looked clearly and with certain aim at a human dilemma capable of slaying the most sane among us and have chosen trust and humility over doubt, arrogance or ignorance. The apologetic for my belief in your choice lies in the beauty of your soul, the bravery of your heart, the acuteness of your mind and reasonableness of your life decisions.

Again to the skeptics who challenge the accuracy of my perception of your being – have you never seen human integrity wrapped within the human dual dilemmas of dependence and depravity if only from the ideals of human imagination? For such I perceive is her integrity from a father’s perspective.

Why do I continue – for you, for me, for others? How can I know if I know such a thing as my motives? But first how might I trust you could perceive what I know – if I become persuaded I know anything, if only a motive?

Our shared presence in our family of six increases the probability of the transference to you Amy. Our shared heritage of genes for human nature lays an attractive and compelling groundwork for transference of meanings among us all. That's enough for now to begin – almost. Still, why do I continue – is there no stated utilitarian benefit for such an effort – only implied!

I first confess I believe your question is not the frothing of insanity, or the result of unreasonable doubt birthed in inadequate bonding with caregivers, or simply the reflections of a bored mind. Your question reflects the heart-felt exploration of many of the young among us (throughout millennia) who seek to integrate their thoughts about life in a constructive, workable reality that stands the test of time and experience while molding to the future-present with the benefits of lessons from real time-space consequences. Most my age have decided by fleeing the discussion if for no other reason than that the necessary pursuit of survival has overshadowed this pursuit – yet it still seems to pursue us to our graves.

I believe I will, poorly with words, address your concern. *But let's first reduce our discussion to giving an account for meanings in words.* This will lay a foundation for conceptualizing how you can know if you know anything.

And I believe when all is said, few will labor to understand my meanings. Such honor may be due to one more honorable than me. I don't demand that which I don't deserve unless in my wounded spirit I require such nourishment and rely on my own devices to seek it.

If ever the critical analyst subjects his or herself to my words, please tread slowly – for the souls of youth are on the playing field. Yet I submit to your fair critiques my inadequacy to think, to articulate, to transmit meanings with such clarity that all souls are satisfied and knowing – not even my own soul, for such is my perception of the limits of language which relies on the notion of useful sense in both everyday and critical thinking.

Onto the playspace of words, meanings and usages – no further delay!

Immediately the problem of presence and intent arises. The further from the source of the words (his or her presence), the fewer clues as to the intent of the author and therefore less probability of accurately knowing the meaning of the words for which the author intended (this includes the distance a person has from his own previously spoken or written words and thoughts). All of this would seem to lead us to a conclusion – the revealing of the improbability of certainty for any text and into a hyper view the autonomy of the reader/listener to assign meanings to words by dispelling not the existence of intent but the improbability of the listener/reader to ascertain the intent of the author and thereby diminishing the relevance of a pursuit of intended meanings by the author. Even in these few pages my intent has varied: serious, humorous, endearing, affirming, honoring, etc. Are the transitions obvious or even relevant?

We will not go into the discussion of the nature of signs only to say that meanings are wrapped not in objects alone or the signs alone. External objects have no exact internal meaning to humans (“no exact meaning” doesn't imply without consequences but does imply without recognized universal consequences). Utterances (a sign) are but sound modulations of which only a few are audible to the human ear. Arrangements of stokes on a paper (another type of sign) provide infinite possibilities with only a very limited number of these revealing any culturally recognizable meaning. *Meaning has something to do with innate human nature, human relationships and culture and is constructed within a feedback system of probabilistic consequences in the regularities of language usages.*

What then is needed to account for meanings? I will seek to construct a means by which the human mind employs a process of generating meanings. The means is a process and to employ the process is a decision, and every meaning generated and refined through feedback is a decision. It is in uses that meanings are decided – and usages are decisions of rhetoric.

Of Wittgenstein & J. Derrida

To convince my saluted audience of my expert understanding of their works and the volumes of critiques they have spawned is as impossible as convincing honeybees that I understand why their choreographed dance resembles the strange world of quantum mechanics (Frank, 1997). But then again, they are dead – Wittgenstein, J. Derrida, not Amy or all bees.

I do not know the intent of your minds or the emotional and intellectual patterns within that allow your words to make sense to you and others with similar orientations while many without such philosophical predilections remain perplexed. That said, allow me to quote some of your words and attempt to explore them in a way that might enrich my soul and the readers (whoever they may be). This is not intended to be a thorough and efficient literature search but rather a selected few thoughts seemly central to your accounting for meanings.

Let's begin with Ludwig Wittgenstein's first and concluding words from his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* written in 1921. "Of what we cannot speak we must be silent." Let's back up and place this comment into a context. (Note: all italics within citations throughout this letter are by the author and/or translator. All bold letters are mine.)

1 The world is all that is the case.

1.1 The world is the totality of facts, not of things.

1.11 The world is determined by the facts, and by these being all the facts.

1.12 For totality of facts determines all that is the case and also that is not the case.

1.13 The facts in logical space are the world.

6.53 The right method in philosophy would be to say nothing except what can be said using sentences such as those of natural science – which of course has nothing to do with philosophy – and then, to show those wishing to say something metaphysical that they failed to give any meaning to certain signs in their sentences. Although they would not be satisfied – they would feel you weren't teaching them any philosophy – *this* would be the only right method.

6.54 My sentences are illuminating in the following way: to understand me you must recognize my sentences – once you have climbed out through them, on them, over them – as senseless. (You must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after you have climbed up on it.) You must climb out through my sentences; then you will see the world correctly.

7. Of what we cannot speak we must be silent.

What was your intent Dr. Wittgenstein? What were the motives of your heart concerning your lack of silence – to explain, to conclude, to mystify, to humor? Of what can we speak? And if meanings are outside that realm of language, why should we speak of anything – even science, if certainty is a requisite for speaking? Silence then would be the privileged stance of meanings. You did not rest here but went on to speak more in your later work *Philosophical Investigations*. You have declared your intent in philosophy:

Philosophical Investigations 133. It is not our aim to refine or complete the system of rules for the use of our words in unheard-of ways. For the clarity that we are aiming at is indeed *complete* clarity. But this simply means that the philosophical problems should *completely* disappear. The real discovery is the one that makes me capable of stopping doing philosophy when I want to. – The one that gives **philosophy peace**, so that it is no longer tormented by questions which bring *itself* in question.

Such an honest expression of your aim – peace from torment through complete clarity. The sense of peace and its pursuit seems a pervasive underlying intent in your works. But how have you come to peace – with silence or does peace precede silence – or death?

Philosophical Investigations 203. **Language is a labyrinth** of paths. You approach from one side and know your way about; you approach the same place from another side and no longer know your way about.

Philosophical Investigations 309. What is your aim in philosophy? – To shew the fly the way out of the fly-bottle.

Philosophical Investigations 432. Every sign *by itself* seems dead. *What* gives it life? – In use it is *alive*. Is life breathed into it there? Or **is the use its life?**

And so you have nudged closer to constructing a view of meanings. “Is the use its life?” Now your peace is intrinsically linked with usages.

So our conundrum continues. Words have meanings as they are used. But use may not yield believable accuracy to everyone’s experiential reality. Can meanings in words create a reality – or a deceptive reality? Is ultimate reality a reality – is it within the human grasp?

What does J. Derrida have to say on these matters? He goes for the jugular as if to clinically arrest all theory of knowledge and thereby all knowledge – maybe even his own shall we say non-theory of knowledge or theory of non-knowledge.

In the few lines just touched upon, **distrust of metaphysical presuppositions is already presented as the condition for an authentic “theory of knowledge,”** as if the project of a theory of knowledge, even when it has freed itself by the “critique” of such and such speculative system, did not belong at the outset to the history of metaphysics. Is not the idea of knowledge and the theory of knowledge in itself metaphysical? (Speech and Phenomena p. 5)

By what mean does he relegate a theory of knowledge to metaphysics and thereby to speculating about what we should remain silent? It is the means of presence.

This nonworldliness is not another worldliness, this ideality is not an existent that has fallen from the sky; its origin will always be the possible repetition of a productive act. In order that the possibility of this repetition may be open, ideally to infinity, one ideal form must assure this unity of the indefinite and the ideal: this is the present, or rather the presence of the living present. The ultimate form of ideality, ideality of ideality, that in which in the last instance one may anticipate or recall all repetition, is the living present, the self-presence of transcendental life. Presence has always been and will always, forever, be the form in which, we can say apodictically, the infinite diversity of contents is produced. The opposition between form and matter – which inaugurates metaphysics – finds in the concrete ideality of the living presence its ultimate and radical justification. (Speech and Phenomena p. 6)

And so we exist as present in the living presence – nothing more, nothing less. Our sense of repetition, of the infinite, of eternity, of ideality is all wrapped not in other worldliness and a time continuum with cause and effect and within the purview of metaphysics, but it is all wrapped in the ever living present which is ever transcendent – according to J. Derrida.

Ideality is the preservation or mastery of presence in repetition. **In its pure form, this presence is the presence of nothing existing in the world;** it is a correlation with the acts of repetition, themselves ideal. (Speech and Phenomena p. 10)

And so the line of existing is drawn by presence – the ideality of repetition. But first language must be toppled. For in language we construct cause and effect that begs for a metaphysical explanation.

It is at the price of this **war of language against itself** that the sense and question of its origin will be thinkable ... Language preserves the difference that preserves language. (Speech and Phenomena p. 14)

We shall have to grasp what happens inside language when the closure of metaphysics is announced.

With the difference between real presence and presence in representation as *Vorstellung*, a whole system of differences involved in language is implied in the same deconstruction: the difference between the represented and the representation in general... The presence-of-the-present is derived from repetition and not the reverse. (Speech and Phenomena p. 52)

But this ideality, which is but another name for the permanence of the same and the possibility of its repetition, does not exist in the world, and it does not come from another world; it depends entirely on the possibility of acts of repetition. It is constituted by this possibility. Its “being” is proportionate to the power of repetition; absolute ideality is the correlate of a possibility of indefinite repetition. (Speech and Phenomena p. 52)

Now let's return to hear Derrida extend these ideas of presence.

I have a **strange and unique certitude** that this universal form of presence, since it concerns no determined being, will not be affected by it. The relationship with *my death* (my disappearance in general) thus lurks in this determination of being as presence, ideality, the possibility of repetition. The possibility of the sign is this relationship with death. The determination and elimination of the sign in metaphysics is the dissimulation of this relationship with death, which yet produced signification.

The dominance of the now not only is integral to the system of the founding contrast established by metaphysics ... It therefore designates the locus of a problem in which phenomenology confronts every position centered on nonconsciousness that can approach what is ultimately at stake, what is at bottom decisive: **the concept of time**. (Speech and Phenomena p.63)

And so all knowledge and all theories of knowledge are thus rendered non-knowing in an absolute sense. Our language games and the phenomenological reduction of our senses are fraught with time as conceptualized by Aristotle (p.61) and others and not as the ideality of repetition.

In the openness of this question *we no longer know*. This does not mean that we know nothing but that we are beyond absolute knowledge (and its ethical, aesthetic, or religious system), approaching that on the basis of which its closure is announced and decided. Such a question will legitimately be understood as meaning nothing, as no longer belonging to the system of meaning. (Speech and Phenomena p. 103)

What then remains, if not to speak.

It remains, then for us to *speak*, to make our voices *resonate* throughout the corridors in order to make up for [*suppléer*] the breakup of presence. (Speech and Phenomena p. 104)

Still what would it mean to not “no longer know”? Can one not say with absolute certainty that to know at any level requires one to trust? Are all knowings hinged between trust and doubt with choice in between and delayed aftereffects to come? And what of Derrida's curious admission “I have a strange and unique certitude...” Does a “strange and unique certitude” not speak of trust in the face of others' doubts – are not one person's paradoxes another's contradictions? Can these knowings become clear without the reason of emotion? And then is there certitude – even to oneself over a lifetime?

Of Rhetoric – Regularities of Use

So where are we left? It seems we are left with the demise of metaphysics through a new perceiving of presence as the ideality of repetition and the demise of certainty of transferable meanings by the privatization of that presence. Where do we now go? “One might say: the axis of reference of our examination must be rotated, but about the fixed point of our real need.” (Philosophical Investigations,108).

It would seem the rotation from logic (is it logically reasonable?) and grammar (is it clearly stated?) to rhetoric (is it decisively stated?) may be the axis of reference we seek.

Newton Garver in his preface to Jacques Derrida’s *Speech and Phenomena* states,
... a vigorous discipline of rhetoric ... (is the) detailed study of the rules and **regularities** and presuppositions **of the use** of linguistic expressions in the circumstances in which they actually are used ... p xvii

Is there a means of constructing the “regularities and presuppositions of the use of linguistic expressions in the circumstances in which they are actually are used?” These regularities would address Wittgenstein’s question “... is the use its life?” What criteria for an attempt would have to be satisfied?

It is to this task I wish to explore with you. First the attempt must satisfy a culture-general critique. Whatever might emerge must be accurate when viewed from the use of language across all cultures.

Let’s explore some regularities in use. These regularities can be visualized as three sets of axes in 3-d conceptual space of how and why (to what end) we logic - not the rules of logic. The first set we will call the logic of intellect. The second is the logic of emotion. And the last is the imagined outcomes of language decisions. In all, decision making is a key aspect to usage – to rhetoric. We decide by some means and for some purpose how language is actually used and how language and life intersect.

These axes are put forth as culture-general axes. However, as one explores a specific culture, the wording of the axes may be changed to better reflect the cognition of the culture toward that particular axis. For instance, in some cultures the concepts I will put forward regarding power may better be talked of as benefit. However this does not invalidate the model for the power to bring benefit and the benefit of power are intricately linked. Again central tendencies, not absolute categories, are an essential part of the regularities of uses.

The axes of the logic of intellect are the axis of certainty, the axis of power and the axis of morality. The axes of emotion are the hierarchical axis, the liberty axis, and the relational axis. The axes of imagined outcomes are the identity axis, adaptive axis and the meanings axis. The three axes systems can be seen as overlapping and interacting to influence the regularities of rhetoric.

These regularities involve many elements we will not directly discuss. However, let’s briefly look at the axes of intellect and emotion and of imagined outcomes with probabilistic effects.

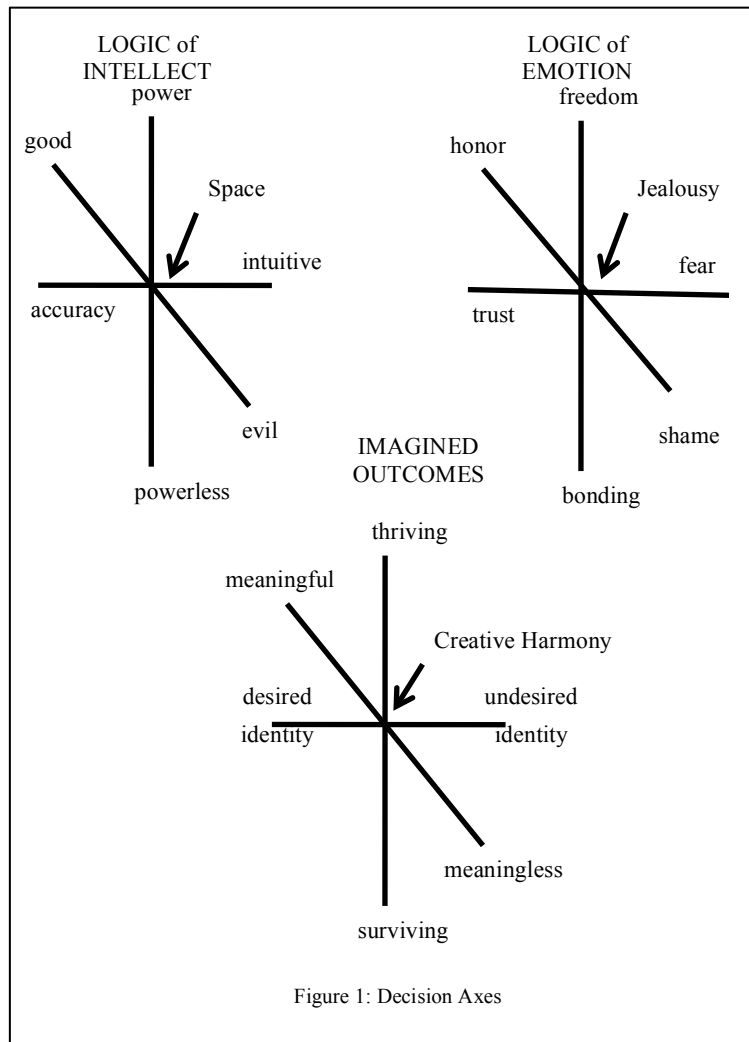


Figure 1: Decision Axes

We all make decisions including the decisions in using language. Each decision has its own combination of logic to it. We use both our intellect and emotions in making decisions. Every thought is wrapped in intellect and emotion.

Some decisions seem to be based primarily on the logic of remaining consistent with patterns of certainty – a continuum of accuracy to intuitive. Other decisions have a type of inner logic that seeks to ensure a continuum of power to powerless – the logic of power. And there is the logic of goodness – a sense of good and evil.

The logic of certainty asks such questions as “Do the historical and scientific fact support such a decision?” “Based on factual data what decision should I make?” “What is a fact?” “What do I intuitively belief to be true?”

The logic of power undergirds such questions as, “How can I gain more power?” “How can I gain more pleasure while minimizing pain?” “Which of the choices promote my health – physical, spiritual, mental?” “What will be the results – harmful or helpful?”

The logic of morality addresses such questions as, “What is fair?” “Is this decision morally right?” “Is this in line with the moral principles of my culture or some other moral system?” “What is evil?”

These three axes intersect with the concept of space – accurate space, powerful space and good space reflected apart from powerless, uncertain, evil space. It may seem a stretch to say that all intellect is involved with space, but what words aren't linked to space at some level of abstraction?

Emotions are linked to all thought since we are always in some emotional state. The intensity of those emotions may vary drastically depending on the circumstances. Highly pleasurable and highly painful states tend to solidify certain thoughts more than others. For example, childhood abuse has a lasting impact on interpersonal relationship well into adult life, while other experience may carry less emotional weight.

Attempting to organize emotions is a precarious task since different cultures emphasize the emotional world linguistically differently. The concept of general tendencies may help us. Although Japanese culture seems to emotional revolve around the emotion “*amae*” which has no translatable equivalent in American English, the description of *amae* is perceivable to some extent by Americans.

As problematic as it may seem, I still wish to organize emotions around three axis: relational axis, hierarchical axis and liberty axis. The emotions of the relational axis are trust and fear. Hierarchical axis deals with honor and shame. And the liberty axis deals with the continuum of freedom and bonding.

So where does *amae* fit in this construct? Doi (1974:307) defines *amae* to mean “to depend and presume upon another’s benevolence.” “To depend” implies trust. “To presume upon another’s benevolence” implies a hierarchy associated with honor and goodness and giving power and freedom to another. Therefore I would plot the emotion of *amae* in the quadrant of accurate-trust, good-honor, and power-freedom.

And what of jealousy? One can be jealous *for* or jealous *of* another. Jealous *for* involves a sense of honoring, trusting and freeing while jealous *of* involves a sense of bondage, fear and shame.

We make decisions (internal and external) with an imagined probabilistic cause and effect outcome in mind (to varying degrees of clarity). Those ends can be described by three axes of imagined outcomes: identity, meanings and adaptation.

Each person and each culture has significant life events that help mold their thinking and decision making. Economic depression, awards, war, natural disasters, abuse, achievements, etc. all impact our reason, emotions and behavior. The probabilistic cause and effect feedback loop of pain and pleasure in the short and long term is a cementing stamp within culture.

Overlapping the axes of emotion and intellect and imagined outcomes, one has creatively harmonious jealous space as a central construct of rhetoric.

Am I stating this as if three visual axes could be extracted from the mind if the mind could be opened (which it cannot)? Of course not. I am suggesting that the workings of the mind, the rhetoric of meanings and knowings (the dynamic flow of living words in use), can be conceptualized using the mental imaginary of geometrical axes, interloping and interacting with one another and readjusting as would a gyroscope to the probabilistic outcomes enacted.

Much more could be said of each axis. But I believe the only apologetic for this set of regularities would be an analysis of some of the work of literature through the ages. Are these axes evident in the rhetoric or not?

Let's first begin the analysis with Wittgenstein and J. Derrida. Below are selected passages from each. It would seem that some, though not all, of the axes would be apparent in any passage and that no passage would be unexplained by this constructed system of regularities for the use of language.

I have indulged in the most random act I can without the mathematics of random numbers. I have opened Philosophical Investigations and typed the following without first sorting through the book to find a passage that best illustrates my point.

Philosophical Investigations 476-479.

476. We should distinguish between the object of fear and the cause of fear.

Thus a face which inspires fear or delight (the object of fear or delight), is not on that account its cause, but – one might say – its target.

477. “Why do you believe that you will burn yourself on the hot-plate?” – Have you reasons for this belief; and do you need reasons?

478. What kind of reason have I to assume that my finger will feel a resistance when it touches the table? What kind of reason to believe that it will hurt if this pencil pierces my hand? – When I ask this, a hundred reasons present themselves, each drowning the voice of the others. “But I have experienced it myself innumerable times, and as often heard of similar experiences; if it were not so, it would: etc.”

479. The question: “On what grounds do you believe this? Might mean: “From what you are now deducing it (have you just deduced it)?” But it might also mean: “What grounds can you produce for this assumption on thinking it over?”

It is not the purpose of this critique to analyze what Wittgenstein is saying but rather upon what rules he is employing in the uses of his words. It would seem that in this particular passage he is reasoning primarily along the relational axis of emotional logic (trust and fear), the intellectual logical axis of certainty (accuracy and inaccuracy) as well as the imagined outcome axis of meaning (meaningless and meaningful). The pursuit of certainty is inherent in this philosophical discourse. An exact parsing of “Why do you believe” is at the intentional heart of the passages. The content of the passage deals with fear and believing. In a central tendency way of viewing this, believing can be viewed as an outcome of trust – trusting enough to believe. Within this passage is the pursuit of meanings (“But it might also mean ...”) – or the flight from a meaningless existence.

“This shows nothing,” you might say. And does not even that complaint surrender to the logic of accuracy, trust and meanings? Or rather can we not reframe your objection to say, “This logic is *inaccurate*, and it shows nothing *trustworthy* in the pursuit of *meanings* wrapped within the labyrinth of the war of language against itself.” On to Derrida.

In searching for a passage from Derrida, I employed a less random means. I restricted myself to *Speech and Phenomena* and exclude any passage in which Derrida quoted Husserl. A passage I found to meet this criteria is below.

If the possibility of my disappearance in general must somehow be experienced in order for a relationship with presence in general to be instituted, we can no longer say that the experience of the possibility of my absolute disappearance (my death) affects me, occurs to an *I am*, and modifies a subject. The *I am*, being experienced only as an *I am present*, itself presupposes the relationship with presence in general, with being present. The appearing of the I to itself in the *I am* is thus originally a relation with its own possible disappearance. Therefore, *I am* originally means *I am mortal*. *I am immortal* is an impossible proposition. We can even go further: as a linguistic statement “I am he who am” is the admission of a mortal. The move which leads from the *I am* to the determination of my being as *res cognitans* (thus, as an immortality) is a move by which the origin of presence and ideality is concealed in the very presence and ideality it makes possible. P. 54.

Again our attempt is not to understand what is being said but what regularities of use are being employed. The logic of intellect appeals to the human sense through certainty and power. Derrida asks us to enter his logic as he accurately describes the “possibility of my absolute disappearance (my death)”. This certainty pursuit leads us into the logic of power – the discussion of death, mortality and immortality. Power is not just a subject matter (as the subject of discussing life and death), it is a logic that leads us to greater trust in his accurate intellectual reasoning. Also the emotional logic of trust is pursued. But for what ends? In this passage the imagined outcome of intellectual and emotional logic is the ends of relational identity - the *I am* in relationship to presence.

A mere finding of the axes within philosophical accounts hardly justifies a generalized trust that these axes can be found within all language games in all cultures. So let's expand the pursuit of accurate regularities of rhetoric to other works of literature.

Here's a passage written in the first century by Paul, a follower of Jesus. Paul was raised in a bi-cultural context. His family and religious heritage was Jewish, his educational training employed the methods of the Greeks and his citizenship was Roman.

Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else, for each one should carry his own load. Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

Obviously, this is a religious writing. If the axes of rhetoric in the constructed model are accurate, they should transcend religious writings as well. The intellectual logic of morality is everywhere in this passage. The appeal to good and evil is evident. This appeal leads into the logic of power for the benefits of morality are put forth as sensible. Sowing yields a reward – a powerful or powerless benefit. Certainty is also an intellectual axis within the passage. Deception is to be avoided. To reason accurately is to avoid deception. The emotional axis of hierarchy (honor or pride and shame) is expressed in the appeal for self-pride through self-comparison rather than other comparison. The axis of liberty is contained in such wordage as “caught” and “burdens”. Trust is inherent in Paul's instruction “Anyone who receives instruction.” The act of voluntary receiving is an act of trust. The imagined outcomes of this passage are identity, meaning and adaptation. The identities of “brothers”, “spiritual”, and “family of believers” are outcomes to be negotiated. Adaptation to survive and thrive in life is conditioned on not being deceived and being morally faithful. And meanings are inherent in a broader view of life beyond physical existence – “eternal life” carried with it the possibility of eternal meanings. And so in this short passage Paul used all the axes of rhetoric.

Is a regularity forming? Within the writings of Wittgenstein, a early 20th century Austrian philosopher, Derrida, a late 20th century French philosopher, and Paul, a first century bi-cultural religious leader, we can see the regularities of these axes at play within the language game. Let's turn eastward and to poetry.

Ascending a Tower at a Town in Hopei

A small village upon the Fu Cliff
Travellers' bower among cloud-mists.
Tall city to view the sundown.
Distant water's reach reflects fume-green hills.
Lights on banks: alone boat at anchor.
Fisherman's homes: evening birds return.
Vast loneliness: sky-earth dusks.
Mind and wide river at leisure.

Wang Wei (Yip translation)

I am not capable of reading Chinese (nor French or German) so my comments pertain to the translated work at the risk that there are rhetorical axes untranslatable into English that are functioning within this language usages.

In the above poem the logic of certainty is employed by creating images of space – “small”, “tall”, “distant” “vast”. The relational logic of trust and fear come to play as “mind and wide river at leisure” find a harmony conducive to each. And that leisure reveals an imagined outcome of adaptation that is thriving within the balance of humankind and nature.

Do these axes describe the regularities of rhetoric? Are they culture-general axes? What would it take to convince you – to go beyond all reasonable doubt and to use a rhetoric which was self-validating to persuade you to trust the sense of it? Should we analyze (intellectual certainty) twenty or thousand passages from twenty or thousand cultures, would the force (intellectual power) of such evidence appeal to your sense of reasonableness (emotional trust) to such a degree as to freely embrace (emotional liberty) its conclusion – regularities of rhetoric? Would you then seek to honor me (emotional hierarchy) with your trust or shame me with disgust for my insufficient accuracy? Would you question my motives (logic of morality) for writing to you or to my daughter or to dead men? Would you imagine my writings to be a vain attempt to control my sense of *meaning* by striving for an *identity* within society which would bring a *thriving* profit to my bank account? Will you privilege doubt or trust as you proceed and on what basis?

Can I truly comprehend all these logics and imagined outcomes simultaneously in order to regulate their usages in the present? I think not. And for this very admission one is led back through the labyrinth of language to the question of “If these axes are accurate, how can these things be? Are they innate to the human mind?” Further are these axes applicable to non-written languages - the languages of tones, eye winks, music, etc. It is sensible to me that the axes apply. Is it sensible to you?

A Signature and Closing

It is time to sign my name to this event. Derrida did it with a J. I wish to sign it Ralph C. Ennis. For C. has significance to me and somewhat to Amy and not to most others without the unwarranted honor of research not demanded by such a one as me. And I close with an indulgence of mine – poetry.

Knowing

Knowing what to know
is survival

Knowing how to know
is education

Knowing I don't know
is humility

Knowing not to know
is fear

Knowing when to know
is discretion

Knowing that I know
is wisdom

Knowing that I'm known
is powerful

Knowing to be known
is vanity.

Knowing meanings
 meaningful knowings
 living meaningful knowings
 knowing the difference
 knowing the sameness
 such is the swirl.

A swirl of
 creatively
 harmonious
 jealous
 space ...
 of useful knowings.

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Ralph C. Ennis
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Meanings in the Ordinary

In another work entitled “Searching the Ordinary for Meanings,” I suggested that Psalm 19 guides us to look at the “ordinary” things in nature to see deeper meanings. The passage refers to the heavens and the sky. I believe that we can expand our gaze to ordinary facets of life such as food, sleep, work, sex, clothes, etc.

This requires symbolic reasoning. What do these ordinary aspects of life tell us about Who God is and who we are? By asking these two questions, much of the meaning of life unfolds from the ordinary. These ordinary meanings form a micro-story that matches well with the meta-story of the Biblical texts.

In “Searching the Ordinary for Meanings,” I provide a way to explore 32 aspects of ordinary life for meanings in life from the micro-perspective. These micro-meanings can help us address the mega-question humans throughout the millennia are prone to ask: What is the meaning of life?

Below are several aspects of ordinary life taken from the 2004 version of “Searching the Ordinary of Meanings.” I suggest “a” meaning—also in the original work images are matched to each ordinary aspect.

A Meaning of FOOD

Daily we gobble. Some barely enough to survive — others eat with little constraint. But we all are bound to this addiction for life.

Much effort goes into the habit. The effort of production, marketing, distribution, working to make money to exchange in a store for food supplies — or at a convenient food-atmosphere dispensing center, commonly called a restaurant.

All this effort for a simple habit...an undeniable necessity. Is this one of life’s most meaningless acts or does it reveal the simple reality of dependence?

Into our mouths daily, often three times or more, goes material provision for our material bodies. Silently does its scream of meaning seeks to touch our souls — “you are a dependent being. You need provision. You need a provider”? Is there a Universal Provider? — food doesn’t say conclusively. It simply alludes to our dependency...and it’s own existence as provision.

Food means we are dependent beings, and food reminds us of this daily.

Food implies there is a Personal Provider Who has delicately designed this nourishment process.

A Meaning of SLEEP

About a third of our lives will be spent sleeping. An effortless task to most — an unavoidable task to all. Sleep is a necessity. Sanity without it will quickly cease in a matter of days. To sleep as a baby is most desired, a sleep that is deep and without the dread of thoughts from other times.

Sleep requires trust — or at least forced trust in extreme situations. The mind shifts gears with assurance that the external is stable even though we are not able to control it. Sleep requires us to relinquish control.

We cannot live without sleep. Sleep pries control from even the most control-oriented people. We will experience trust for a third of our lives — if only asleep.

Why are we not constructed to sleep only a tenth or a half of our lives? Why a third?

Sleep can be disturbed by chemical imbalances. These imbalances impact not only sleep but the quality of life. To sleep implies balance. To be balanced requires trust.

Sleep means trusting and relinquishing control are healthy for mankind.

Sleep implies God is trustworthy.

A Meaning of WORK

The Great Wall of China required work...hard work for over 1000 years. It is the only continuous building project of such duration on the planet. It symbolically represents the efforts of many generations of Chinese civilization.

Work and civilization run parallel. From an individual perspective work can seem like a constant scratching of a pen on paper. From a generational point of view, though, work is viewed as brush strokes on a mural that require both harmony and dissonance for excellence to emerge.

Work means that building civilizations requires consequences over the generations.

Work implies God is the Fashioner of consequences.

A Meaning of BODY

We wash our bodies. We nourish them with air and good. We exercise them. We caress them. We celebrate them. We also abuse them with substances of know harm. We risk them in behaviors that can mutilate them — such as driving in rush hour traffic. We use them to carry our imaginations to their anticipated locations.

Through all these functions we attest to the wishful desire that there is a precious soul within the wrappings of flesh and bone — or else why bother — or even ask why?

Body means the spirit is wrapped precariously in flesh and bone.

Body implies God enjoys identity-containments.

A Meaning of CLOTHES

Enter clothes and the elaborate industry of fashion! The covering of human flesh preoccupies some while others give it little thought. All still faithfully cover themselves, for public nakedness comes at an emotional price — the exposure of shame. Babies don't yet have it; but adolescence arouses this formidable emotion associated with total exposure. The covering of shame is an emotion not learned but inherited — publicly strip any teenager and shame will emerge — in most cultures of the world.

We can curse at our inheritance of shame. We can cover our inheritance of shame with clothes and ignore its reality. We can dull this emotion with shameless behavior. Or with clothes and conscience we can celebrate this powerful emotion that foretells of greater realities that the human soul longs for — realities such as total perfection and unqualified acceptance.

The economics of clothes often overshadows the deeper realities behind the covering of naked humanity. Yet the hope of shame — absent naked beauty lingers as a possibility within the human soul — and drives much of both art and pornography.

Clothes mean that human beings, unlike other animals, have shame.

Clothes imply God requires a covering for shame.

A Meaning of MONEY

For money to function, property must be exchanged. For money to function justly, ownership must have some fluidity, otherwise, "Get all you can get, and spoil the rest" rules transactions.

Money is like a heartbeat. It facilitates the flow of rich blood through the body to help insure good health. But in the absence of electrical impulses heartbeats can become erratic and stop. Money, similarly, is kept functional by human trust.

Humans often operate under the illusion that money can buy security when it really can only afford a limited number of opportunities. Money does have the power to enslave the soul but not to ensure good health, great comfort, or deep intimacy with others.

Money means people are procurement, efficiency, and security-seeking beings who are capable of limited trust.

Money implies God is above this dependency game.

A Meaning of MERCY

Mercy has been defined as not receiving the consequences one deserves. Therefore, in order to receive mercy, we must first be judged and condemned.

Only condemned people can truly receive, appreciate, and grow from knowing mercy.

At the very heart of God is a heart of mercy, desiring to spare us from the consequences and guilt of our actions and reality of our nature.

Mercy means judgment can be satisfied and overcome.

The difficulty of offering mercy by the one offended implies that God is often present in acts of mercy.

A Meaning of MUSIC

Sound waves can be manipulated to create music. Music can be manipulated to inspire emotion. Music is a direct touch of the emotional soul. It can lead us to heavenly aspirations. It can incite the hell in us.

Music can take the chaos of arbitrary sound and screeches and mold it into a beauty to which our soul longs for and responds.

Music means chaos can be transformed into beauty.

Music implies a God of transformative beauty.

A Meaning of MALE and FEMALE

The sexes are intrinsically linked. They may not live together well, but they most certainly can't live without each other — at least for more than a generation.

Mystery surrounds sexuality. The attraction, the touch of the soul, the jealousies that arise — all seem to be a master communication of something far beyond our human formulas and reasoning.

Is not God's touch of desire and jealousy for humanity written deeply within our sexuality? Is not the true nature of maleness and femaleness also deeply spiritual? What aspect of Who God is would humanity not be able to perceive if we were not sexual beings?

Male and female mean the cycle of "Jealousy-Love-Romance-Birth-Life-Death" is dependent on two sexes and reflects a spiritual dimension.

Male and female implies God revealed His jealousy for humanity.

A Meaning of PAIN

Consequences are often wrapped in pain. This feedback loop between behavior and effect serves to help us adapt in an imperfect world. Sometimes the pain seems justified; other times it doesn't and our sense of fairness is activated. We then are left to grapple with the inequities of pain, pain that can run very deep and sprout bitterness. We can extricate ourselves from pain, though ultimately this would be neither wise nor desirable. For pain mysteriously draws us like little else to look beyond the decay of life for a deeper meaning.

Pain means wholeness is challenging decay.

Pain implies God is either a surgical healer or a raging destroyer.

A Meaning of PLEASURE

The simple toss of a ball, a look into the eyes of a child, a view of an ocean sunset, a longing gaze from a lover's eyes — they all give testimony that people are pleasure beings. We are addicted to pleasure and thrive through its caresses.

Yet pleasure without considering temporarily delayed consequences can turn to bitter disappointment and bankrupt our souls.

Pursue pleasure — if it is pleasure with the long term reality of consequences fully embraced.

Pleasure means wholeness can thrive.

Pleasure implies God enjoys wholeness.

A Meaning of FRIENDSHIP

Ever miss a friendship — childhood friendships centered around play without the confusion of sexuality; adult friendships positioned around power, sexuality and authority; elder friendships seeking to learn from the mistakes and pleasures of childhood and adult life and to enjoy time with others?

Friendships are essential to human health. They connect us to a broader reality that nourishes our souls. The human experience devoid of friendship often reveals a brutal heart. The kindnesses of friendship and even the hurts of friendships keep us same and alive with hope.

Friendship means human connections are an essential reality check.

Friendship implies God offers real friendship.

A Meaning of SHAME

“If I don't become a country western singer, I'll die of shame” — so says a 12-year-old girl fully comprehending the dynamics of shame while misplacing the corrective of it. Shame is an emotion deeply rooted in our being flawed, unworthy or worthless. It's not so concerned with what we do but with who we are — our very identity.

The core of shame is human deformity — it's in not being as good as our souls were designed to be or even as good as we can imagine.

Shame means design has been devastated.

Shame implies God is serious about His design.

A Meaning of ANIMALS

The eyes of a single dog or cat are enough subject matter to explore for a lifetime. We give up not because we solve this venture, but because we quickly find we are at a loss for how to proceed.

Billions of diverse eyes from the animal kingdom watch us humans. Each set sees a little differently the range of mystery we codify with the word “humanity.”

Animals mean life is diverse.

Animals imply God likes diversity.

A Meaning of BEAUTY and UGLINESS

Beauty is a pleasure value. It excites our hearts. We dream of its effect upon our souls.

The beauty of simple architectural lines leads us to explore the space by containing it. The beauty of music penetrates our being and moves us through the range of human emotions. The beauty of sexuality — its physical curves, its sensuous embrace, its soulful reach and longing — foretells a deeper beauty.

We contrast beauty with ugliness, if only to accentuate the power of beauty...and the power of ugliness. Without this continuum, our imaginations and perceptions would be reduced.

Beauty and ugliness mean our souls are elevated far above mechanisms of the material world.

Beauty and ugliness imply God understands the logic of preciousness and repulsion.

A Meaning of MYSTERY

The mystery of silence is enough to confuse the soul; the mystery of beauty, to embolden it with a sense of dignity.

Mysteries surround us — from within and without. We cannot escape through the power of our intellect or the power of our imaginations.

As the information age propels us into a world heavy-laden with facts, the power of mysteries that excite and captivate our imaginations can be either deadened or nourished — we must choose.

Mystery means life does not imply chaos, and human hearts lean toward adoration.

Mystery implies God is worthy of adoration.

A Meaning of DEATH

Death seems so final. Brutal death so ugly, immoral and meaningless. Death is to be raged against — and embraced. It is both enemy and friend of the soul.

Little in life is certain — except its conclusion; not the sequencing to conclusion, but the fact that it will conclude. Such is the power of death: it is the last word to the body.

The core question is whether this final word will imprison the soul that can imagine so much more.

Death means life must and will transition.

Death implies God has further plans and purposes.

A Meaning of LIFE

Isn't it a peculiar thing that the human soul desires meaning? It is not enough to simply exist or survive or even flourish. We want a bigger picture. We want meaning. Life without meaning is a degraded life. To give up the search for the meaning of life is to slither into the habit of dulling one's soul.

Life's meaning is like a light beam — it illuminates the scenery. It mystifies the mind. But its absence definitely has an impact on those remaining.

Life means God is the God of the living. Life means death is not the only option.

A Meaning of MEANINGS

"No more why's!" — a young girl to a four-year-old boy. We can't but try to make sense of the world around us. We seem to be designed to ask the meta-questions of life.

About 3000 years ago King Solomon of Israel concluded that all of life is meaningless — at first and second glance, but not last look. Today many songwriters, painters and philosophers conclude the same.

Yet we keep looking. Are we strangely addicted to something that doesn't exist? Or are we designed to explore a realm of reality that fulfills this deep longing of the soul? If only we could see clearly, past decay and death. It is this wall of darkness that allows time and space to render meaningless all acts of the present. It is this same wall that is able to surrender the keys to meaning for all — as we acknowledge our frailty before it and accept eternal consequences for today's realities.

Meanings exist because probabilistic consequences of actions permeate reality.

Meanings imply God is transcendent to chaos and change.

A Meaning of SILENT SCREAMS OF MEANINGS.

We wake to the screams of our firstborns
 piercing the night
 with their complaints of life.
Our souls are alert to such interruptions for
 our hearts are twisted to
 surround them with acts of
 love-meanings.

Yet daily we drive by beauty variations
 the sounds of leaves and mosquitoes,
 the smell of garlic and flowers,
 light outlining the shape of a distant moon,
 the grace and violence of humankind;
Without a thought to
 such meanings —
 we pound our hearts to
 the irregular rhythm of the economy.

Twisting is inevitable away or searching for
 as young twigs bends for light,
 so our souls
yearn for the non-tranquil peace of answered whys
 silently screaming all around us
 through the frequency of meanings
 of the God who is everywhere ... and beyond.

Edited from "Searching the Ordinary for Meanings"

A Few Reflections on Beauty

Beauty and Spiritual Transformation

Ephesians 5: 25-27

... Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

To indicate that beauty formation is not a significant aspect of spiritual transformation is to ignore Jesus' work within His bride today. He expresses His intent within the language of beauty—a radiant church without stain or wrinkle or any blemish.

How do you see beauty growing in the church and in your soul?

What beauty has others seen and affirmed growing within you?

Ezekiel 16:14,15

And your fame spread among the nations on account of your beauty, because the splendor I had given you made your beauty perfect, declares the Sovereign LORD. "But you trusted in your beauty and used your fame to become a prostitute. You lavished your favors on anyone who passed by and your beauty became his."

Beauty can become an idol. Instead of trusting the Author of beauty, fallen humanity quickly turns to trust in beauty itself. It seems we are also inclined to prostitute our beauty to get favor from other humans instead of trusting in the One who has lavished beauty upon us.

As you examine your heart, do you trust in your beauty or do you desire beauty to achieve fame for yourself?

How are you aware of the impact of beauty on your trusting heart?

Symbolic and the Silent Language of God

Romans 1:20

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.

The play of the artist/musician/writer is to create a “knowing” that human souls embrace through the lens of their worldview wrapped within the limits of their senses. This worldview is constantly under the support and assault of our sensual abilities. But input from our senses without symbolic reasoning, strips the soul from the pursuit of broader meanings such as “why live?” It is through metaphor that we explore these meanings of the silent language of God.

The metaphor is a powerful linking of language to concrete spatial realities that usually invoke multiple senses. And a case can be made that all words are spatially related at some level of abstraction. For example, some business owners might be compared to the metaphor of a mother bear protecting her baby cubs. Or truth might be compared to a rock that stands firm against the pounding of the sea. Such metaphors allow us to vicariously experience our emotional reactions to some concrete sensual reality while exploring another aspect of life.

The silent language of God seems based on the human capacity to connect spatial realities with abstractions that relate to the attributes of God. For instance, the galaxies tell of the glory of God. Is not His glory beautiful? As we gaze into the night sky, we are gazing into the glory of God Who is the Author of our capacity to perceive beauty. Do other aspects of nature tell of other attributes of God? The psalmist declared that “The earth is filled with your love, O Lord ...” If part of human love language is beauty, is not beauty of a sun rise a proclamation from God to us that He loves us?

How do you sense God silently “speaking” to you through the beauty of the heavens and of everyday surroundings?

What does the continuum of beauty-ugliness communicate to your soul about the attributes of God?

Art and Pornography

Song of Solomon 4:1-3

How beautiful you are, my darling!

Oh, how beautiful!

Your eyes behind your veil are doves.

Your hair is like a flock of goats

descending from Mount Gilead.

Your teeth are like a flock of sheep just shorn, coming up from the washing.

Each has its twin;

not one of them is alone.

Your lips are like a scarlet ribbon;

your mouth is lovely.

Your temples behind your veil

are like the halves of a pomegranate.

Ezekiel 23:18-21

When she carried on her prostitution openly and exposed her nakedness, I (God) turned away from her in disgust, just as I had turned away from her sister. Yet she became more and more promiscuous as she recalled the days of her youth, when she was a prostitute in Egypt. There she lusted after her lovers, whose genitals were like those of donkeys and whose emission was like that of horses. So you longed for the lewdness of your youth, when in Egypt your bosom was caressed and your young breasts fondled.

Beauty devoid of all pride, lust, shame or shamelessness seems out of the reach and imagination of fallen humanness. Beauty, with shadows of lust contained by a sense of shame, allows the artist to explore human sexuality within the boundaries of art and without wallowing within the realm of the pornographic. Pornographic beauty seeks to arouse shameless lust. Thus, for one person an artistic display or movement may be art and for another pornography. Still others see an “art of pornography” by highlighting art and pornography’s common appeal to human sensuality. Without a societal discourse of goodness, pornography can jar the majority view of art. Are there no guidelines or hints by God revealed in Scripture that allows for attraction to beauty and disgust of pornographic lust?

Ephesians 4:19

Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.

How do you discern between sensuality and sensitivity within your soul?

Is your heart drawn to the beauty of art?

Is your heart drawn to pornography as art?

Where is God in the mix of your artistic heart?

Are you aware of times when your heart is drawn away from God and toward lust as you encounter and engage with the art/music/dance, etc.?

How do you handle these times of sensuality to move toward sensitivity without deceiving yourself regarding the power of lusting over beauty?

Beauty and Kingdom Glory

Romans 8:18-21

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

If wholeness enhances beauty and beauty encases wholeness, then the gospel of Jesus and His kingdom restores corrupted humanity and creation to its original beauty and wholeness. But if such wholeness detracts from beauty, then Jesus' gospel is not really good news for the restoration of a creation that is groaning continuously in its current state.

The wholeness and beauty of the Gospel of Jesus and His Kingdom comes with delay and promise. We still suffer through a fallen world. Our hearts, imaginations and bodies long for far more than any saint has experienced on this plane of reality. But the promise of more sustains us. And as the Apostle Paul experienced, "For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life" (2 Corinthians 5:4).

The historical expansion of the Gospel into Russia came as ambassadors from Prince Vladimir saw beauty within the Eastern Orthodox Church. They reported that they couldn't tell if they were in heaven or on earth when surrounded by such beauty. And thus the Christian faith first entered Russia.

Into today's pluralistic world, images and music disseminated by mass media are a significant aspect of socialization of the young. Thus, the artist has a profound impact on the valued beliefs of this generation. How followers of Jesus view this obstacle of bad image content and opportunity to bring beauty to the masses is strategically important for the expansion of the Gospel.

How have artistic expressions moved you in the past year?

How do you sense God leading you to create beauty as an expression of your heart for Him?

Beauty of Mathematics

Most of us see no or little beauty in mathematics. Our eyes and hearts have often been trained to view this beautiful language with drudgery or suspicion. Suspicion that this discipline is only an attempt to objectify, not value. And similarly, feelings of drudgery may be aroused due to the exacting nature of the language.

But for all who enjoy the beauty of architecture, it is good to remember that this art form is heavily laden with mathematics. The Greeks explored the proportions of the golden ratio in their building. Similarly, the nature of “pi” as a special irrational number intrinsically linked to the mathematics of circles has fascinated mathematicians for thousands of years. From finite series to exploring n^{th} dimensional space, mathematics provides us with tools to describe natural realities and imaginary spaces. The artist uses tools of paints, words, musician instruments, etc., often in exacting ways, to describe and explore the realities of natures and the imaginations of the mind wrapped with emotions. And so the mathematician uses his/her tools to explore nature and imagination with beauty that can potentially excite our emotions—and restructure our everyday world.

Symmetry is a key element within artistic expressions. And symmetry is a fascination for mathematicians. The artist and the mathematician are not far separated in their pursuits, only in their approaches. A recognized description of a reality that is wrapped in beauty can appeal to them both in the construct of symmetry.

“Could a mathematical proof, scientific theory, or piece of software be beautiful in the real, literal way that a painting or symphony or rose can be beautiful? Yes. The beauty of a proof or machine lies in a happy marriage of simplicity and power—power meaning the ability to accomplish a wide range of tasks, get a lot done.” David Gelernter, DISCOVER Vol. 18 No. 09, September 1997

Does mathematics excite or bore you? And to what degree?

Are you aware of symmetry in the world around you (e.g. the shape of a human body, architecture, flower arrangements, etc.)? How does that impact you?

How might your experience of symmetric beauty around you enhance your awareness of the beauty of mathematics?

Toward an Abstract Essence of Beauty

Art comes in many forms—the art of sound waves from an orchestra playing Bach, the art of light waves reflecting from a Rembrandt painting or projected from a movie projector, the display of particles revealed within a Michelangelo sculpture, the movement of bodies on the dance floor, the poetic lines of Emerson.

These art forms are filtered through human sensuality and various constructs of what is preciousness. With our various senses we perceive an external to which we are connected across degrees of distance. With various intensities of assigned values, we separate objects and concepts upon some continuum of preciousness-distain. Art can excite us to embrace both a connected external and an internal as a precious beauty or to distain it as an ugliness.

At an abstract level, beauty can be conceptualized as a artist's play of spatial particles and/or waves and an emotional construct of jealousy through some "language" that is perceived through human senses of consciousness. God has created lots of space and highlighted it with a diverse array of discrete particles in continuous motion. But it is God's Name Jealous (Exodus 34:14) that places the play upon a beauty-ugly continuum. As being created in the image of God, we can perceive jealousy primarily through the play of sexuality. And within jealousy we can understand preciousness (and boundaries of possessiveness). Without this innate panhuman awareness of various degrees of preciousness, all art would be stripped of its power to craft the soul and to be crafted by the soul of humanity.

At the point of this abstract perception of beauty, we can understand that the Jealous Triune God is not only the Creator but also the Original Artist crafting preciousness and things precious. At a concrete level, the same can be known by simply gazing into the evening sunset or meditating on God's instruction to Abraham to sacrifice his son.

Is all art sexual in nature? Is all preciousness sexual in nature? Is all jealousy sexual in nature? Can any art form be completely stripped from a masculine/feminine mystic? Is all beauty crafted through the lens of sexuality? Can the artist lay aside his or her sexuality as the scientist attempts to lay aside his or her subjectivity? Can he/she succeed? These questions of sexuality may be suspended, but a link between the emotions of sexuality and the emotions of beauty remain.

Is the jealous heart of God beautiful to you?

Is your heart beautiful to you?

Do your attractions to beauty and distain of ugliness draw you deeper into the heart of God?

How are the jealousies of your heart aligned to the jealousies of the heart of God?

How do you discern a jealousy "for" from a jealousy "of"— between godly jealousy and envy that rots the soul?

Written June 2006

Meta-Language for Ethical Decisions

John Mikhail (2007), in his article "Universal moral grammar: theory, evidence and the future", suggest the question "Is there a universal moral grammar, and if so, what are its properties?" as a future research agenda. In this article, I am suggesting the Thought Dynamo Decision Mapping Model derives a possible starting point for the latter question.

Ethical discussions have never been simple. The related questions of authority and foundations – "Who has the right to say what is good and evil?" and "In what foundational reasoning are ethics grounded?" – plague the discussion. Ethical decision making in a multicultural, postmodern context is at best problematic, at worst chaotic. In a multicultural world, the task of finding an authority for ethics that is reliable across cultural differences requires shifting through ethical norms of a multitude of nationalities and ethnicities to establish panhuman commonalities. In a postmodern world, the task of finding a reliable foundation for any ethical reasoning can dissolve into an erosion of all epistemological foundations due to an inherent uncertainty in language and dispersion of an author's presence from his/her context of communication. Thus, ethical discussions can shift from a pursuit of universal ethics to more limited interpretations of good and evil by individuals, nationalities, ethnicities and/or religious communities. In an interconnected world with limited resources, the practical sustainability of a global ethical perspective can be brought into question.

The stakes for establishing a culture-general language for meta-ethical reasoning have never been higher. The global ecosystem is now substantially managed by humanity. As governments, corporations and individuals strive for and against each other, this ecosystem is the precious jewel in the middle of the debates. History now places a high risk in the ethical decisions of humanity—the health of a planetary ecosystem. In particular, human decisions that impact atmospheric gases, life in the oceans, the genetics of the food chain and atomic energy, propels humanity to a new requirement of ethical reasoning, i.e. substantially agree across cultures and act for the good of the whole or suffer probabilistic negative global consequences within this century. Philosophical ethics and practice ethical decision making need congruence as humanity seeks to negotiate the options available within this multicultural and often postmodern world. The prospects of probable planetary consequences and their impact on societies beseech humanity to reasoning ethically. And this will require a meta-language for ethical decisions.

The task of this article is to posit culture-general constructs that may be used for ethical reasoning in a multicultural world. In specific, a construct of ethical reasoning across cultures can be perceived by reflecting on the management of creative harmony established through decision making regarding the negotiation of jealous space. A look at jealousy, space and creative harmony in relation to ethical reasoning follows.

The notion of beauty—expressed as creative harmony within jealous space—can be applied to ethical reasoning in sexual relations, commercial real estate industry, geriatric medicine, global banking, endangered species, patents and copyrights, etc. Sexual beauty will be examined due to the primacy of ethical choices involved within this panhuman pleasure-reproduction-socialization enterprise—an enterprise essential to the survival of the species. A sexual beauty ethic can be viewed as a high impact ethic within the human social system, i.e. many choices that impact the

global economy and ecosystem can be linked to sexual beauty. For instance, physical appearance and social image are involved in the management of sexual beauty. Physical appearance choices (by over 6 billion people) directly impact the economies of the clothing, food and health industries. Choices involved in the management of social image impact the housing, automotive, travel, entertainment, energy and banking industries, and even political candidate choices. Thus, the direct and indirect impact of these industries on the ecosystem can be influenced by ethical decisions related to sexual beauty.

A first step toward agreement and action on ethical parameters is a culture-general language that facilitates productive dialogue among competing interest. Without common language constructs of ethics, the task before humanity can dissolve into unproductive haggling and even wars over limited resources. At an abstract level, that language can be conceptualized as negotiating creative harmony within jealous space thus negotiating beauty and ugliness. Beauty can be conceived as displaying creative harmony amidst space that is jealousy held. Similarly, ugliness can be posited as displaying disharmonious jealous space. The good and evil of beauty and ugliness is thus a matter of negotiating jealous space.

The link between beauty and jealous space is intuitive. Beauty reveals an emotional attraction focused on some spatial object or spatially grounded concepts (such as symmetry). This emotional attraction can be conceptualized as a jealousy – a desire to possessive for oneself that which is deemed precious. Space that is jealously possessed and is in creative harmony with other jealously held space is deemed beautiful across cultures. However, when one space is jealousy possessed by conflicting parties, these jealousies (i.e. destructive envies) produce an ugliness that can lead to brutal conflicts. Thus the underlining dynamics of jealous space is intrinsically embedded within human reasoning of beauty-ugliness.

The link between jealous and space is also intuitive. Humanity can be both jealous *for* and *of* spatial objects (both with and without life) and ideations of spatial objects at various levels of abstraction. (One can be jealous for one's philosophical models and questions – i.e. “This is my philosophical stance”). A link between jealous space as an underlying concept within all ethical reasoning can be found in the “unfair” emotional reaction to the violation of jealously possessed space. For example, if one jealously possessives the space of his/her own sexual body and someone attempts to enter that body space without permission, then an internal emotional reaction will occur that this intrusion is an unfair violation, that this act is an ugliness warranting the label “evil”. Thus it is culture-general to discuss and condemn the ethical ugliness of sexual rape.

Another example of such jealous space that shifted to cruel ugliness is the Rwandan genocide of 1994 in which some 800,000 people were killed in 100 days. One people group, the majority Hutus, negotiated their space (i.e. their ethnic identities attached to physical space of land and property) with a jealousy that became envious, over-possessive and oppressive to the minority Tutsis. This negotiation of jealous space allowed an ethical justification for the evil of genocide – a justification acceptable at that time to many (not all) Hutus while being totally unacceptable to all Tutsis.

Beauty is on a reasoning continuum with ugliness. Degrees of beauty are compared with degrees of ugliness. Consistent with the definition of above beauty, ugliness is posited as the violation of creatively harmonious jealousy space – thus disharmony of envied space. The comparative difference is primarily within the definitions of jealousy and envy. Jealous is a jealousy “for” something or someone with an established right of ownership, while envy is a jealousy “of” something or someone with no established right of ownership. (Obviously, establishing rightful

ownership can be problematic.) For instance, societies agree that parents has some limited right of ownership to their children. For a parent to be jealous “for” the space of his/her child is a beautiful act of harmony. However, when a parent becomes jealous “of” – envious of – the child, something very different occurs, something very ugly. To be jealous “of” is an intrusion of personal space. It is a desire (and sometimes an act) to invade the space of another and take from him that which he rightfully possesses. This envy, this over-possessive, misdirected and deformed jealousy, can undermine the parent-child relationship while a proper sense of jealousy for a child can help protected and develop a child who is cherished within that possessive jealousy. Parental jealousy “for” can nurtures the child while envy, jealousy “of”, can rob the child of the space for protection and to be cherished.

The construct of beauty as creative harmony of jealous space holds promise as a meta-language in negotiating the abstract and practical ethical discussions of our day across cultural distinctions. In going forward an analysis of ethical reasoning patterns across cultures is needed. This analysis can serve to enhance a language driven by beauty as jealous space.

One can make a case for many ethical perspectives. Below are various ethical perspectives that are derived from the Thought Dynamo Decision Mapping Model. Some of these perspectives dominate in one cultural context more than in others. Some perspectives are applied to certain circumstances but not to others. For instance, a person’s relation to a group may influence which ethical perspective may apply to him. Someone within the in-group may receive radically different ethical treatment from someone outside that group.

Ethical Logic of Intellect

1. **Good-Evil.** The very fact that all cultures have some sense of good and evil, even though they may disagree on the details, is an indication of a universal moral grammar. The concept of fairness (not necessarily equality) underpins this moral reasoning. Laws (including permission, restriction, innocence, guilt, condemnation and mercy) are designed to manage good-evil within a society.
2. **Accuracy-Intuitive.** Morality includes of verbal and non-verbal truth telling that is accurate and intuitively consistency. Many courts of law require witnesses to vow to tell the truth.
3. **Powerful-Powerless.** Protection of the powerless (esp. babies) is foundational to the continuation of any society.
4. **Space.** Mental or physical spatial ownership (individual and/or corporate) is central in moral reasoning. Many wars have and continue to be fought over space – ownership of land.

Ethical Logic of Emotion

5. **Freedom-Bonding.** As ethical reasoning, this continuum is best understood at the extremes of abandonment and bondage.
6. **Honor-Shame.** The management of moral behavior is often comes through positive rewards that honor people or negative rewards that shame them.
7. **Trust-Fear.** The breeching trust is often considered a moral failure. Legal contracts are formed to ensure, to fortify verbal trust. Fear of the consequences of broken trust often helps negotiate trust relationship.
8. **Jealousy.** Jealousy has two sides – jealous *for* and jealous *of*. The latter is better referred to as envy. Jealousy is posited a the central construct of emotions and thus the central

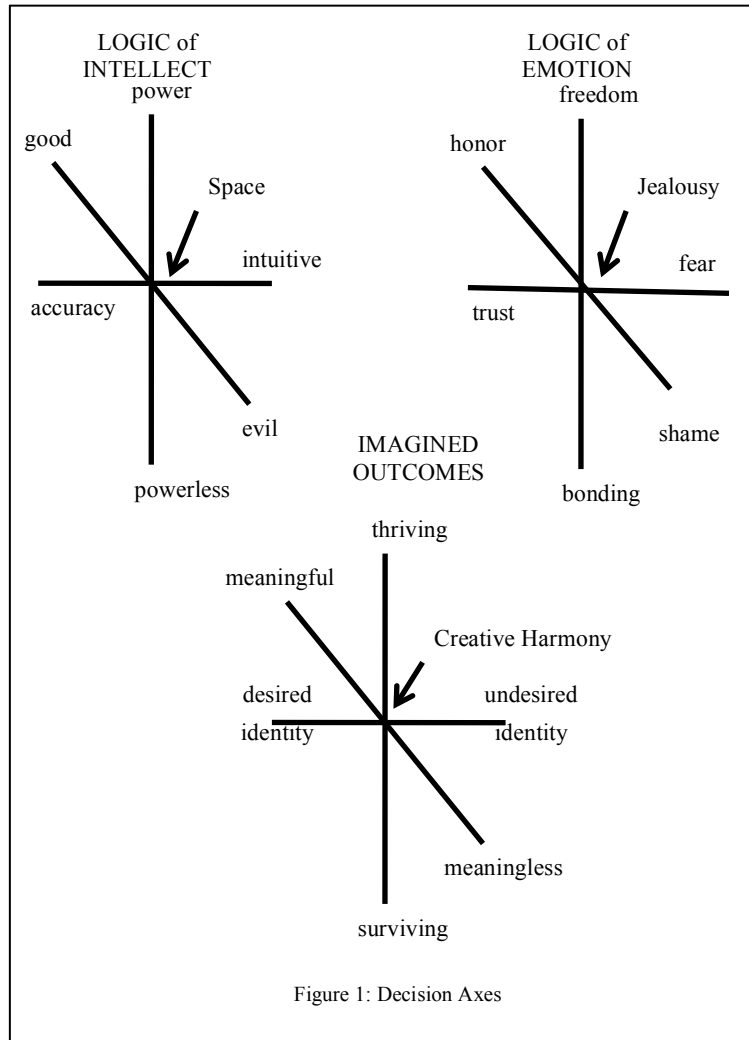
emotional construct of moral reasoning. To cease to be jealous *for* someone that relies on that jealousy is a breach of ethics.

Imagined Outcomes

9. **Desired-Undesired Identity.** To violate someone's group identity through verbal abuse often causes strong negative reactions.
10. **Thriving-Surviving.** The ethics of thriving involve not eliminating the surviving of others. For instance, refusing medical care to a destitute person is an ethical issue of survival.
11. **Meaningful-Meaningless.** Religious belief systems are designed to bring meaning into human existence of birth-life-death. To violate these meanings can be considered an immoral act.
12. **Creative Harmony.** This central construct of imagined outcomes is creative harmony. This ethical concept helps maintains the goodness of perpetrating harmonious health in individuals and society. The violation of creative harmony—destructive dissonance—can be viewed as morally wrong under certain but not all circumstances.

Additional Ethical Aspects from of the TDD Mapping Model

13. **Paradoxes.** The ethics of paradoxes suggests that contradictory stances are both ethical when understand by paradoxical reasoning.
14. **Continuums.** The concept of continuums suggests moral reasoning has a relative component to it—not everything is black and white.
16. **Probabilistic cause and effect.** Over time one learns that certain causes will result in a probabilistic range of effects. For instance, destruction of endangered animals is viewed as unethical since the probable consequences may eliminate a species within the ecosystem and thus impact the entire ecosystem..
17. **Intent.** If one intended good and harm occurred, this is often judged differently from intended evil.
18. **Emotional Integrity.** The use of emotions to deceive within one's in-group is usually viewed as unethical.
19. **Authority.** Challenging established authority is often considered unethical. Every government relies on the concept of authority to enforce ethical behavior of its citizenry.
20. **Beauty.** Beauty is posited as the creative harmony of jealous space—the central construct of all three overlapping 3-D axes. The preservation of beauty and avoidance of ugliness can thus become an issue of goodness.
21. **Love.** Love is determined by the heart, mind and soul of individuals and societies. Love as an ethic is always nebulous. However, love may motivate many ethical pursuits. Moreover, the absence of love, when love is expected, or the presence of hate invokes ethical choices. Love can be conceptualized as the internal working of beauty and beauty as the outward evidence of love in action—that is, creative harmony of jealous space.



This meta-language for ethical decision making is based on the Thought Dynamo Decision Model (Ennis, 2009) that includes a dynamic of thought (logic of intellect, logic of emotion and imagined outcomes—see figure 1) as well as a process of decision making that involves input, associations, adjustments, solidify, goal seek, employment, and feedback).

Notes ...

Written 2009; updated 2013

Ethical Perspectives from Biblical Texts

The Biblical texts are filled with statements of ethical perspectives. They point us to reason and live in a world that is filled with goodness rather than evil.

In this short essay I will attempt to summarize some of those perspectives. This will not be a list of do's and don'ts but rather a collection of perspectives—ways of thinking that will lead us into a life that is ethically good.

1. **FAIRNESS.** From young childhood we reason for fairness. We have an aversion to others getting more than we do—more attention, more love, more toys. This fairness doesn't require complete equality but rather a deeper sense that accounts for distribution of products, services and motivates that are appropriate to circumstances and needs.
2. **RETRIBUTION.** When others fault us, we often want retribution or revenge—some pay-back to make things right. (“An eye for an eye” – Exodus).
3. **BELIEFS.** The Bible is filled with beliefs and symbolic meanings that establish and reinforce our view of ethics. Adherence to these beliefs can be viewed ethically correct while violation of a belief would be evil.
4. **TRUTH TELLING.** Verbal and non-verbal truth telling is a Biblically ethical concept. (Exodus 20:16; Proverbs 11:1). A sense of consistency in language and behavior can be inherently good. And contradictory statements and hypocritical behavior is usually viewed as ethically wrong.
5. **PARADOX.** The concept of paradoxes as suggested within the Bible is a perspective for ethical reasoning as well. Consistency must be moderated by paradox. All of life is not consistent, thus beliefs and behaviors that are not consistent are not necessarily wrong.
6. **CONTINUUMS.** Continuums suggest relative degrees of morality (Proverbs 1:7 and 1 John 4:18). End points of ethical perspectives are often best understood along a continuum of reasoning.
7. **INTENTION.** Our intentions are key as we judge our own and others' behaviors (Matthew 5:20-7:28; Luke 11:39,40; Luke 16:15). Behavior can be interpreted through intent. Without an intention to harm, a harmful behavior is judged more moderately.
8. **INNOCENTS.** The *protection of innocents* is the play of powerful and powerlessness (Luke 18:15-17). A foundational construct of ethical perspectives is a need to protect the innocents within a society. Without this in tact the foundations of future generations are at risk—babies. And the elderly become prey to the young.
9. **PROBABILISTIC CAUSE AND EFFECT.** Ethical reasoning require that we anticipate the effects of our actions over immediate and long-term timeframes (Galatians 6:7).

10. **JEALOUSY.** Proper jealousy for others, with an appropriate level of loyalty, is an in-group dynamics that when violated can cause severe consequences (Exodus 20: 5; Proverbs 6:34; Luke 9:26). A break of a jealous bond is often seen as a moral wrong. Thus the marriage commitment is sealed with jealousy and threats to this jealous are perceived as ethical judgments.
11. **EMOTIONAL INTEGRITY.** Maintaining a sense of emotional wholeness or integrity is a high value among some cultures. To manage emotions without integrity is often viewed as self-deceptive and distained by others. (See Proverbs 11:3; Galatians 5:22.)
12. **POWER AND AUTHORITY.** Power distributed among many and wrapped in the authority of a few provides a context for ethically sound behavior as well as for addressing breaches by non-conformist behavior.
13. **NECESSITY.** The concept of surviving is usually determined by physical and psychological needs fulfillment (2 Peter 1:3). To not allow self or others the necessities required for survival is deemed morally wrong.
14. **GOAL ACHIEVEMENT.** Thriving through the achievement of goals can be a value that when violated interfere with our sense of need fulfillment (Luke 12:15). When goals are declared as non-negotiable, then the play of ethical reasoning is fully engaged. It becomes unacceptable and wrong to not meet those goals.
15. **OWNERSHIP.** Physical and mental ownership of property and ideas are often determined through individual and group agreements (Exodus 20:15; Ephesians 4: 28). Taking that which is owned by another individual or group is thus perceived to be a wrongful act.
16. **IDENTITY PRESERVATION.** Ownership of identity begins with our birth name and is layered with family, cultural and national identities, etc. To violate an identity is to desecrate all others of common identity. (See Luke 14:11.)
17. **LAW.** The concept of law (including permission, restriction, innocence, guilt, condemnation and mercy, etc.) is determined by rules of behavior set forth by God or people with authority (Exodus 20; Matthew 5-7). The letter of the law serves to enforce the spirit of the law. To violate a lettered law is ethically wrong as the letter protects the spirit of the law.
18. **HONOR AND SHAME.** These emotional constructs are determined by a hierarchical system (of people and/or codes) established by society To honor a person for good choices or position is usually declared ethically good. To shame a person without cause is ethically wrong. To shame them with cause is to invoke a dynamic to better ensure future conformity to that which is deemed honorable.
19. **CREATIVE HARMONY.** Ethical reasoning seeks to bring harmony into a system that is in some jeopardy of destabilizing. Thus disharmony is often but not necessarily seen as wrong. (See Luke 5:31,32.)
20. **EMPTINESS AND FULLNESS.** To be full or empty can both be ethically right. But to be empty when a desire for fullness exists in that arena is usually judged as wrong. (See Luke 17:33; Mark 8:34.)

21. **BEAUTY.** Beauty, as opposed to ugliness, is a goal of ethically reasoning. We seek a system of relationships among humans and with the ecosystem that brings a beauty to our souls, to others and to the environment. To bring ugliness can bring with it a judgment of wrongness. (See 1 Peter 3:3,4; Luke 17:33.)
22. **LOVE.** Love is a motivate that can be perceived as the highest construct of ethical reasoning. To violate true love is judged as a wrong.

The above perspectives are not to be seen as exhaustive, but rather as perspectives to explore the nuances of ethical reasoning from Biblical text.

Written 2010; updated 2013

Reality and Illusions

Considerations for Consciousness

Reality is a difficult word to grasp. We live in a world that we call 'real' and yet each of us perceives events differently to some degree. That separation of perception can be nominal or have great discrepancies.

Our senses come to play in defining reality. What we see, touch, smell, hear and taste are processed in the mind to create our belief in reality as well as our descriptions of it.

Without a sense of consciousness, of self-consciousness, we might not even perceive a need for belief or description of reality. Thus the core issue of reality becomes is self-consciousness a reality or is it a human illusion?

This question is substantially unanswerable on two fronts. First, self-consciousness is necessary to affirm self-consciousness, thus a cyclical reasoning comes into play. And second, without self-consciousness, the question of self-consciousness is mute—there would then be no one to care about the question!

Though perceived reality may in time become an illusion (i.e. the world is flat), illusions can serve to reestablish our perception of reality in ways that better align with probabilistic effects.

Try as we may, humanity is subservient to effects over time from their causes. We might dispute the exact effects, but we will continue to experience with our senses these probabilistic consequences of our behaviors.

In short, these probable effects sculpt our perception of reality and illusion. And with trust and fear, we establish a system of belief and doubt that we can call real and illusion.

These systems form 'world views' of reality by which we discriminate and assimilate our experiences, react to the world around us, and judge other views as real or illusionary.

A side note is the issue of concurrent consciousnesses. Can two or more consciousness minds co-exist as separate yet united in real-time? Can humans achieve this state of consciousnesses? Can artificial general intelligence machines operate with concurrent consciousnesses?

The implications for efficiency, power and identity are profound. Quantum computers are already simultaneously processing for optimization. Can power be shared efficiently between optimal solutions of consciousnesses or will identity issues arise between concurrent machine consciousnesses—issue that are resolved through a struggling for power?

Resources to Explore

CONNECT BIBLE STUDIES

GOD: Connecting with His Outrageous Love
IDENTITY: Becoming Who God Says I Am
SOUL: Embracing My Sexuality and Emotions
RELATIONSHIPS: Bringing Jesus into My World
LIFE: Thriving a Complex World
FREEDOM: Breaking the Power of Shame

IMAGE-BASED

The New Me
Searching the Ordinary for Meanings
Grapplings: Why Do People Suffer So Much?

BOOKS

The Shame Exchange: Trading Shame for God's Mercy and Freedom
Worth a Thousand Words: The Power of Images to Transform Hearts

INVENTORIES

Breakthru: Discovering My Spiritual Gifts
Breakthru: Discovering My Primary Roles

For the above resources see:

www.ralphennis.com

About the Authors

Ralph and Jennifer Ennis have served with The Navigators since 1975. They have ministered at Princeton University, Richmond Community, Glen Eyrie Leadership Development Institute, The CoMission in Russia, and in Raleigh, NC. In 2006 Jennifer co-founded JourneyMates, a ministry to help people grow in intimacy with the Triune God through Scripture, silence and solitude.

Unless otherwise noted, the essays of the WB Series have been written by Ralph. However, each work was crafted in the context our marriage relationship and with the editorial benefit of Jen's perspectives and unique abilities.

In 2018 Ralph and Jennifer celebrated 45 years of marriage. They have four married children and 15 grandchildren.



Our web sites:

www.journeymates.org
www.ralphennis.com

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