

Integrative Truth: Ontological Existence and Epistemological Challenge

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Many individuals and groups seek truth in many different ways. Two such disciplines for pursuing truth are psychology and Christianity. This paper provides a beginning perspective on integrating these disciplines in order to approach truth. A description of how one comes to know truth begins the discussion, operating within a modified postmodern worldview and epistemology that mirrors the Wesleyan Quadrilateral. Following is a proposed model for integrating different sources of truth by selectively utilizing different integratory processes. Lastly, a personal application of this model is provided with regard to my desired work in urban and regional planning.

How One Comes to Know Truth on the Worldview or Epistemological Level

A triangle has three sides.

Water boils at 212 degrees Fahrenheit.

Serotonin, dopamine, oxytocin, and other neurochemicals compose the biological basis of love (Zeki, 2007).

Each of these statements is fact, but do they carry the same weight as truth? In the discussion of truth and how one comes to know it, facts don't tell us much; it is the interpretations and theories that ultimately shape truth. Epistemology, the study of knowledge, describes how one may come to know truth. Each epistemological view, however, is merely another set of interpretations. These interpretations, in turn, are based on a particular worldview. It is our worldviews, then, that ultimately shape how we come to know and arrive at truth. In this section, the postmodern worldview that frames my Wesleyan epistemology will be discussed.

Jacques Derrida, a French philosopher, provides some of the most preeminent thoughts behind postmodernism, epitomized by the notion that nothing exists outside the

text (Smith, 2006). This axiom is commonly misinterpreted to suggest that the whole world is some kind of book, waxing on metaphysical idealism. More properly interpreted, this axiom is a response to the philosophy of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (Smith, 2006).

Rousseau argues that language is a barrier to the real world; it is a lens, or more critically, a filter through which we experience things (Smith, 2006). As language categorizes everyday experiences, people interact more with the medium (language) than the object or experience itself. Instead of experiencing the world through the proxy of language, Rousseau advocates for a more immediate experience of nature in which things are not interpreted through language but are instinctively known. The assumption that we can know things for what they purely and objectively are - without interpretation - reveals the modernism inherent in Rousseau's philosophy. Derrida's quote, "There is nothing outside the text" thus suggests that everything is exposed to the interpretative nature of language (Derrida, 1976, p. 158; quoted in Smith, 2006). There is nothing outside of interpretation and we cannot directly and objectively experience things. Instead, we have intrinsic presuppositions that guide our interpretative thinking.

No sets of beliefs are free from Derrida's claim. Atheistic thinking is ground upon presuppositions. Secular science is ground upon presuppositions (Percy & Thaxton, 1994). Christian thinking is ground upon presuppositions. Since true objectivity does not exist, it is crucial to recognize these presuppositions and what influences them.

Context, sin, and the Holy Spirit frame the presuppositions influencing the ubiquitous process of interpretation (Smith, 2006). With regard to context, Derrida established that community plays one of the most significant roles of interpretation, establishing a norm to govern interpretation. Communities help stabilize contexts to

permit interpretative cohesion among a collection of individuals (Smith, 2006). Those who think within the Christian worldview have several notions to add, however.

The *noetic effects of sin* is a theological phrase that refers to the intellectual consequences of man's fallenness (Entwistle, 2010, p. 74). Smith adds that a prominent noetic effect of sin is the distortion of good interpretation (2006). What can redeem humankind's fallen interpretations is the light of the Holy Spirit, however (Smith, 2006). In a postmodern world in which everything is bound to capricious interpretation, community and the Holy Spirit provide an interpretive worldview to approach truth.

Given this context, my postmodern approach to truth comes out of my interpretative qualities based on a Christian worldview. This position allows for modern science to approach truth, adopting the following tenets from Percy and Thaxton (1994):

- Nature is real (unlike Hinduism)
- God made creation well – it is worth studying
- Made in the image of God, humans can transcend nature and view it as a subject
- A single, rational, and orderly God created a cohesive and lawful world
- The world exists in God's rationality, not human rationality, albeit much overlap

These basic presuppositions support empirical reasoning as a means of reaching truth but also recognize the limits of human reasoning as well. These tenets support only the presuppositions of science and empirical fact, however. With regard to spiritual, moral, and human truth, these statements describe my presuppositions:

- Made in the image of God, humans are social beings and each have intrinsic value
- The Holy Spirit exists and can influence our behavior, attitudes, and feelings
- The noetic effects of sin distort and limit our understanding of truth
- Because of the redemptive act of Christ, we have the grace to study truth
- The Holy Scriptures are infallible
- All truth is God's truth: the unity of truth

With these presuppositions as a foundation, my current beliefs about coming to know truth are very similar to the theological methodology of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral

(Outler, 1964). The four sources of truth that comprise the Wesleyan Quadrilateral are *Scripture, tradition, reason, and personal experience*. Wesley posited that Scripture was preeminent, taking precedent over any conflict. I believe that each element is equally important as a source of God's truth, however, and are also subject to the same fallible process of interpretation.

Scripture and reason easily fit into the presuppositions bulleted above. Tradition, I value as a source of truth because it reflects the beliefs and rituals of the community. Tradition helps provides a communal stability to interpretations, but must also interact with the other corners of the Quadrilateral. Personal experience affords the more subjective aspects of postmodern thought and contributes to my personal epistemology.

Now that a beginning description of how one may come to know truth has been given, I believe that, unlike postmodern thought, a single unified truth *ontologically exists* but is *epistemologically untenable* because of the noetic effects of sin. Within these constraints, I maintain belief in the existence of a unity of truth, but if different sources from the Wesleyan Quadrilateral contradict each other, two possible outcomes are afforded: (a) if there is enough confidence, one interpretation may replace an inferior interpretation, bringing us closer to a unity of truth. The other alternative is (b) to regard the conflict as a temporary quandary, currently ungraspable by our limited human comprehension, a temporary impasse to the unity of truth. This impasse is temporary until human reason or God's divine grace intercedes in the process of good interpretation.

To illustrate this, two curves would start from different sides of a plane and tangentially converge towards the top of the plane (see Figure 1 below). The bottom of the shape reflects perception and is wide because of the diversity of perception (not just

through the five senses, but from different angles, views, social positions, etc.). The space between the lines represents plurality of truth and the vertical narrowing represents convergence towards a unified truth. What helps to consolidate and vertically advance perceptions towards a unified truth is the process of interpretation. The two curves never touch, however, and remain tangential because of the noetic effects of sin. Although the grace of Christ permits us to work towards truth, because of our fallenness, we cannot reach truth while on this earth. Because the lines are tangential, however, it reflects the notion that although we cannot reach the truth, efforts can bring our understanding ever closer to united truth.

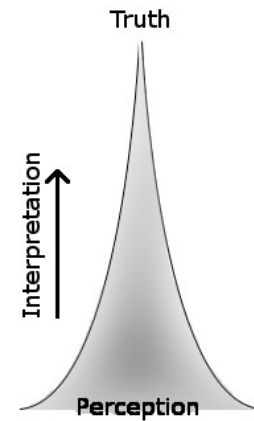


Figure 1: A graphical illustration of how one may come to approach knowledge of truth

These presuppositions and epistemological sources adapted from postmodern thought and the Wesleyan Quadrilateral inform how I believe one comes to know truth on a worldview or epistemological level. Ultimately, coming to know truth depends on a good set of presuppositions (or a worldview), informed by one's community and the Holy Spirit; these presuppositions guide good interpretation; and good interpretation chips away at the unified truth within all experiences and observations.

Self Critique

This section turned out to be the hardest but most rewarding to develop and articulate. Having wrestled with postmodern thought and my faith for three years, it was exceedingly rewarding to come to terms with these seemingly incompatible beliefs.

At this point, I feel pretty confident about what I wrote, but it is mostly because of the authors that have influenced it and have come before me. Smith's interpretation of

Derrida and postmodernism was especially helpful. An area of growth would be the defense of the ontological existence of the unity of truth. An area I cannot yet answer is how to precisely treat conflicts between interpretations. Because of this, I conceded that certain conflicts are unresolvable until human reasoning advances or God's grace further intercedes. This concession may be considered a cop-out, but I am currently satisfied.

Dynamic Integration Model

Considering the postmodern context of this paper, the proposed model is significantly more flexible and broad than traditional models, such that it may be thought of as a meta-model. As such, I will describe the current meta-model as a *model* and the traditional models, such as Eck's *Unifies* or *Transforms* model, as *processes* (1996). These terms will be utilized for the remainder of this paper. Following criteria suggested by Eck, certain processes are more appropriate for certain types of data (1996). This section examines how a beginning dynamic integration model utilizes criteria inspired by Eck to apply suitable processes for each integration situation.

In a seminal article that attempts to integrate the integrators, Eck begins with three areas in need of agreement for integration to progress: (a) the definition of integration, (b) what is admissible data, and (c) what processes can be utilized for integration (1996). Although I believe that it is important to agree upon (a) the definition or goal for integration, I would argue that agreement is not necessary for (b) what is considered admissible data or (c) what processes can be utilized for integration. Instead, like Derrida's emphasis on recognizing presuppositions but not having to agree on a single *correct* presupposition, I don't think agreement upon a single mode of data or processes is required. For example, I do not think that integrators need to agree that Scriptural data

is the supreme admissible data (most likely a fundamental Christian presupposition).

Between the lines, Eck seems to intend expressing the need for agreement *upon what the different understandings or presuppositions* are, rather than an agreement upon a single understanding or set of presuppositions.

Considering the meta-presuppositions of the dynamic integration model, the acceptance of different data types and processes of integration is broader (so long as the presuppositions of each are recognized). Although it is broader, however, certain integration processes are more appropriate for certain integration situations within the dynamic integration model. Eck suggests a multiperspectival approach to integration as well, reflecting its consistency “with the growing trend toward a postmodern research paradigm” (Eck, 1996, p. 235). This multiperspectival approach is further described as being contingent upon the type of data and methodology utilized in each discipline. Certain domains within each discipline conceptually correspond better than others, in which case Eck’s *Unifies* model would be most appropriate (1996). In other domains, the data and concepts between the disciplines fail to sufficiently correspond. Less integrative models may be more appropriate, in that case. Lastly, as Eck suggests, data that is poorly supported from one discipline should not necessarily be integrated (1996). Eck provides additional criteria for determining an appropriate integration process, such as whether a particular area of knowledge can be incarnationally lived out (1996).

The dynamic integration model borrows heavily from Eck’s different integration processes: the *rejects*, *reconstructs*, *transforms*, *correlates*, and *unifies processes* (see Eck, 1996). The dynamic integration model simply attempts to recognize the presuppositions in the constructs and data in order to most appropriately integrate the

disciplines. The ideal integratory process would be unifies, as it is the closest to reaching God's united truth. Due to the noetic effects of sin, however, sometimes integration must settle for less integrated processes because of different data type or methods.

Self Critique

This section was not as strong as I would like it to be, but then again it is only a beginning model of integration. I think the weakest aspect that can use the most development is how one determines which integration process is most appropriate. I suggest some basic criteria (borrowed heavily from Eck, 1996), but I do not go very far in describing how to use these criteria to determine an appropriate integration process.

Additionally, I am concerned about misreading Eck's text with regard to my dissention on his three areas needing agreement. Lastly, the heavy reliance on Eck's models is weak, but because of the constraints of length and time, this decision seemed acceptable. Hopefully the reader can enlighten himself or herself by reading the great article.

Personal Application of the Dynamic Integration Model

There seem to be two domains of truth to be integrated when personally applying this model: the domain of logical truths and of spiritual, moral, and human truths. After graduating at APU, I plan to pursue a master's degree in urban and regional planning at UC Irvine. There is vast opportunity for the integration of urban and regional planning with Christianly thinking. This section explores the integration of urban and regional planning with Christianly thinking in the domain of logical truths and spiritual, moral, and human truths.

Within the domain of logical truths, the unifies process fits very well. Based on the epistemology briefly described in the first section, Christian beliefs fit very well with logical thinking. In particular, the rationality of God and the lawfulness of his creation afford logic and mathematics their valuable (and mysteriously useful) application. Within urban and regional planning, much logistical and statistical work helps to develop a factual and quantitative understanding of civic needs.

Beyond the integration of logic and Christianly thinking, studies of more abstract human needs integrate well between empirical data and Christian data. For example, the need of green space in cities finds its place within the unifies process of the dynamic integration model because both empirical research and the biblical emphasis on the connection between man and creation integrate nicely (e.g. Psalm 19:1-4). On the other hand, implications of the imago dei aspect of Christianly thinking can conflict with secular thinking about city planning and design. Some philosophies suggest that supporting the poor and marginalized individuals in a society contradicts progress (i.e. Herbert Spencer's social Darwinism). In this case, the unifies integration process would not be appropriate. Perhaps the rejects process would be more fitting. The secular presuppositions of social Darwinism are incompatible with orthodox Christian presuppositions. However, the majority of the community seems to support presuppositions more akin to the Christian position, suggesting that the Christian presuppositions and interpretation of the issue may have more validity.

These examples illustrate how the dynamic integration model applies to different situations. Following the adapted postmodern notion that truth is ontologically feasible but epistemologically untenable, this integration model seems to push towards truth.

Self Critique

In writing this section, a motivating question was “Why will my Christian faith be important in my career?” To attempt answering this, I think it supports common presuppositions about logical thinking but also provides well-supported presuppositions about spiritual, moral, and human truth that are not available from other worldviews. These aspects are harder to unite within God’s unity of truth, however, because Christian truths are often a different modality of truth than secular empirical truths. The presuppositions of Christianly thinking, however, do provide a well-supported and helpful lens in order to discern the truth about what is best for a community and how to be a good urban and regional planner.

Conclusion

This short paper has introduced a beginning epistemology, integration model, and personal application. The meditations on these topics are the first attempts at articulating very grand and ambitious issues and are expected to change and be refined. Several influential thoughts have guided this paper, however, and will be summarized.

Truth is ontologically feasible but is epistemologically untenable because of the pervasiveness of interpretation and the noetic effects of sin. Good presuppositions can guide good interpretation; however, and at this point I believe that Christian presuppositions, or a Christian worldview, are the most fitting, personally. With recognition of these presuppositions, different integration processes best serve certain types of data and worldviews, according to the dynamic model of integration. Lastly, this model of integration affords an adaptive personal application for a professional career in urban and regional planning.

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