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## Theological Axiology of Reality

### Abstract

In the present discussion of the multiplicity of sciences as against the unity of knowledge, sometimes the possibility of one super-science is advocated with a suggestion that all other scientific methods should be reduced to just one method of a one particular, usually natural science. Such reductionism often leads to disrespectful pronouncements at the address of all other sciences and their methods.

This article advocates theological foundations for a multiplicity of scientific methods. Biblical ontology introduces a series of dualities called here, for the lack of a better word, “biblical graded dualism.” It is a system of asymmetrical dualities that give substance to the idea of the hierarchy of being. In the article an axiological view of reality is deduced that should facilitate a more respectful and fruitful debate among the sciences.

### Keywords

Theology, epistemology, axiology, dualism, methodology.

## 1. Introduction: Epistemological totalitarianism

In the era of scientific imperialism<sup>1</sup> the humanities have to defend themselves against epistemological totalitarianism<sup>2</sup> that is all but omnipresent in scientific decisions about which methodology passes for “scientific” and what is just “stamp collecting.”<sup>3</sup> Sometimes the controversy between natural scientists and “literati” boils over into a major battle like the *Two Cultures*<sup>4</sup> debate started by C.P. Snow in 1959 or the scandal of Alan Sokal’s hoax article in *Social Text*<sup>5</sup> in 1996. I think that those skirmishes can be taken as an example of what psychiatrist Thomas Szasz said: “In the animal kingdom, the rule is, eat or be eaten; in the human kingdom, define or be defined.”<sup>6</sup> In the “kingdom” of sciences the battle rages for who defines or explains whom. Science that can reduce all other knowledge to its methods of explanation has “eaten” all others and made them just sub-fields of its own inquiry. Also, “to be defined” is analogical to “be killed” – the science that has been swallowed has ceased to exist as an independent source of original and irreplaceable scientific method.

An alternative approach to the controversy is simply avoiding any contact with the opposition. If this is the case, the decision is to run away from any possible discussion. In this sense philosopher Gilles Deleuze said: “...when a true philosopher sits in a café and hears somebody say ‘Let us debate this point a little bit!’ he jumps up and runs away as fast as possible.”<sup>7</sup>

These wars have been conducted between natural science and the humanities. For Christian theology, there is an additional problem of posing as science when its specific methods include such “unscientific” procedures as interpreting divinely inspired text or communicating with God which some scientists

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<sup>1</sup> A. McGrath, *The Territories of Human Reason*, Oxford 2019, Oxford University Press, p. 57.

<sup>2</sup> “...defined as the centralizing of power and knowledge in a priori postulates defended through oppression and marginalization” (Omar Swartz, *Conducting Socially Responsible Research*, Thousand Oaks 1997, Sage Publications, p. 28).

<sup>3</sup> Quote attributed to Rutherford (J.D. Bernal, *The Social Function of Science*, London 1939, George Routledge and Sons, p. 9).

<sup>4</sup> C.P. Snow *The Two Cultures*, Cambridge 2012, Cambridge University Press.

<sup>5</sup> A. Sokal, *Transgressing the Boundaries: Towards a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity*, [http://www.physics.nyu.edu/sokal/transgress\\_v2\\_noafterword.pdf](http://www.physics.nyu.edu/sokal/transgress_v2_noafterword.pdf) (4.7.2022).

<sup>6</sup> Th. Szasz, *The Second Sin*, New York 1973, Doubleday & Co., p. 20.

<sup>7</sup> S. Žižek, *Organs without Bodies*, London 2012, Routledge, p. xix.

consider “incompatible with good science.”<sup>8</sup> But reactions can be very similar to those described above. Some Christians think only of converting unbelievers without being genuinely interested in their argument. (With some modification, they can be compared to those who “define” or “eat” the adversary.) Others tend to run away from the debate and create ghettos of believing communities.

## 2. Why axiology?

A genuine debate is possible only if assumptions of all participants in it are not only clearly stated but taken seriously and with respect. Axiological epistemology has to do with the quality and usefulness of epistemological methods, the dignity and skills of their proponents and the value or status of investigated objects. It takes account not only of objects of knowledge and the methods used to investigate them but also our preparedness or openness over time to recognise unfamiliar forms of experiences and perceptions that some people have. For example, there is a factor of historical development in our ability to appraise true knowledge. Some arguments lose their persuasiveness with time without being really disproved. One such instance is the method of intuition in ethics. After it ceased to be one of the main methods in British moral philosophy, one author dismissed it as “...a body of writing so acute and at the same time so totally unilluminating...”<sup>9</sup> That was in 1967. In 2005 a book with the title *Ethical Intuitionism* has a quote from Albert Einstein – “The only real valuable thing is intuition” – as an introductory motto for the whole work.<sup>10</sup> Here we may ask a very simplified question: What has changed that the notion of “intuition” became implausible in 1967 and plausible in 2005 again?

This also should remind us of the too often neglected problem that impedes the dialogue between worldviews. Arthur Koestler called it “the pathology of the human mind.”<sup>11</sup> (Mind you, our *own* mind not exempted.) What if a life

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<sup>8</sup> W. Breitbart, *God and Science: Can We Believe in Both?*, “Palliative and Supportive Care”, Cambridge 2005, Cambridge University Press, 3, pp. 167–169, DOI: 10.1017/S1478951505050273.

<sup>9</sup> G.J. Warnock, *Contemporary Moral Philosophy*, London 1967, Macmillan and Company, p. 16.

<sup>10</sup> M. Huemer, *Ethical Intuitionism*, London 2005, Palgrave Macmillan, p. vi.

<sup>11</sup> What if the human mind “...contains some built-in error or deficiency which predisposes him towards self-destruction.”? (A. Koestler, *The Ghost in the Machine*, New York 1989, Arkana, p. xi.)

of searching for the truth viewed as an *ascent up* the mountain of knowledge, in reality is a *descent down* the slope of declining spiritual sensitivities? The interpretation will obviously depend on the worldview that is in the background of the explanation.

In the same vein, we should take more seriously what is called “the age of therapy”<sup>12</sup> with its epistemological consequences. Worldviews may be believed not so much because they are *true*, but because they provide *comfort*. Psychologist Paul Vitz says “...that for every person strongly swayed by rational argument there are many, many more affected by nonrational psychological factors.”<sup>13</sup>

These considerations help us to view the situation from an axiological perspective. If we allow that the differences between the antagonistic positions are not always rooted in fallacious logic or clear lies their source probably will be in incompatible or incommensurable values. Axiology as a general theory of values need not be completely about subjective preferences if the strict fact/value dichotomy has collapsed as Hilary Putnam has shown.<sup>14</sup> The axiological approach to an epistemological impasse takes seriously the possibility of different systems of values and offers ways of giving mutual respect and understanding if disagreement in the debate continues. It opens the way to an appreciation of the opponent’s *ordo amoris* (order of love).<sup>15</sup> Each person’s *ordo amoris*, in other words hierarchy of values, has to be treated with respect.

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<sup>12</sup> K.J. Schneider, *Rollo May on Existential Psychotherapy*, “Journal of Humanistic Psychology” 49 (2009) 4, p. 422.

<sup>13</sup> P.C. Vitz, *The Psychology of Atheism*, Addison 2008, Christian Leadership Ministries, p. 34.

<sup>14</sup> H. Putnam, *The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy*, Cambridge 2003, Harvard University Press.

<sup>15</sup> Max Scheler likens it to a shell in which humans are encased and each person “...carries this shell along with him wherever he goes and cannot escape from it no matter how quickly he runs. He perceives the world and himself through the windows of this shell, and perceives no more of the world, of himself, or of anything else besides what these windows show him, in accordance with their position, size, and color.” M. Scheler, *Selected Philosophical Essays*, Evanston 1973, Northwestern University Press, p. 100.

### 3. “Saving the appearances”

The fight against what has been called ‘methodological monism’<sup>16</sup> is conducted not only by theology. Let us take a look at three authors from various branches of human thought. Economist and historian Ludwig von Mises begins his book *Theory and History*, subtitled “An Interpretation of Social and Economic Evolution,” with a defense of methodological dualism.<sup>17</sup> Philosopher of science Paul Feyerabend also attacked monism, although from a different angle.<sup>18</sup> Neither of these two authors maintain a theological view of reality. Referring to them is a way of calling attention to the problem that monism causes in other branches of knowledge.

Closer to our theme is what C.S. Lewis says about our value-related emotions being “...either congruous or incongruous...”<sup>19</sup> to the universe we live in. His argument is that statements expressing values have to be based in something “beyond existence”<sup>20</sup> – he calls it the *Tao* – or they are nonsensical.

Von Mises explicitly refrains from making decisions about metaphysical constructs but insists that whether a “Unified Science” is possible or not, it “... can in no way invalidate the results of the discursive reasoning of the sciences of human action.”<sup>21</sup> Paul Feyerabend defended materialism in no uncertain terms, nevertheless he also said that “...theoretical monism ...hinders progress.”<sup>22</sup> C.S. Lewis’s reference to the *Tao* borrows the word from Chinese philosophy but makes it clear that it is not committed to any one particular worldview. All these three authors in their various ways do what was described as “saving the appearances.”<sup>23</sup> Today physicists speak of modelling physical reality. The widely popularised problem is the identification of real processes in the micro world

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<sup>16</sup> A. McGrath, *The Territories of Human Reason*, p. 9.

<sup>17</sup> L. von Mises, *Theory and History*, Auburn 2007, Ludwig von Mises Institute, p. 1.

<sup>18</sup> J. Preston, *Feyerabend: Philosophy, Science and Society*, Cambridge 1997, Polity Press.

<sup>19</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, New York 1996, Touchstone, p. 27.

<sup>20</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, p. 30.

<sup>21</sup> L. von Mises, *Theory and History*, p. 4.

<sup>22</sup> P.K. Feyerabend (S. Gattei and J. Agassi, eds., *Physics and Philosophy*, New York 2016, Cambridge University Press, p. 97).

<sup>23</sup> “This phrase, used by Simplicius in his sixth century Commentary on Aristotle’s *De Caelo*, continued to dominate astronomy down to the time of Copernicus. ... the same appearances could be saved by two or more quite different hypotheses. ... These hypotheses did not have ...any essential part in truth or knowledge. They were used as models for calculation with

with the models coming from the macro world. Werner Heisenberg said: “... we have to remember that what we observe is not nature in itself but nature exposed to our method of questioning.”<sup>24</sup>

What has this to do with the axiological view of reality? As was said above, it tends to make us cautious about overvaluation of our own particular picture of reality. The theory may be a model that can be surpassed. Next, axiology warns us about the limitations of our *ordo amoris* in the sense Max Scheler spoke about it.

#### 4. Biblical graded dualism

The contention of this article is that it is the axiology based on the biblical worldview that “saves the appearances” in an optimum way.

Let us begin by comparing the attitudes to reality of Pascal and Andrew Carnegie. For Pascal, the source of knowledge is in the highest and infinite Being: “Pascal, when about to write, used to kneel down and pray the infinite Being so to subdue every part of him unto Himself, that when he was thus brought low the divine force might enter into him. By self abasement he prepared himself for the receiving of inspirations.”<sup>25</sup>

For Carnegie, the source of hope and progress is in evolution:

Andrew Carnegie (19<sup>th</sup> century millionaire and philanthropist) “discovered” the theory of evolution and was full of excitement: “...Carnegie would remember ‘that light came as in a flood and all was clear. Not only had I got rid of theology and the supernatural, but I had found the truth of evolution. ‘All is well since all grows better’ became my motto, my true source of comfort. Man was not created with an instinct for his own degradation, but from the lower he had risen to the higher forms. Nor is there any conceivable end to his march to perfection. His face is turned to the light, he stands in the sun and looks upward.”<sup>26</sup>

These two quotations illustrate two opposite epistemological views of reality. One reverently turns its face toward transcendence, the other is happily trusting

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no claims to correspond with physical reality.” O. Barfield, *Saving the Appearances*, New York 1965, Harcourt, Brace & World, pp. 48, 49.

<sup>24</sup> W. Heisenberg, *Physics and Philosophy*, New York 1958, Harper & Brothers, p. 58.

<sup>25</sup> E. Boutroux, *Pascal*, Manchester 1902, Sherratt and Hughes, xv.

<sup>26</sup> J. Frazier Wall, *Andrew Carnegie*, New York 1970, Oxford University Press, p. 365.

immanent evolutionary forces inherent in nature. In between these two views there are innumerable positions that can be called “philosophical faiths.”<sup>27</sup> Let us mention just a few: idealism, physicalism, emergent dualism, materialism,<sup>28</sup> emergentist materialism, etc. These are names of metaphysical theories with their related epistemologies and corresponding explanations and attitudes to reality. Philologist Owen Barfield compared various views of reality to “watertight compartments” that prevent relating them to each other.<sup>29</sup>

Biblical ontology explains the existence of various sciences and the need for various epistemic methods by what could be termed the “hierarchy of being.” At the same time, it provides an “axiological scale” for different epistemic attitudes – from control over experiments in laboratory to respect for diverse interlocutors (epistemic peers)<sup>30</sup> and to worship like Pascal.

I will call Biblical ontology, for the lack of a better term, “graded dualism.” It is important to say that the notion of “dualism” from the biblical point of view must be carefully defined and distinguished from other uses of the same term. For example, it is different from Cartesian dualisms (thought-extension or soul-body) although it may use the same words. It is different from Persian absolute dualism (two deities), Manichean dualism (evil based in ontology) or psychoanalytical dualism (conscious-unconscious, culture-nature, ego-instinct). Gilles Deleuze says that on the level of thought and subject of thought “there are as many dualisms as you like.”<sup>31</sup>

The Biblical graded dualism is in reality a series of asymmetrical dualisms (or dualities) – two ontological (*substance* dualism) and one ethical (*property*

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<sup>27</sup> Philosophical faith can be viewed as an *experience* of the Comprehensive (*das Umgreifende*). K. Jaspers, *The Perennial Scope of Philosophy*, London 1950, Routledge & Kegan Paul, p. 14.

<sup>28</sup> “...some versions of materialism may be equivalent to a particular version of dualism.” W. Hasker, *Is Materialism Equivalent to Dualism?*, in: Benedikt Paul Göcke (ed.), *After Physicalism*, Notre Dame 2012, University of Notre Dame Press, p. 180.

<sup>29</sup> O. Barfield, *Worlds Apart*, Middletown 1963, Wesleyan University Press, p. 20. In the book a theologian, a physicist, a linguist, a technician and a psychiatrist lead a three days long conversation. Barfield cleverly shows the difficulties of communication between explanations based on different worldviews.

<sup>30</sup> “...roughly, people who are in as good a position (have as much relevant knowledge, experience, and cognitive skills) as we are. G. Gutting, *What Philosophers Know*, Cambridge 2009, Cambridge University Press, p. 96.

<sup>31</sup> G. Deleuze, *Seminars*, <https://deleuze.cla.purdue.edu/seminars/anti-oedipus-ii/lecture-02> (11.7.2022).

dualism). The first order dualism is defined by the polarity between the created and the uncreated reality. The uncreated being of the Triune God is both transcendent and immanent in relation to the created reality. The transcendent Trinity gives unity to the plurality of created things (making it a “uni-verse”) and makes possible a genuine multiplicity of identities (as there is plurality in the Trinity). Also, it allows us to think of the world as “both one and many.”<sup>32</sup>

Next, the biblical world picture gives us a polarity between the spiritual and the material world. (We shall call it a “second-order” dualism.) The invisible spiritual world is the realm of eternal beings<sup>33</sup> while the material world is (against our natural common-sense view) temporal. It is important to stress that “temporal” does not mean “bad” or “evil” as we can see in the Creator’s pronouncement that in creation everything was “very good” (Genesis 1:31). The material world as created is “good” but it is ethically neutral – neither good nor evil. It can become holy when it is offered to God as a sacrificial gift.

A very controversial aspect is Cartesian mind-body dualism<sup>34</sup> of two incompatible and non-interactive substances that is often confused with the biblical description of human constitution. From the biblical theological point of view, a human being is a whole that can be viewed from either material (“dust”) or spiritual (“soul”).<sup>35</sup> In the living human being we cannot distinguish between mental states and events and physical states and events as Cartesianism tries to do. Also, in the Bible emotions, reason and will are lumped together under the notion of “heart” – mind and logic not isolated from emotions and passions. Furthermore, separating the soul from the body means death. On the other hand, it is clearly thought that the spiritual reality of a human being (spirit/soul) survives the death of the body. In the biblical view the body is not a passive receptor of the mind’s commands, at the same time, the body with its active desires should be subordinate to the reasoned desires of the human spirit.

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<sup>32</sup> C. Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many*, Cambridge 2005, Cambridge University Press, p. 124.

<sup>33</sup> “For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:18).

<sup>34</sup> We must be careful here not to accuse Descartes of what is ascribed to his philosophy because “[t]he official Descartes is not the historical Descartes...”. R.A. Watson, *Shadow History in Philosophy*, in: Johns Hopkins University Press, “Journal of the History of Philosophy” 31 (1993) 1, p. 105.

<sup>35</sup> In Genesis 2:6 the created human is called both “dust from the ground” and “a living soul.” There is no preposition “from” (the dust) in original Hebrew.

So the biblical picture of humans makes them neither wholly spiritual, nor wholly material beings. Human beings are neither fallen angels nor erected apes. They are personal beings that can enter into communion with God but at the same time, they are material bodies that can crumble to dust. It is unfortunate that we tend to view human beings solely from the viewpoint of some preferred science –be it psychology, medicine or theology. A holistic approach to humans requires taking into account all dimensions of their being which, with the ongoing specialisation of the sciences, is more and more difficult. Humans bridge the divide between the realm of spiritual beings and the realm of animals by being a part of both.

The third-order dualism that we find in the biblical image of the world is not an ontological but an ethical dualism of good and evil. (As was stated above, material creation is ethically neutral.) This ethical dualism is closely connected with the apocalyptic cosmic *spatial* dualism of this world and the heavenly realm of God and angels, and also with the *temporal* dualism of this age and the age to come. This world is in the power of the Evil One (1 John 5:19) whose main ambition is to deceive and murder (John 8:44). The origin of evil is presented as a free-will decision of intelligent beings. The victory over evil is the achievement of Christ.

For axiological considerations of this article it will be sufficient to say that in the biblical worldview ethical good is defined in a religious manner as a positive relationship with God and ethical evil is its opposite.

## 5. Critiques of dualism

As we have seen, the word “dualism” is more a description of an attribute than a fully developed theory. But it can be asserted that whatever its use it is more often than not contested. Monism has become the orthodox view both in natural sciences and the humanities. The word itself has the same wide use as the word “dualism.”<sup>36</sup> The basic principle of monism was defined by LaMettrie: “...in the whole universe there is but a single substance differently modified.”<sup>37</sup> In materialistic philosophical sense it began being used by Ernst Haeckel who defined

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<sup>36</sup> E.g. legal monism is a theory in legal philosophy that has little to do with our theme.

<sup>37</sup> J. Offray de la Mettrie, *Man a Machine*, Chicago 1912, The Open Court Publishing Co., p. 148.

it in Spinozist terms as recognising “...one sole substance in the universe, which is at once ‘God and Nature.’”<sup>38</sup>

There are several objections to dualism that need to be answered in order to avoid misunderstanding of biblical axiology. It is obvious that an absolute dualism of two independent and equal co-eternal deities is a logical impossibility. (By definition God must be the one necessary being.) Anyway, if there were two or more eternal mutually independent realities, all the laws of metaphysics, epistemology, language or axiology as we know them would not be applicable to it. As C.S. Lewis remarked what we call good and bad (we may add any other category) is always in “...relation to the real ultimate God.”<sup>39</sup> There would be nothing “ultimate” in plural realities.

Another objection to dualism is epistemological. It has been called a “discouraging prospect” towards which contemporary minds feel “emotional repugnance” because “...perception does not, so far as it -goes, afford an unadulterated and unmediated disclosure of what is present in ‘nature.’”<sup>40</sup> This “repugnance” can be found in the Hegelian system that strongly influenced not only idealist philosophies but also materialist (Marxism) and psychological (Freud) epistemologies.<sup>41</sup> Both idealist and materialist systems use many dualist schemes but deny their embeddedness in ontological reality.

The theological answer to this objection is in the full understanding of the notion of revelation. Metaphysics as theory in words “does not induce Being itself to speak.”<sup>42</sup> This is how Walter Kaufmann explains Heidegger’s insistence that knowledge of truth is coming to us as *unconcealedness* (ALETHEIA) and is more than the truth of propositions. Emil Brunner developed a theory of revelation in his work *Truth as Encounter* where he says: “...in faith I do not think but God leads me to think; he does not communicate ‘something’ to me, but ‘himself.’”<sup>43</sup> I do not completely subscribe to his existentialist theology but here he puts

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<sup>38</sup> E. Haeckel, *The Riddle of the Universe*, New York 1905, Harper & Brothers, p. 20.

<sup>39</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, London 2009, HarperCollins Publishers, p. 43.

<sup>40</sup> A.O. Lovejoy, *The Revolt against Dualism*, New York 1930, W.W. Norton & Co., p. 34.

<sup>41</sup> “For Hegel, as for Freud, there is a primordial nature to man that precedes reason, namely, the underworld.” J. Mills, *The Unconscious Abyss*, Albany 2002, State University of New York Press, p. 189.

<sup>42</sup> W. Kaufmann, *Existentialism from Dostoyevsky to Sartre*, New York 1958, Meridian Books, p. 210.

<sup>43</sup> E. Brunner, *Truth as Encounter*, Philadelphia 1964, The Westminster Press, p. 114.

forward an important point in biblical epistemology. A trinitarian explanation that is closer to the spirit of the Bible explains revelational communication through the operations of the Spirit of God. "Spirit relates to one another beings and realms that are opposed or separate."<sup>44</sup> The epistemic process is thus more than just communicating the right words true knowledge depends on the properties of persons who perform knowing as well.<sup>45</sup>

Probably a more damaging objection to biblical dualism is the accusation of defending *domination*. Anna Case-Winters writes: "Feminist theology faults Christian tradition for buying into a hierarchical dualism that sets man above woman and culture above nature and spirit above body in ways that are mutually reinforcing and destructive in their effect."<sup>46</sup> Hierarchy has certainly been abused for the domination and exploitation of the weak. But, as the old proverb goes, abuse does not negate use. By getting rid of the hierarchical graded dualism we lose the foundation for an axiological view of reality. If everything is sacred nothing is profane and the difference is lost. Historically, egalitarian revolutions led to totalitarianism in the name of freedom, inevitably with some animals becoming "more equal than others." Hierarchy even if abrogated in theory will assert itself in practice. Hierarchy and exercise of power is a necessary unifying force in any functioning system that involves freedom. In the same breath it must be stressed that "[p]ower as power does not have any divine claim, no matter how imposing or effective it might be."<sup>47</sup> In incarnation God not only exercised power but submitted to it. The divine claim on human allegiance is not solely his power but his identification with humans. The master became a servant. In a paradoxical way, when the hierarchy works according to the original Creator's plan the dominion is exercised in the interests of its lower positioned members. Of course, in the world in which we live, we do not expect humility from the subjects or love from the leaders. But we must not forget that the original plan for creation has not changed just because something went terribly wrong and sacrificial love and appreciative humility have become rare virtues.

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<sup>44</sup> C. Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many*, p. 181.

<sup>45</sup> The theory of the right attitudes in epistemology is developed in the so called virtue epistemology.

<sup>46</sup> A. Case-Winters, *Reconstructing a Christian Theology of Nature*, Aldershot 2007, Ashgate Publishing, p. 63.

<sup>47</sup> K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics 2/2*, Edinburgh 1957, T & T Clark, p. 553.

Probably in no other area of Christian theology there has been so much criticism as in the area of the third-order dualism – the existence of evil. Often it is put as a logical impasse: (1) God is good, (2) God is omnipotent, (3) There is evil. It seems that these three statements cannot be all true about the world at the same time. Although this is a mystery beyond complete solution before “the age to come” arrives, for the purpose of an axiological view of reality it is important to realise the fact of existence of *epistemic evil* as well. If natural evil is some catastrophe by natural causes, moral evil is some problem caused by disobeying moral law, epistemic evil is a deficiency or hindrance to getting an important piece of knowledge. Simply put, if there is God, why cannot we know it? Why is there this problem at all?

To this objection there are several theological answers that are beyond the theme of this article. The reply that pertains to epistemology and axiology has to do with the epistemic channel that is essential to the full knowledge of God. In the Letter to the Romans we see that all humans have access to the knowledge of God (Romans 1:19) but the full spiritual knowledge depends on an inward transformation that Jesus called “regeneration” (John 3:3). In the First letter to the Corinthians the topic is developed even more closely. To know the spiritual matters one has to become *spiritual* man because “[t]he animal (PSYCHIKOS) man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned (1 Corinthians 2:14). The word PSYCHIKOS is “...used of a man whose motives do not rise above the level of merely human needs and aspirations.”<sup>48</sup> Whether we interpret the word “psychikos” ontologically or ethically in both cases it will mean an epistemological evil standing in the way of the full knowledge of God.

## 6. Biblical dualism and axiological epistemology

How does the biblical graded dualism as described above “save the appearances” in epistemology? How does it compare with other interpretations of reality? Let us remember that all sciences interpret some sort of data, be it natural phenomena, human behaviour or texts. In the words of anthropologist Clifford Geertz between sciences there are “...some general resemblances to one

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<sup>48</sup> A.C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Grand Rapids 2000, Eerdmans, p. 267.

another and some genuine differences from the sorts that are conducted under the others...<sup>49</sup>

Our focus of interest here is the axiological significance of the plurality of epistemological methods. Let us keep in mind that the dualism we speak about is *asymmetrical* because its parts are not of equal weight and it is *graded* because it can be arranged according to the grades of value (axiology). For epistemology it means that there are methods of investigation that reflect the hierarchical constitution of reality. From what was said follows that there are three axiological levels of reality with corresponding clusters of methods of investigation. The most successful and developed are the methods of natural sciences that tend to usurp the entire field of scientific knowledge through epistemological totalitarianism. (Of course, such attitudes depend very much on the personality of those who hold them.)<sup>50</sup> The methodology of natural sciences is a complicated and sometimes controversial science.<sup>51</sup> But at the risk of oversimplification it can be said, that the essential attributes of methods in natural science are the possibility of repeated testing and their predictive success. From the axiological point of view, the key attribute of a scientific method is a possibility of *control* best illustrated by setting up precisely defined experiments. Objectivity, repeatability, communicability are other attributes that can be added to the description of scientific methods in natural sciences. Another key word here is *manipulation*. Experiments are realised on impersonal matter and even if there are problems with experiments on animals they cannot be treated as persons.

The realm of personal beings cannot be fully investigated by methods of natural sciences because of the inaccessibility of the inward world of the mind by their methods.<sup>52</sup> Also, it is inadmissible to manipulate persons without their expressed consent. In this way *control* and *manipulation* are very limited and experiments

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<sup>49</sup> C. Geertz, *Local Knowledge*, New York 1983, Basic Books, p. 7.

<sup>50</sup> For example "...Heisenberg was able to accommodate both art and religion within his overall approach, distinguishing these methodologically from the sciences, while affirming their intellectual and cultural legitimacy and distinctiveness." A. McGrath, *The Territories of Human Reason*, p. 210.

<sup>51</sup> Paul Feyerabend notoriously defended methodological anarchism in science. P. Feyerabend, *Against Method*, London 1993, Verso.

<sup>52</sup> These are what Aldous Huxley calls "more private" experiences as against the "more public" experiences that belong to natural science. A. Huxley, *Literature and Science*, New York 1963, Harper & Row, pp. 4–5.

depend more on *language* and *empathy*. To use language as a method of investigation means to enter into a respectful interpersonal relationship. It is impossible to effectively communicate without trust and empathy.<sup>53</sup> In this method of investigation, *imagination* based on the narrative stands for what in the natural sciences is an *observation* based on experiment. We have to remember though, that humans are both “dust of the ground” and “a living soul” (Genesis 2:6) which means that the methods of investigation often will have to be mixed. From the axiological point of view it means that the methods of natural sciences, when used to investigate humans, have to be accommodated to take into account the dignity of persons.

Probably most controversial is the problem of investigating the uncreated reality. By definition, God overlooks all the processes of reality. (This does not mean he *determines* them.) God as an *object* of knowledge is a problematic notion because God being God has to be also the *source* of all true knowledge. So, in a short sentence, we could say that *it is impossible to know God without God*. This means he cannot become an object of investigation detached from the operations of the mind of the investigator. If God refuses to be known as just one object of knowledge among many he may confound the efforts to know him. On the other hand, he may unexpectedly reveal himself to people who are not searching for him. This may “save the appearances” or explain the failure of sciences – both natural and the humanities – to prove or disprove his existence. So we have to live with the situation in which some people are absolutely sure of being in communion with God while others are absolutely sure of God’s non-existence.

The “method of investigating” (for the lack of better words) God is *worship*. Worship in the Bible describes a sense of humble awe, loving wonder and willing submission towards God. Strictly speaking, these are just opening conditions for reception of God’s self-revelation which may or may not happen – that depends on God. Although all true cognition can contribute to the knowledge of God, here we speak of spiritual communion that pertains to the attitude of genuine worship. Spiritual experience that may go with such an encounter is often described as mystical, mysterious and beyond words. Some of such encounters

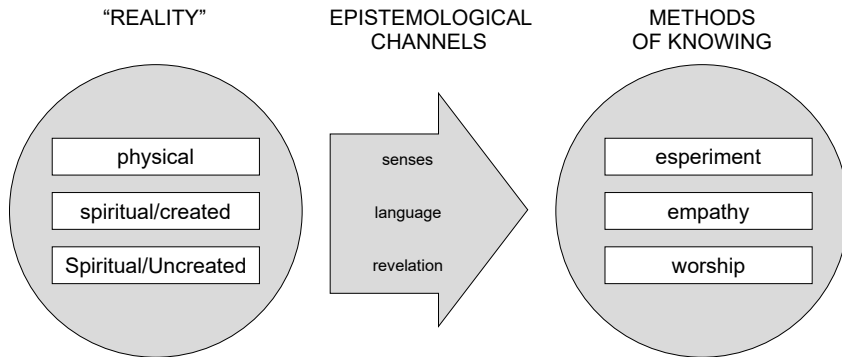
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<sup>53</sup> “Empathy is a process or procedure by which a person centrally imagines the narrative (the thoughts, feelings, and emotions) of another person.” P. Goldie, *The Emotions*, Oxford 2000, Clarendon Press, p. 195.

are described in William James' classic *The Varieties of Religious Experience*.<sup>54</sup> Although much of what is experienced cannot be put in words the presence of what cannot be said comes as undeniable.

In recent years it has become quite frequent to point out that atheism does not preclude spiritual experiences. For example, Sam Harris maintains that spirituality is "...essential for understanding the human mind."<sup>55</sup> This raises the question we have discussed when we talked of "saving the appearances:" which explanation better corresponds with reality? This question has to be answered by each individual according to his/her experience.

We can summarise the axiology of epistemological methods in the following Scheme 1:



**Scheme 1:** Reality and epistemological methods (own resource)

For the hierarchy of values it is a most important fact that it is not arbitrarily created by some social or political force or based just on tradition. This has important consequences not only for epistemology and its methods but also for ethics of scientific research and especially for respectful debates between various branches of science, art and religion.

<sup>54</sup> W. James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, London 2002, Routledge.

<sup>55</sup> S. Harris, *Waking Up: A Guide to Spirituality without Religion*, New York 2014, Simon & Schuster, p. 51.

## 7. Conclusion

An axiological approach to reality purports to show that epistemological methods correspond not only to various problems in science but also to different levels of reality. Reality according to the biblical picture of the world is a series of dualities that are unified by the power and active involvement of the Creator. At the same time, these dualities are ontologically graded and so constitute a foundation for a hierarchy of values.

We can hardly expect that one epistemological theory will sway the whole field of knowledge. But from the epistemologies on the market it is logical to choose the one that in the best way saves the appearances (explains the phenomena). Whatever is our choice we should debate other people's views with respect.

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