THE IDEA OF A CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY

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The vast majority of Christian thinkers through the ages have denied that a distinctly Christian philosophy is possible. As one of them once put it: There is no more a Christian philosophy than there is a Christian mathematics or Christian biology.[1] But there is a tradition of Christian thinkers who came to the opposite conclusion. I'm referring to the Dutch Calvinist line of thought that began in the 19th century with Groen Van Prinsterer (aristocrat & historian, 1801 - 1876), and has included such gifted thinkers as Abraham Kuyper (1837 – 1920), Dirk Vollenhoven (1892 – 1978), and Herman Dooyeweerd (1896 – 1977).

So what is it, exactly, that most Christians have thought impossible that these men held to be a legitimate and needed Christian enterprise? And what reasons could they have had for disagreeing with such a long-standing position of so many fellow-Christians?

Warning:

Before I begin to explain what philosophy is, and why there can be and needs to be a Christian one, you need to know that just because it's Christian and you are a Christian doesn't mean it will sound familiar or comfortable to you. Christian theology may do that, and it should. But a Christian philosophy will not. But if you stick with it, you will see the point of contact between Christianity and the enterprise of philosophy. And you will see how and why Christianity calls for a distinctive strategy for constructing philosophical theories.

What is philosophy?

Philosophy consists mainly of two types of theories: a theory of reality, and a theory of knowledge. The technical name for a theory of reality is "ontology," while the technical name for a theory of knowledge is "epistemology." (Ontology also has the nick-name, "metaphysics.") Saying that these are "theories" means two things. First, they are educated guesses (hypotheses) that we make to explain things, and second that they are highly abstract guesses that require highly abstract reasoning and argument to attack or defend them.[2]

What is sought by an ontology is to specify the *ultimate nature of reality*. Think of it this way: we have disciplines that study many different aspects of the world around us: math, physics, biology, psychology, logic, sociology, economics, ethics, for example. So if all of those disciplines make theories about a distinct aspect of reality, then ontology wants to know what they are all aspects *of*. What is the nature of the reality that is common to them all? Similarly, we have knowledge of different kinds: mathematical, physical, biological, logical, economical, and so on. But epistemology wants to know what is the nature of knowledge that is common to all the particular kinds of it. It wants to discover the conditions under which identifying that nature can show us when we can (or cannot) be certain of a belief, and how to answer the question, "what is truth?".

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[1] Fredrick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy,* (Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, 1960), vol. 2, p. 557.

[2] The works devoted to the philosophy of some field of study such as philosophy of science, philosophy of law, philosophy of history, philosophy of religion, etc., differ from non-philosophical works in those fields by first advocating a theory of reality or knowledge, and then applying it to problems in that special field.

At this point you may feel like asking, Why do we need such theories? Isn't it difficult enough to form theories within specific aspects of reality and knowledge? Why do we also need to have theories that supply an overview of how all the aspects of reality relate to one another?

The answer is that any theory constructed *within* a particular subject matter always assumes some view as to how its subject matter relates to all the other subject matters. In other words, work in a particular field presupposes – even if unconsciously – some view of how it relates to what is outside its field, which amounts to some sort of overview about the nature of reality and/or knowledge. The Dutch Calvinist tradition said that because such philosophical overviews are unavoidable we, as Christians, need to make a concerted effort to be sure those overviews are guided by our belief in God. In that way we may accomplish the purpose of transferring that guidance from the overviews to the theories we make or accept within the various natural and social sciences.

This is an important point about which there has been significant misunderstanding, so it bears repeating: a Christian philosophy is needed in order to give guidance to theory-making within the natural and social sciences: subjects such as math, geometry, kinetics, physics, biology, psychology, logic, history, linguistics, sociology, economics, aesthetics, jurisprudence, and ethics. Dooyeweerd himself put the point this way:

All Christians who in their scientific work are ashamed of the Name of Christ Jesus, because they desire honor among people, will be totally useless ***in the mighty struggle to recapture science, one of the great powers of Western culture, for the Kingdom of God.*** This struggle is not hopeless, however, so long as it is waged in the full armour of faith in Him who has said "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me," and again, "Take heart! I have overcome the world."[3]

What Philosophy Is Not

This means, among other things, that we should not expect a Christian philosophy to yield new knowledge of God beyond what is revealed in God's word. It will not replace or enlarge theology, and it is not the same as theology. Theology formulates into doctrines the teachings revealed in scripture, and proposes views as to how those doctrines are to be related to one another. Philosophy does neither of those things.

Nor will philosophy replace pastoral counselling. It will not, for example, comfort a grieving widow, or aid a person who has just lost his or her job. It is not the same as apologetics; it does not attempt to prove the truth of the Christian Faith nor does it seek to convert unbelievers.[4] As a side-effect it has, at times, helped clear up misunderstandings about certain doctrines of the Faith, but even then that is not its main purpose. Its main purpose remains *to guide Christians who are engaged in making and evaluating theories in the sciences, by giving them a God-guided overview on the nature of reality and knowledge, the benefits of which can then be transmitted to their work within their specific fields.*

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[3] *Christian Philosophy and the Meaning of History,* ed. DFM Strauss. (Lewiston/Queenston/Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1996), 104.

[4] Cornelius Van Til once phrased his objection to Dooyeweerd's work to me this way: "That's no way to present the gospel to unbelievers." On the other hand, a Christian philosophy can have some apologetic value. It can help to expose misunderstandings of Christianity and to rebut criticisms, for example.

Nor is it the case that the hypotheses of a Christian philosophy will automatically be true, or closer to the truth, for being Christian. A Christian philosophy is still a set of *theories;* it therefore remains human guess-work. This is why Dooyeweerd once said to me: "All my theories may need to be changed or abandoned." Above all, it does not mean that a Christian philosophy will take its hypotheses from scripture or theology. It's this assumption that has led to the view that there can be a Christian view of, say, justice or ethics but not of physics or chemistry. The scriptures do contain specific teachings that bear on justice and on ethics (though they don't come within miles of supplying a *theory* of justice or ethics), while they don't say anything whatever about metal stress or chemical valency.

So in what sense can an ontology or epistemology be Christian? The answer is actually simple: there is one sort of error that has infected just about every ontology and epistemology ever made, and which should be ruled out from the start for a Christian because it is incompatible with the belief that God is the creator of everything "visible or invisible" (Col. 1). The sense in which an ontology or epistemology can be Christian, then, is that all its hypotheses (guesses) *must be consistent with the doctrine of creation as Colossians 1 states it.*

So why have most Christian thinkers come to the conclusion that there can be no such thing as a God-guided theory of reality or knowledge? To answer this, we must talk briefly about the beginnings of philosophical thought, that is, about the ancient Greek thinkers who began the task of making theories instead of myths (around 650 B.C.). Early on, they recognized that getting a theory of reality needed to begin with identifying the divine reality. The divine, they said, is whatever is the self-existent reality that all else depends on.[5] Since they were all without access to the scriptures, they ransacked the cosmos for the divine reality and came up with a series of proposals as to what that might be. One of them proposed that the self-existent reality is earth, another that it's air, another that it's fire, and another said it's water. Around 440 BC, Leucippus of Miletus proposed the theory that the stuff the cosmos is made of is tiny invisible and indivisible self-existent particles he called "atoms." And, he suggested, it's how the atoms combine that determines whether they form earth, air, fire, or water.

During this same era another line of thinkers stressed that merely accounting for the stuff everything is made of is not sufficient to explain the nature of the world we experience. Our world isn't merely a random pile of stuff, but is an *ordered* cosmos. Whatever stuff it's made of has to be given order, organization, and definiteness. So, a theory of reality has to include the nature of the self-existent source of the order of the world, as well as of the nature of the stuff that gets ordered. The Pythagoreans, for example, said that numbers were the stuff that gets ordered and that mathematical laws provided the order of everything.[6] The two most influential thinkers of this era were Plato and his student Aristotle. Plato also held that it is mathematical

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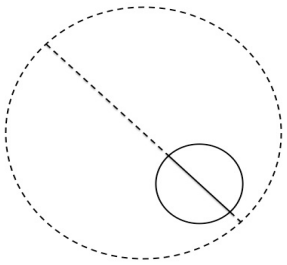
[5] This was Anaximander's definition. See Werner Jaeger's *The Theology of the Early Greek* Philosophers (Oxford: Clarendon Press*,* 1947), 27 – 35; and also Aristotle's *Physics,* 203b and *Meta.* 1064b, 28 – 38. That *something* must be self-existent is obvious. Consider the sum total of reality. This totality must be self-existent either in part or as a whole *because there is nothing else for it to depend upon*. Hinduism and Buddhism say it is the whole that is the self-existent (divine) reality. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam say it is one part that is self-existent: God.

[6] There can be no doubt that the Pythagoreans regarded numbers as the divine (self-existent) reality. Here is their prayer to the number 10: "Bless us, divine number, thou that generatest gods and men! O holy, holy tetraktys, thou that containest the root and source of eternally flowing creation! For divine number begins with the profound, the pure unity until it comes to the holy four; then it begets the mother of all, the all-encompassing, the all-bounding, the first born, the never swerving, never tiring holy ten, the keyholder of all." T Danzig, *Number, The Language of Science* (Garden City, (Garden City, NY,: Doubleday-Anchor, 1954), 42.

laws that order the cosmos, whereas Aristotle held that the nature of the cosmic order is characterized by the axioms of logic.[7] Both of them defended the theory that the world we inhabit is made out of stuff they called "matter," and that it is given its shape and order by what they called rational "Forms."[8]

The Response to Philosophy in Western Christianity

What we first need to notice about these theories, is that they are all pagan or naturalist. They all picked out something in the creation as their candidate(s) for the self-existent (divine) reality rather than the transcendent Creator revealed in scripture. So, if we represent the divine by a solid line and the dependent cosmos by a dotted line, then schematically what they proposed can be illustrated by the following diagram:



Within the dotted circle there is a solid circle (the divine), indicating that the divine is to be found within the cosmos. The solid circle is divided because there are two divine realities, Form and Matter. It is the interaction of the two divine realities that generates everything else, all of which are dependent things that come into being and pass away.[9]

But in Plato's theory, the realm of self-existent Forms included more than just the laws of math and logic. It also included what came to be called "Perfections." This meant that every quality or type of thing we experience on earth is an imperfect copy of its perfect instance in the realm of divine Forms. For example, in our world there are only imperfect instances of green, or square, justice, or a horse. But in the realm of divine Forms, there is the perfect green, the perfect square, perfect justice, and the perfect horse.

Early Christian thinkers of course rejected the idea that anything in the cosmos is the divine creator of the rest of it. Nevertheless, many of them were impressed with Plato's (and later Aristotle's) theories. And some of them – notably St Augustine – thought Plato had actually figured out the biblical idea of God when he (Plato) said that the highest Form is "the God and Father of all things." The theory of Perfections, said Augustine, is the truth.[10] Plato simply didn't

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[7] *Meta.* 1064a. Most philosophers since Plato and Aristotle have taken both the mathematical and the logical laws together to comprise what they call the *rational* order of reality.

[8] Aristotle came to prefer the term "substances" rather than "Forms" for the rational order that organizes matter into knowable objects, and that is the term used by most philosophers since. It connotes the permanent, abiding principle of organization of a thing that remains the same throughout all the changes the thing undergoes.

[9] This interpretation of the schematic drawing is not intended to characterize all ancient philosophy, and still less all philosophy since then. Some ontologies have only one divinity, for example, and many endorse different candidates for divinity whether they endorse one or two.

[10] *City of God,* viii, 6.

know that all the individual perfections are to be found unified in the One True God. But he got it right that there are self-existent perfections, and that they are the nature of the Divine Reality. This theory was developed by Augustine and others who followed him into a theology that defined God – the God of the Bible - as the being with all (and only) perfections. It said that every characteristic of God exists in Him in the highest possible (or "maximal") degree. In Him there is maximal goodness, justice, love, power, knowledge, and whatever other perfections there may be whether we know of them or not. The fact that creatures have imperfect copies of such qualities, is due to God's imparting His qualities to them in a less-than-maximal mode. So this theology defined God as the being with all and only Perfections, and a perfection as the maximal mode of any property that makes something better to have it than to lack it.[11]

In this way, early Christian thought retained the idea that some created entities in the cosmos may be more real than the rest of creation. For surely whenever a creature possesses (even imperfectly) a quality that is a maximal perfection in God, that creature possesses a quality that is uncreated and self-existent. And any quality that is self-existent is more real than any other quality that is not self-existent. The fact that creatures exist and have that quality is a fact created by God; and the fact that the quality imparted is in an imperfect mode is also determined by God. But since it is the *same quality* in both God and the creature, the quality cannot be uncreated in God but created in the creature. (It is an axiom of logic that the same thing cannot be both created and uncreated at the same time in the same sense.) As Aquinas later explained it, the modes in which the quality is possessed by creatures vary and are less than perfect, but the quality we're talking about (the "res significata") is the same.[12] Even in less-than-perfect-modes, then, the qualities of creatures that are also attributes of God are uncreated, and thus more real in creatures than qualities that are not attributes of God.

This means that love, beauty, goodness, and justice, wisdom, etc.– in addition to the laws of math & logic – were not created by God. They just *are* God. And the key point here for philosophy is that when these same qualities occur in creatures in a lesser degree, they are still more real than the rest of creation because the properties of the rest of creation are not uncreated. For example, spatial properties, physical properties, properties of change (motion), biotic properties (healthy, sick, growing), sensory qualities (red, smooth, sweet), and so on, are not perfections.

This is why it seemed to Augustine (and to Anselm and Aquinas after him) that the strategy for explaining the natures of creatures could be the same for Christians as it had been for the pagan and naturalist thinkers before them, namely: some parts of the cosmos are more real than the others, and the less real parts are explained by showing how they depend upon the more real parts.[13]

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[11] The definition is A. Plantinga's. See *God, Freedom, and Evil,* (NY: Harper & Row, 1967), 98. Augustine insisted that all the perfections are identical with God's being, so God does not merely *possess* them, He *is* the unity of them. Anselm and Aquinas followed him on this point.
So far as I know, no one has ever answered the question: why does there have to be a maximal instance of any perfection? Why can't they be like the natural number series which has no last number?

[12] This is a key point in Aquinas' theory of proper proportionality, which he offered to explain how religious language is possible (*S.T.,* I, 13, 15 & 16; *C.G.,* I, 33 & 34, and *De Pot.,* 7, 7). For an excellent exposition of that theory, see JF Ross' "Analogy as a Rule of Meaning in Religious Language" in the *International Philosophical Quarterly,* vol. 1, no. 3, Sept. 1971, pp 468 – 504.

[13] In fact, this strategy for explanation opened the way for more than just the attributes of God to have greater reality than other qualities when they occurred in creatures. This is because God could make some other kinds of properties and laws more real than the rest without their being true of Himself at all. So not only were there in creation self-existent Perfections that creatures share with God, but He could if

The key idea is this: all the rest of creation may be explained as dependent on some one or two kinds of entities in creation, *so long as we add that those entities, in turn, depend on God.* And this strategy for explanation seemed to be not only suggested by, but supported by, the most fundamental Christian doctrine of all: the doctrine of God in which God is understood as the being with all and only Perfections.

This strategy allowed Christian thinkers to adapt virtually any theory to belief in God. For example, Epicurus held that reality is comprised of infinite (and self-existent) space in which an infinite (and self-existent) number of atoms went through every possible combination over an infinite length of time. A Christian could now adapt that theory simply by regarding space and matter as more real than any other aspects of creation, but denying that space and atoms are self-existent by adding that they, in turn, depend on God. He or she could then go on to explain everything else as combinations of atoms. (There are Christian philosophers today who advocate something very close to this position!)

It is this idea of how to do philosophy that has led almost every Christian thinker in the western church to say there's no such thing as a distinctly Christian philosophy. It's because it is always possible for any theory either to regard its ultimate explainers as the components of the cosmos that are divine realities, or to add the claim that they are not divine because they, in turn, depend on God. **This is precisely why most Christians in philosophy still reject the idea that a distinctly Christian philosophy is even possible let alone needed. And It is why they reject in advance Dooyeweerd's work of constructing a Christian ontology.**

So what's wrong with this prevailing idea? It doesn't deify anything in creation and it seems to accommodate virtually any theory anyone could possibly come up with. It allows any theory of reality or knowledge to have belief in God pinned onto the end of it – like the tail on the donkey in the child's birthday party game. Instead of calling for a distinct program of explanation for Christians, it generates a philosophical agenda that was once described to me as "the peaceful view of Aquinas."[14]

The Reformational Objection

Our first objection to this strategy strikes at the heart of it, namely, the claim that something in creation can be what everything else in creation depends on. We say that giving any created reality that status is ruled out by scripture, so that adding that "it in turn depends on God" does not neutralize its anti-Christian character. This is because the N.T. says that everything in creation depends directly on the Divine nature of Jesus Christ alone:

> For by him were all things created that are in the heavens and on the earth, the visible and the invisible… all things have been created through him and for him, and by him all things hang together. (Colossians 1: 16 – 17)

He wished make, say, physical properties to be more real than some other kinds of properties. In that case, if a Christian wanted to keep, some version of the Form/Matter ontology, he could propose that God had made the physical properties of creatures to be more real than, say, biotic and sensory properties, so those could be explained as dependent on (caused by) the physical.

[14] These are the words of Prof Ernan McMullen in a letter to me.

Two quick comments on this text: First: the scope of its claim is everything "visible and invisible," and it's a truism that everything is either visible or it's not. Second, there is not the slightest hint that Paul means to leave open the possibility that anything else could share this status with Christ. In short, there is no created reality that mediates God's creative and sustaining power to the rest of creation. This is because it is Christ in his Divine nature who alone sustains every creature in existence. He alone hangs all things together: not purely physical matter, or rational forms plus matter, or sensory data plus logic, nor any others in the long list of candidates for this status proposed in the history of western philosophy.

This is not, however, a stand-alone point. It is coupled with a doctrine of God that rejects the definition that God is the being with all and only Perfections. Again, please notice that the scope of what Paul says in Colossians is "all things… visible and invisible." Taken at face value, this would require that the attributes of God are also created (they depend on God). They are not self-existent Platonic perfections. God has, on this view, created that there is such a thing as goodness, justice, power, etc., and has taken them into Himself. In fact, Proverbs 8 explicitly asserts this of God's wisdom. So why not understand the other attributes that comprise God's nature the same way?

This is, in fact, the position taken by the Cappadocian Fathers of the Eastern Orthodox Church, and they did so well before Augustine proposed reading Plato's theory into the New Testament. They were: St Basil, bishop of Caesarea, his brother Gregory of Nyssa, and his brother-in-law, Gregory Nazianzus, as well as Basil's sister Macrina. Their theology of God distinguished between God's originating being, which they called God's "essence," and God's manifestations to humans, which they called God's "energies." God's essence, they said, is altogether unknowable; His energies are His actions and relations to humans by which He makes Himself known.

Please notice that saying God created wisdom, goodness, knowledge, and power does not mean there ever was a time He didn't have them. That's because God created time also.[15] So the creation of time, as well as of the attributes of His nature, was independent of time. This means that there never was and never will be a time when God has any nature other than the nature He reveals in scripture. But that nature is, nevertheless, one He created and took into himself independently of time.[16] Basil summed up this position in one pithy remark: "If there are perfections, God created them."

This doctrine of God was re-discovered in the Western Church by Martin Luther and John Calvin in the 16th century, [17] and was re-affirmed by Swiss theologian Karl Barth in the 20th century. Let's start with Luther:

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[15] Heb. 1:2 says God "created the ages of time," while other texts assert that God's plan – and therefore God himself - is "before time": I Cor. 2:6-8,. II Tim. 1:9, Titus 1:2, and Jude 25.

[16] The 14th century theologian, St Gregory Palamas, put the point this way: "[God's] energies do not comprise the being of God; it is he who gives them their existence…God by a superabundance of goodness towards us [although] transcendent over all things, incomprehensible and in-expressible, *consents to become particible [sic] to our intelligence... [and] in his voluntary condescension imposes on himself a really diversified mode of existence."* (Italics mine). Cited from John Meyendorff's, *A Study of Gregory Palamas* (London: Faith Press, 1961), 226.

[17] This doctrine was not, however, supported in the main stream of subsequent Protestant theology which lapsed back into the doctrine of Augustine, Anselm, and Aquinas. That is why I why I call this doctrine of God the Orthodox/ Reformational view.

> …God does not manifest himself except through his works (*energies*) and the Word, because the meaning of these is understood…Whatever else belongs to the Divinity cannot be grasped and understood such as being outside time.[18] (brackets mine)
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> Now God in his own nature and majesty is to be left alone; in this regard we have nothing to do with him, nor does he wish us to deal with him. We have to do with him as clothed by his Word, by which he presents himself to us.[19]

Calvin is just as clear:

> …in the enumeration of his perfections, [God] is revealed not as he is in himself, but in relation to us…Every perfection [ascribed] to God may be contemplated in creation; and, hence, such as we feel him to be when experience is our guide, such he declares himself to be in his word. (*Inst.,* I, x, 2)[20]
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> The Lord is manifested by his perfections…Hence…in seeking God, the most direct path…is not to attempt with presumptuous curiosity to pry into his essence… but to contemplate him in his works [*energies*], by which he draws near, becomes familiar, and in a manner communicates himself to us. (*Inst.,* I, v, 9) (brackets added)

Here is the way Barth put the same position:

> … the object of divine action in the Incarnation is man. God's free decision is and remains a gracious decision; God becomes man, the word becomes flesh. The Incarnation means… a real and complete descent of God, *God actually became what we are*, in order actually to exist with us… for us… and so actually, in our place, in our situation and position to be the new man. It is not in His eternal majesty – in which he is and remains hidden from us – but as this new man, and therefore the word in the flesh, that God's Son is God's revelation to us and our reconciliation with God. *Just for that reason faith cannot look past His humanity… the cradle… the cross… in order to see Him in His Divinity.* Faith in the eternal word of the Father is faith in Jesus of

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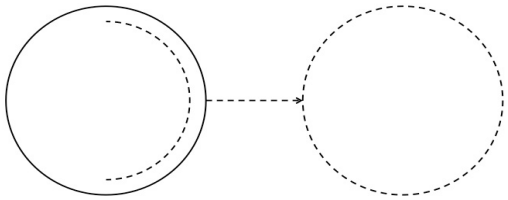
18 "Lectures on Genesis" in *Luther's Works,* ed. J. Pelikan (St Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1958), vol. 1, 11.

19 J. Dillenberger's *Martin Luther* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1961), 191.

liv Two comments are needed here. The first is that although Calvin retains the term "perfections" for God's attributes, it should be clear that he is not using the term to connote the maximal instance of a necessarily existing "great-making" quality. That should be obvious simply from the fact that he regards them as attributes God has "in relation to us" rather than as Perfections of which God's own being is the unity. The second is that I wouldn't say "every" perfection scripture ascribed to God is in relation to us. Many are; but some are not, such as the mutual love of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Nazareth or it is not the Christian faith.[21] (Italics mine)

I call this the "Incarnational model" for understanding God's attributes: Just as in the Incarnation God took into Himself the entire (created) person of Jesus Christ, so too that is the way in which God eternally acquired the (created) attributes that comprise His revealed nature. It is why Calvin speaks of "the nature in which [God] is *pleased to manifest himself*" (*Inst*. iii, 2, 6), rather than speaking of an uncreated nature He cannot help but have. The schematic representing this idea looks like this:



How Does This Difference Impact Theories?

If there is no created reality that is basic to the existence of all other created things – no "substance" in the universe whether created by God or not – that fact alone sets a distinctive agenda for theory-making that had never been tried until Dooyeweerd's theory of reality. All ontologies up until his had attempted to find *within creation* the kind of entities that are either all there is or are what the rest of creation depends on, whether or not they also attempted to baptize their proposals with the formula that those entities, in turn, depend on God.

By contrast, Dooyeweerd's theory begins by regarding *every* kind of property and all the laws in the cosmos as directly created and sustained by God, the laws of rationality included. None are more real than any others, because all depend entirely and directly on God. What gives to things and to their properties the orderliness they exhibit, are the laws God has built into creation. And what sustains both the laws and the things that exist and function under those laws, is the power of God. Moreover, that Divine power, says Colossians 1, is mediated to creation *only* by the Divine Son of God, Jesus Christ.

In philosophy, the term for theories of reality that argue for something in creation to be the explanation of all the rest of creation are called "reduction" arguments.[22] The term is intended to convey that things of a particular nature (mathematical, physical, sensory, logical, etc.), are either: 1) all there is, or 2) are what produce everything else. So the Christian agenda for theories of reality or knowledge - the agenda that takes seriously Colossians 1 - can be said to be that of constructing theories that are entirely "non-reductionist."[23]

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[21] *Credo,* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1936), 66.

[22] The denial of causality between one entire kind of properties-and-laws and another, is to be understood globally not locally. For sure, heating a copper wire causes it to glow green, for example. But hot copper wires are not the reason there are such things as green glows in the cosmos.

[23] Some of the more frequently employed senses of reduction are as follows:

A. Hard Reduction

One of the consequences of such an ontology is that while it gives an account of the distinctive natures of types of created things – everything from atoms and animals to family, state, and church – it does not offer any such proposal about the nature of creation as a whole.

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1. Eliminative Reduction. The nature of reality is exclusively that of aspect X, so that all things have only properties of kind X and are governed only by laws of kind X. This is not defended by claiming that the terms used for non-X properties are equivalent in meaning to X terms, or that the seemingly non-X properties are in fact identical with X properties. Instead the entire experience of non-X things and/or properties is dismissed as totally illusory, on the ground that it is able to be ignored in favor of speaking of, and dealing with, reality only in the terms of the science of X. (Paul Churchland has used this method for defending materialism.)

2. Meaning Replacement. The nature of reality is exclusively that of aspect X so that all things have only properties of kind X and are governed only by laws of kind X. This is defended by arguing that all the *terms* supposed to have non-X meaning can be replaced by X-terms without loss of meaning, while not all X-terms can be replaced by non-X terms without loss of meaning. (Berkeley, Hume, and Ayer used this strategy to defend phenomenalism.)

3. Factual Identity. The nature of reality is exclusively that of aspect X, so that all things have properties of only aspect X and are governed only by the laws of aspect X. This is defended by arguing that although the meaning of non-X terms *cannot* be replaced with only X-terms without loss of meaning, such terms may *reference* only X-things all the same. The selection of the kind(s) of terms that correspond both extensionally and intentionally to the nature of reality is then defended on the basis of explanatory superiority: the argument tries to show that for anything whatever, the only or best explanation is always one whose primitive terms and laws are of the X kind. (JJC Smart defended materialism this way.) More recent theories try to regard non X properties as identical with *functions* that are purely X, rather than with specific things or events that appear to be non X.

B. Soft Reduction

1. Causal Dependency. The nature of reality is basically that of aspect X (or of aspects X and Y). It is the X-ness of things that makes possible and actual the other kinds of properties and laws that are true of reality as experienced pre-theoretically. So while non-X properties are real, and can be proper objects of scientific investigation, there is a one-way causal dependency between non-X aspects and aspect X. The non-X aspect could not exist without X, while X can exist without any others. (Aristotle and Descartes both defended theories in which certain aspects were the nature of “substance,” and properties of all other kinds were accidental or secondary to substances.)

2. Epiphenomenalism. This version is much like causal dependency, except that the non-X aspects are thought to be much less real – similarly to the way a mirror image relates to its object. They exist, but they do not have their own laws, nor do they exert causal effects. This they are not proper objects of scientific investigation. All genuine explanations must therefore be given in terms of X only properties and laws. (Huxley and Skinner argued that states of consciousness are epiphenomena that depend upon bodily processes or behavior.)

These strategies are not mutually exclusive and can be combined in various ways within the same theory of reality.

That is because, from this viewpoint, creation as a whole cannot be characterized by any one or two of its aspects (kinds of properties and laws). It is not more basically physical, or physical/ mathematical, or sensory, or sensory/logical, etc. *That is because the most basic nature of the universe is to depend on God.*

This is what Herman Dooyeweerd did. He constructed a theory of reality that offers an account of the diverse natures of types of creatures without resorting either to the hypothesis that all creatures are really of the same kind, or the hypothesis that all the rest of creation is produced by created entities of one or two particular kinds. Instead, he took all the aspects we encounter in everyday experience to have been real from the beginning of creation, and all individual things to have (some) properties of every aspectual kind.[24] He then distinguished the laws that hold among the properties of each aspect (aspectual universality) from the type laws[25] that hold across aspects and make possible the combinations of properties that typify classes of individuals (laws for individual entities). His theory also recognizes the way a particular aspect can more centrally qualify (characterize) the nature of a thing, and shows how our intuitive grasp of those natures can be confirmed (or not) by the way the laws of the qualifying aspect govern the internal organization of things of a particular type when each is considered as a whole. Thus his theory recognizes (at least) three sorts of laws: 1. Laws that hold among all the properties of a given aspect, 2. Laws that hold across aspects to make possible types of individuals, and 3. causal laws which are themselves multi-aspectual events and, like individual things, have varying qualifying functions.

In this way, Dooyeweerd provided fellow-Christians with a theory of reality by which they can carry its non-reductionist agenda into theories in each of the scientific disciplines.

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[24] Some scientists (e.g., Hawking and Krauss) have suggested that for quite a while after the Big Bang there were no laws whatever other than universal gravitation. Apparently they don't realize that if there were no logical laws to which that era of the universe was subject (passively), it could not now be logically distinguished by us. Similarly, if no mathematical laws applied to that era, nothing about it could now be so much as counted, let alone calculated.

[25] Dooyeweerd's own term for these laws was "individuality structures." But that term seemed to connote the individuals rather than the laws which made each type of them possible.