

FOREWORD BY TIMOTHY KELLER

BIBLICAL CRITICAL THEORY

How the Bible's Unfolding Story Makes Sense
of Modern Life and Culture



CHRISTOPHER
WATKIN

A PDF COMPANION TO THE AUDIOBOOK

ZONDERVAN ACADEMIC

Biblical Critical Theory

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INTRODUCTION

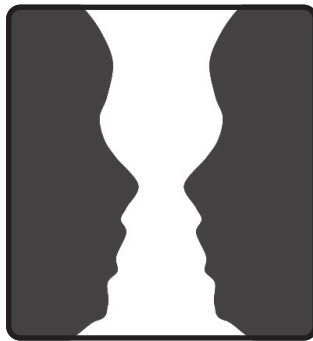


Figure 1: Optical Illusion

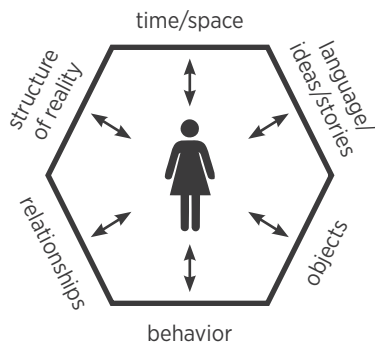


Figure 2: Figuration Totale

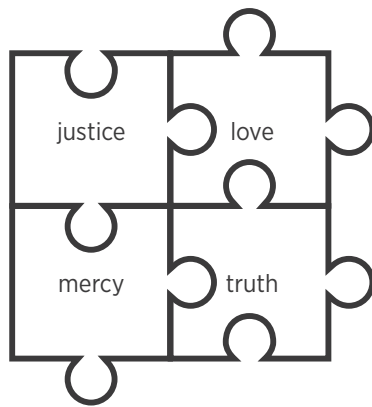


Figure 3: Complex Biblical Reality



Figure 4: False Cultural Dichotomy

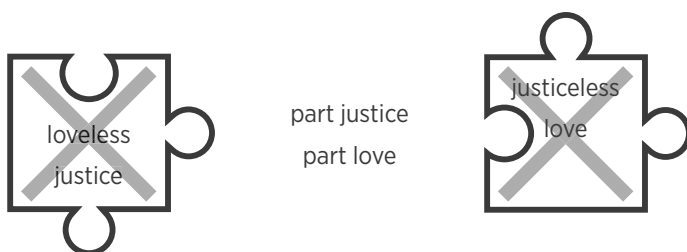


Figure 5: Unsatisfying Cultural Compromise

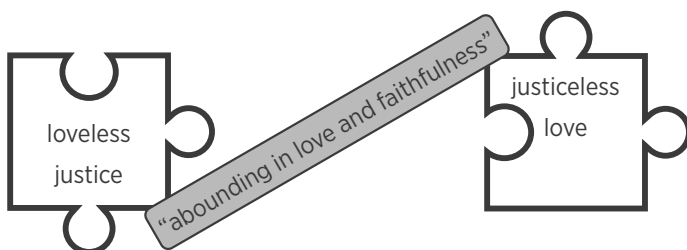


Figure 6: Diagonalization

Part 1: critique of Roman religion and philosophy	Part 2: the story of the two cities from Genesis to Revelation
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Figure 7: Two Parts of the *City of God*



Figure 8: Structure of the Present Volume

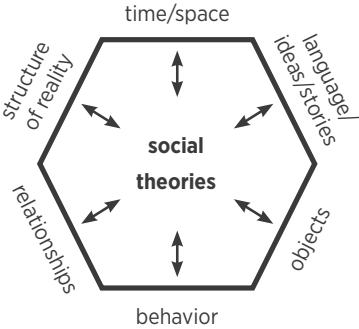


Figure 9: Social Theories

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. **Hot Take:** Quickly write down your top three takeaways from this chapter. Don't think about it, just write what first comes into your head.
2. What features do different cultural and social theories have in common?
3. Briefly describe *figures* and *worlds* as the terms are used in this book.
4. "A biblical social and cultural theory is both possible and important today if we are to refresh the agenda for Christian cultural engagement in our generation." What reasons are given for such a claim? Do you agree or disagree with them, and why?
5. "Trying to separate Christianity from culture is like trying to extract the flour from a baked cake." Explain this claim. Do you agree or disagree, and why?
6. In your opinion, what are the five most important bullet points to explain "diagonalization."

TRINITY

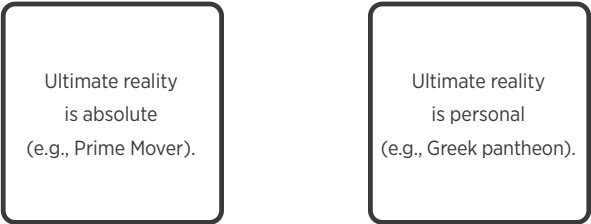


Figure 10: Absolute-Personal Dichotomy

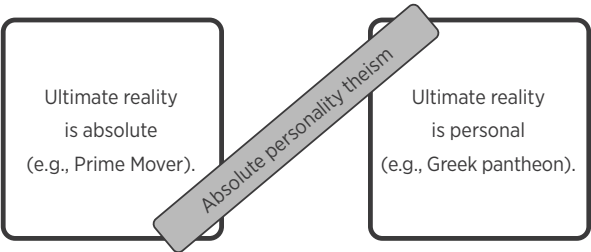


Figure 11: Absolute-Personal Dichotomy Diagonalized

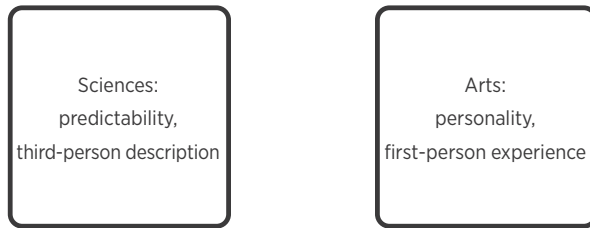


Figure 12: Science-Art Dichotomy

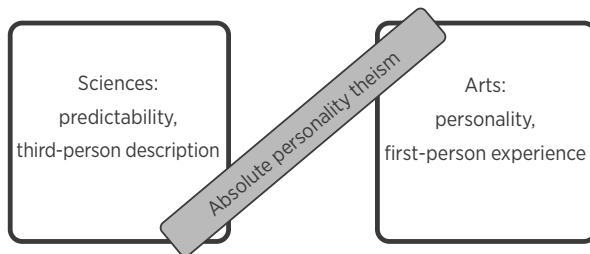


Figure 13: Science-Art Dichotomy Diagonalized

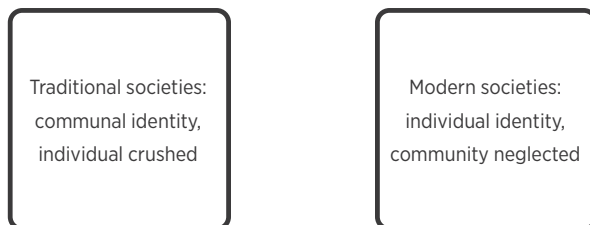


Figure 14: Traditional-Modern Dichotomy

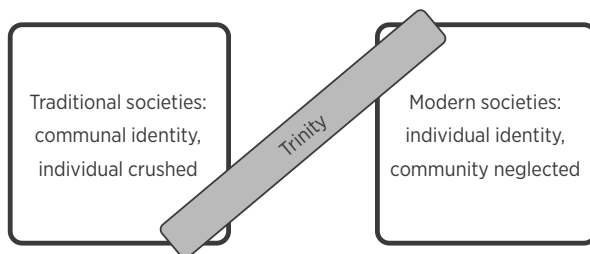


Figure 15: Traditional-Modern Dichotomy Diagonalized

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. **HOT TAKE:** Take one thought from this chapter and write a note that will travel back in time to *yourself* five years ago. The note begins “You really need to think about this because . . .”
2. “We commit a grave error when we put the doctrine of the Trinity in the ‘too hard’ or ‘too controversial’ box of Christian doctrines.” Why?
3. Explain in your own words the difference between living in a universe where everything personal reduces to the impersonal and living in a universe where everything impersonal is transfigured by its personal origin.
4. When theologians say that biblical religion is an absolute personality theism, what do they mean?
5. How does the biblical God provide the basis for both the sciences and the arts?
6. How does the Trinity diagonalize the overemphases of both traditional and modern views of society?
7. How does the Trinity address the problem identified by postmodern thinkers like Derrida that language is violent?
8. How is biblical loving-power different to the brute power of Roman law and modern social theory?

CREATION

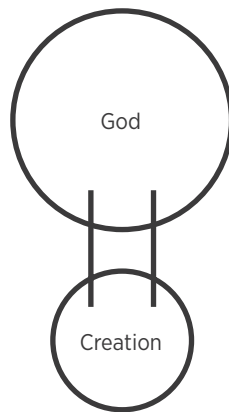


Figure 16: The Creator-Creature Distinction

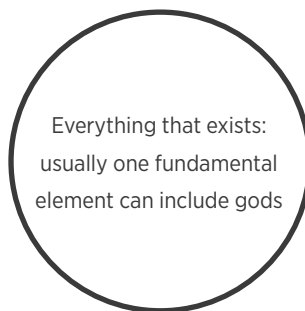


Figure 17: A Monistic,
One-Circle View of the World

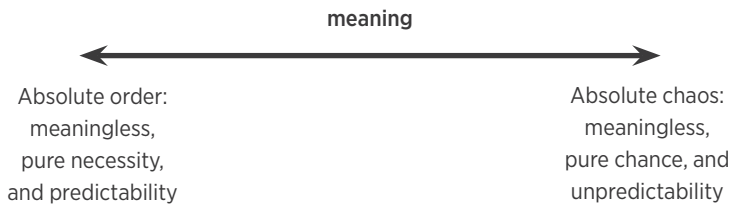


Figure 18: Meaning Spectrum

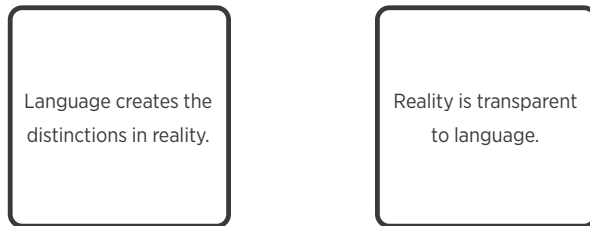


Figure 19: Language-Reality Dichotomy

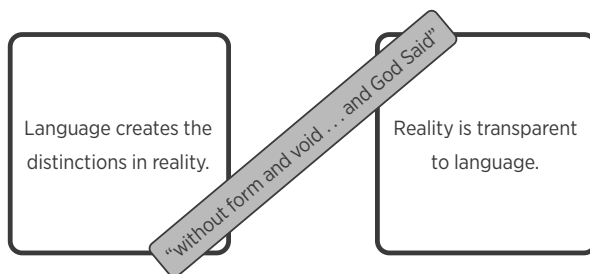


Figure 20: Language-Reality Dichotomy Diagonalized

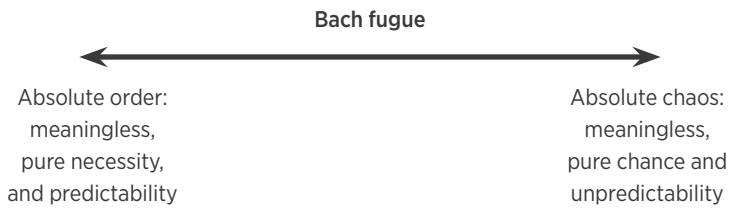


Figure 21: Order and Chaos of a Bach Fugue

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. **HOT TAKE:** Summarize this chapter in ten words exactly.
2. What difference does it make that the universe has a beginning?
3. Why is the creator-creature distinction important for a Christian understanding of reality?
4. How do biblical ideas of transcendence and immanence differ from their extrabiblical namesakes?
5. In what ways is the *tohu wabohu* of Genesis 1 a cultural and natural threat today?
6. Describe the significance of the “enchanted-embodied” world of Genesis 1.
7. “The universe is not a slap-dash, careless affair, but neither is it a straightjacketed, regimented geometry of absolute order.” Explain.
8. In what way is sabbath observance a practice of resistance today?

HUMANITY

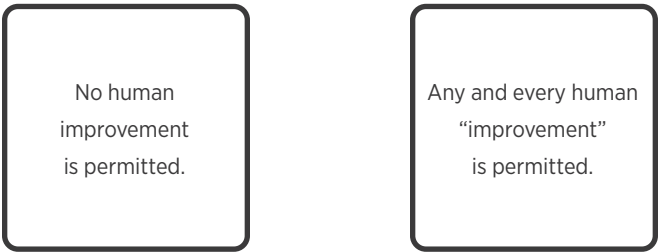


Figure 22: Nature-Improvement Dichotomy

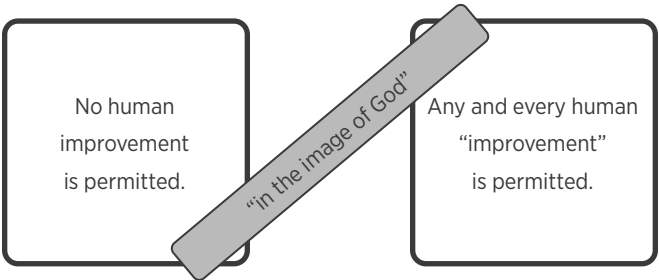


Figure 23: Nature-Improvement Dichotomy Diagonalized

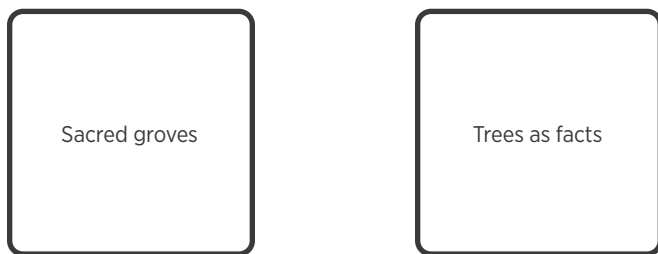


Figure 24: White's Dichotomy

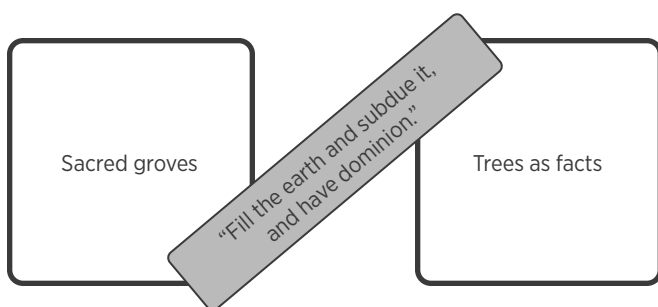


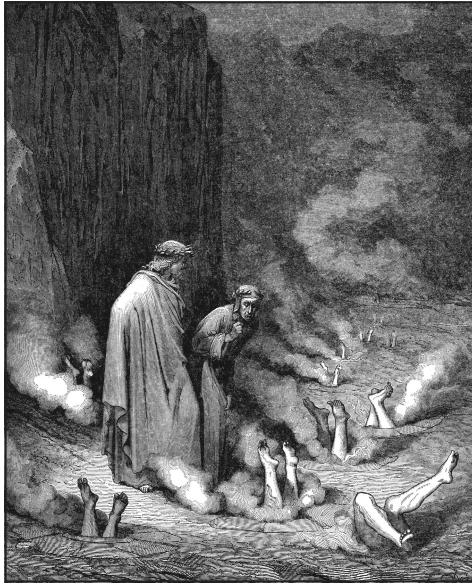
Figure 25: White's Dichotomy Diagonalized

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. **HOT TAKE:** Explain the main points of this chapter to an intelligent ten-year-old. You have one minute and your time starts now.
2. In what ways are Adam and Eve like the other creatures in Genesis 1 and 2, and in what ways are they different?
3. “The Value, or WORTH of a man, is as of all other things, his Price; that is to say, so much as would be given for the use of his Power.”¹
In what ways does the biblical account of humanity challenge Thomas Hobbes’s understanding of human worth?
4. How does the image of God motif express both the unity and the diversity of humanity?
5. “A Christian philosophy of meaning could do worse than to begin with a meditation on Adam’s naming of the animals.” How so?
6. How do the biblical commands to “have dominion” and “rule” avoid both exploitation and veneration of nature?

1. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 63. Emphasis original.

SIN AND SOCIETY



Gustave Doré, *The Inferno*, canto xix

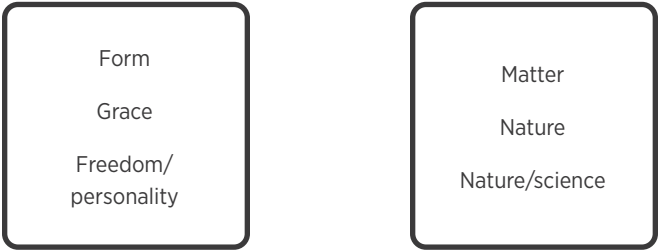


Figure 26: Three Dichotomous Ground Motives

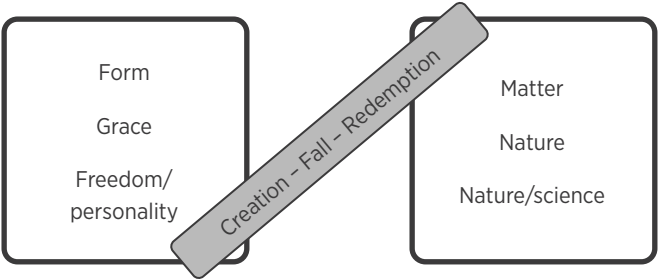


Figure 27: Three Dichotomous Ground Motives Diagonalized

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. **HOT TAKE:** If your memory of this whole chapter is about to be wiped in ten seconds' time but you can only keep one thought from it, what would you choose to keep and why?
2. In your own words, what are the main reasons why the Bible's account of sin is one of the "great overlooked resources for cultural engagement"?
3. "Making more of sin is good for society." Why so?
4. In what ways might we consider Satan's approach to Eve to be a "noble lie," and where do we see noble lies in society today?
5. Do you agree that sin is a foundation of equality, dignity, and democracy? State your reasons.
6. How do thinkers like Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche develop the theme that human beings "suppress the truth by their wickedness" (Rom 1:18)?
7. Imagine you are giving a five-minute class presentation on how modern society and the Bible present the fault line between good and evil. What would you include?
8. What is the Bible's distinctive take on the logic of victims, oppressors, and liberators?

SIN AND AUTONOMY

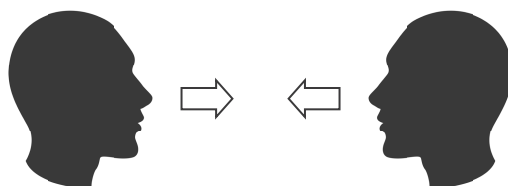


Figure 28: Human Symmetry

Symmetry: the ontological equality between any two people means that neither has the inherent right to command the other.

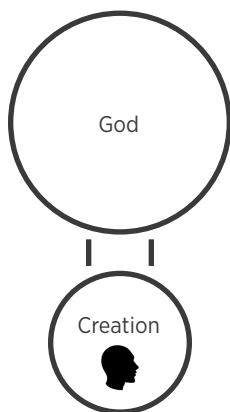


Figure 29: Human Asymmetry

Asymmetry: God is not my ontological equal.
His command upholds my being moment by moment.

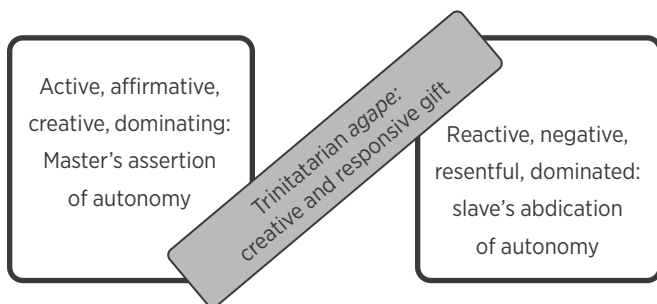


Figure 30: Trinitarian *Agapē*

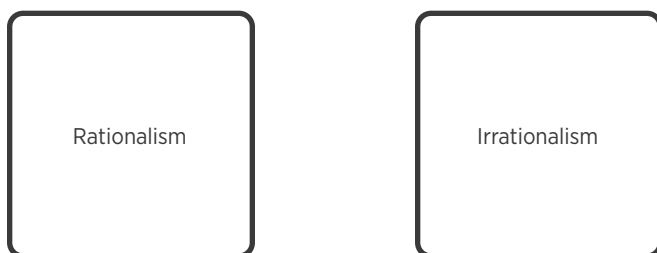


Figure 31: Rational-Irrational Dialectic

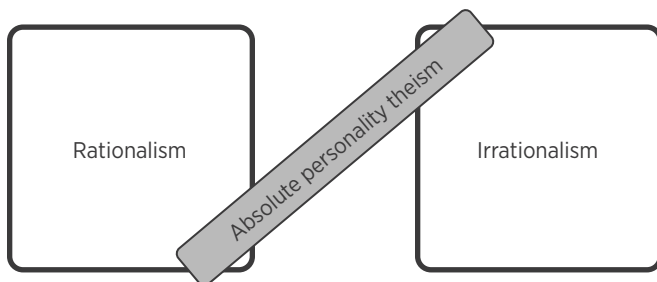


Figure 32: Absolute Personality Theism

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. **HOT TAKE:** Think of one friend or family member who might be encouraged or helped by something in this chapter. Compose an email or message to them right now that begins “Hey, I’ve just read this and thought I’d share it with you . . .”
2. What is meant by *autonomy* in this chapter? Why is it such an important dogma for the Enlightenment? What are some of the main points to make in a biblical assessment of the concept of human autonomy?
3. Explain the significance for our understanding of autonomy that “the God-human relationship is inassimilable to a human-human relationship.”
4. What is the *rational-irrational dialectic*, and what are its implications for modern thought?
5. According to this chapter, why does an insistence on autonomy foster the ethic of violence? Do you agree or disagree, and why?
6. How does the Bible’s account of Christ’s relationship with the Father expose the shallowness of modern ideas of autonomy?

SIN, ANTHROPOLOGY, AND ASYMMETRY



Figure 33: Single-Lens Anthropology

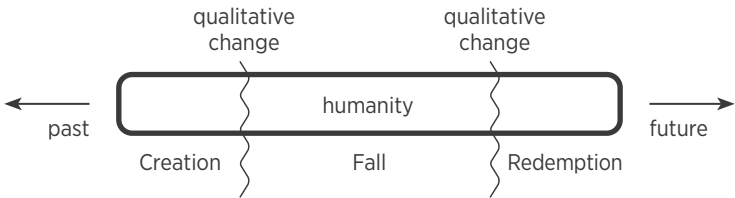


Figure 34: Multi-Lens Anthropology



Figure 35: False Pessimism-Utopianism Dichotomy

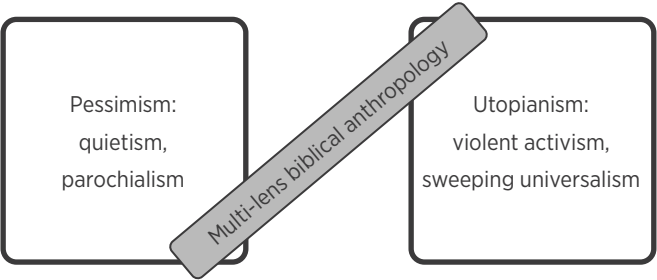


Figure 36: Multi-Lens Biblical Anthropology

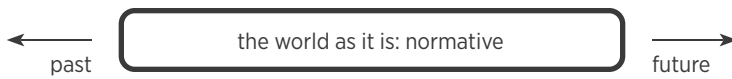


Figure 37: Flat Ontology

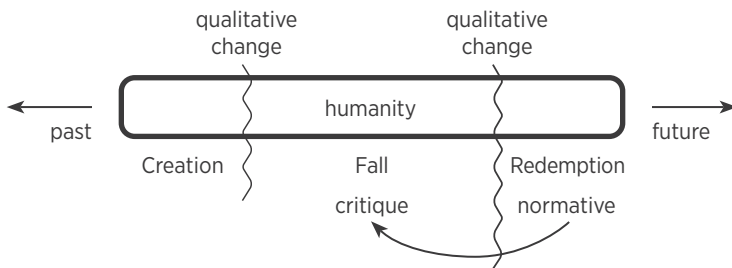


Figure 38: Asymmetry's Radical Critique

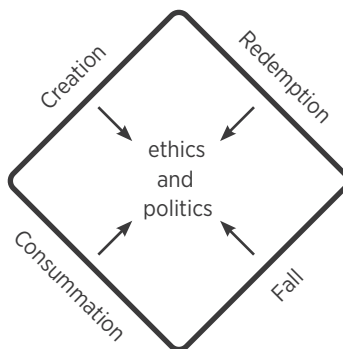


Figure 39: Emplotted Biblical Ethics and Politics

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. **HOT TAKE:** Quickly write down your top three takeaways from this chapter. Don't think too much about it.
2. How does multi-lens anthropology help us to think through questions around the nature and status of human beings?
3. Why is the biblical asymmetry of good and evil such an important truth for Christian cultural critique?
4. In what way(s) does the doctrine of the wretchedness of humanity testify to human dignity?
5. Choose one feature, artifact, or event in late modern society and examine it with the tools of a biblical multi-lens anthropology and the asymmetry of good and evil.
6. "Multi-lens anthropology makes the Christian more optimistic than the utopian and more sober than the cynic." Explain how this can be the case.
7. Pick one of the following: (1) cultural critique, (2) politics, or (3) culture making. Discuss the importance of the asymmetry of good and evil in this area, using your own illustrations if possible.

FROM LAMECH TO NOAH

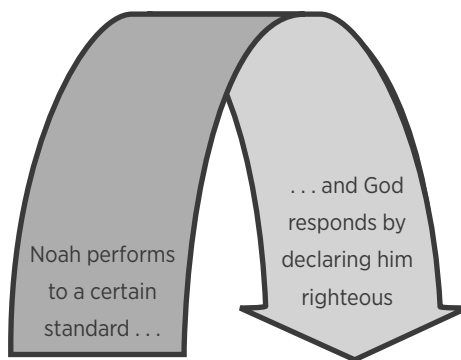
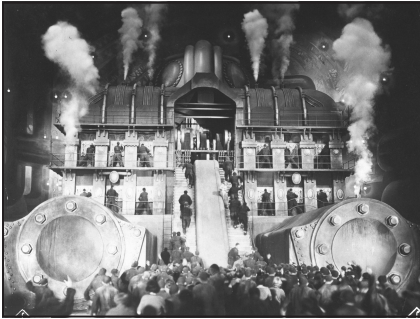
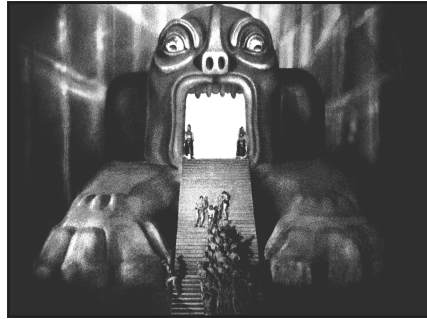


Figure 40: The n -Shaped Dynamic



TCD/Prod.DB / Alamy Stock Photo

The industrial factory in
Lang's *Metropolis*.



Album / Alamy Stock Photo

Its transformation into the
Moloch Machine.

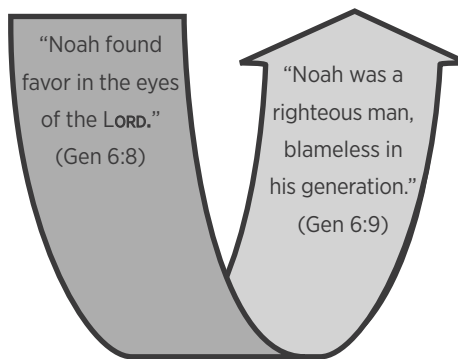


Figure 41: The *u*-Shaped Dynamic

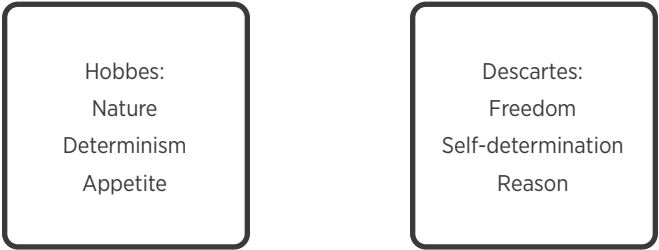


Figure 42: The Dichotomy of the Modern Attitude to Freedom

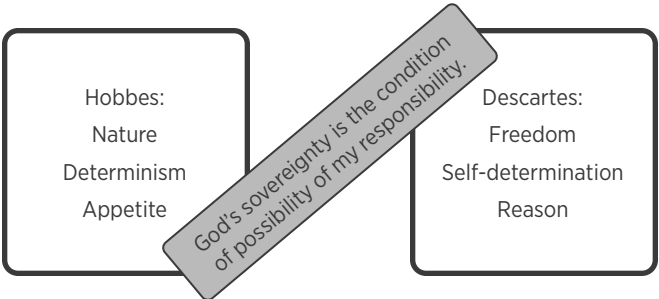


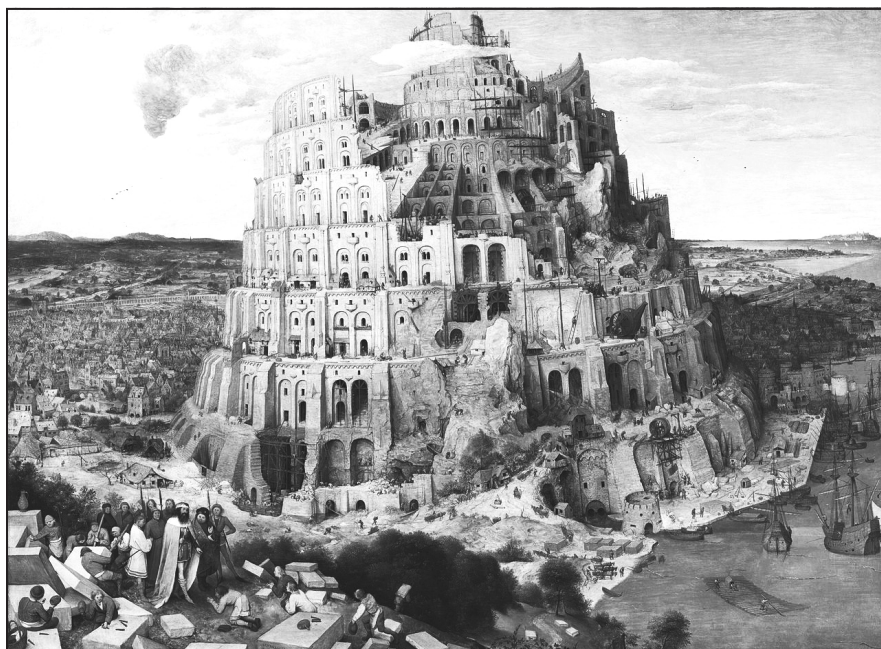
Figure 43: Sovereignty-Responsibility Diagonalized

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. **HOT TAKE:** Before you started to read this chapter, what would you have included in a treatment of the cultural implications of Genesis 4–10? Has that changed at all now that you have read the chapter?
2. What conclusions can we draw about culture and cities from the account of their emergence in Genesis 4–5?
3. How does the “technical attitude” help us to see the continuities between ancient religion, sorcery, and modern society?
4. Explain the *n*-shaped dynamic with an example or illustration from your own experience.
5. How does the biblical account of Noah undermine the idea that we are trapped by our past?
6. If you had to commend the *u*-shaped dynamic of grace and bounty to someone living a life rhythmmed by the *n*-shaped logic of tit for tat, what arguments, stories, or illustrations might you use?
7. How does the Bible diagonalize modernity’s dichotomy between free will and determinism?

Chapter 8

BABEL



Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The Tower of Babel*, c. 1563.

Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. **HOT TAKE:** Choose something from this chapter that challenged you, encouraged you, or convicted you. Right now, pray about it for one minute.
2. In the Babel narrative, what is the desire to “make a name for ourselves,” and why is it met with God’s condemnation and scattering?
3. Think of an example from our own culture of “making a name for ourselves.” To what burdens and problems does it give rise?
4. What are the great spectacles of our own society, through which we find our meaning?
5. What is the relationship laid out in this chapter between God’s judgment and meaning in life?
6. Do you find the truth that God sees and judges everything that you do, say, and think oppressive or liberating? Explain your answer.
7. How does Genesis 11 perform a *détournement* of Babel’s pretensions?

ABRAHAM AND PROMISE

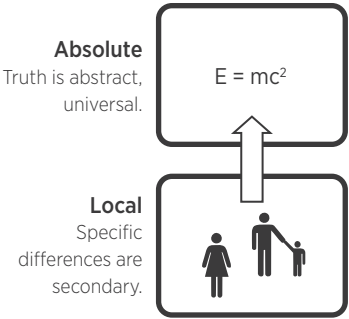


Figure 44: The Prejudice
of the Universal

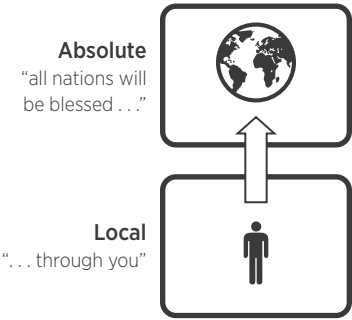


Figure 45: The Scandal
of the Particular

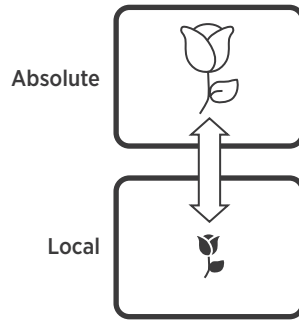


Figure 46: Beauty

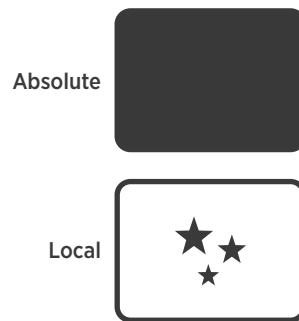


Figure 47: Sublimity

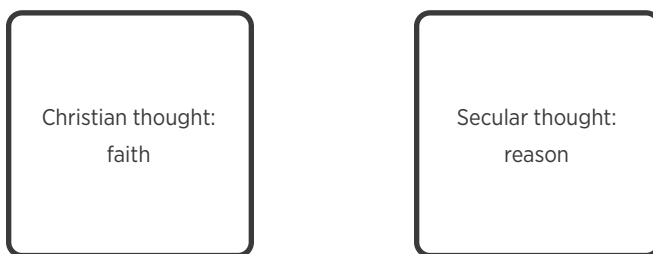


Figure 48: Christian-Secular False Dichotomy

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. **HOT TAKE:** Write a hundred-word review of this chapter, of the sort you might post on social media. Summarize what the chapter covers and what you think of it.
2. “Within a biblical frame, time is personal.” Explain this statement.
3. Explain what is meant by viewing the Christian experience of this life as “being-towards-fulfilment” or “being-towards-yes”.
4. In what way are promise making and promise keeping fundamental to our identities as human beings?
5. Is it ethnocentric that God gives his promises to Abram and not to everyone at the same time? Explain your response.
6. What is the “scandal of the particular,” and how does it contribute to a distinctively Christian understanding of truth and beauty?
7. In what specific contexts do you see this paradigm of double-click knowledge used in our society today? What effects does it have?

ABRAHAM AND COVENANT

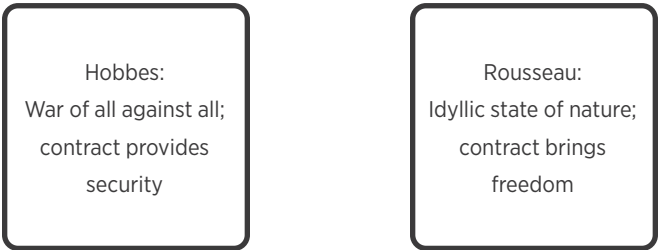


Figure 49: The Dichotomy of Modern Social Contract Theory

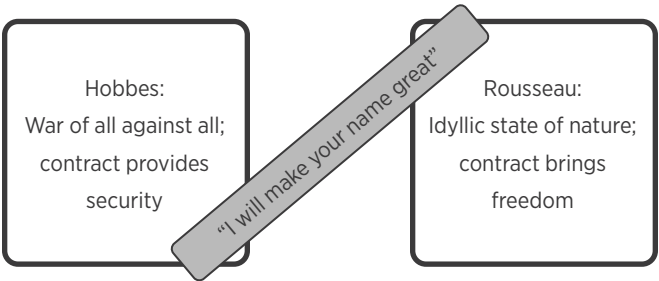


Figure 50: Modern Social Contract Theory Diagonalized

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. **HOT TAKE:** Prepare a one-minute presentation on this chapter for your next church small group meeting. Try to make it relevant for specific members of the group.
2. What is remarkable about the covenant account in Genesis 15? What are its implications for a Christian view of society?
3. How does the biblical idea of covenant diagonalize the different social contract theories of Hobbes and Rousseau?
4. You have ten minutes to make an adult Sunday school presentation on the difference between the logic of equivalence and the logic of superabundance and how they relate to the biblical idea of covenant. What key points will you include?
5. How is a society founded on the covenantal logic of superabundance different to one founded on the contractual logic of equivalence?
6. How does covenant epistemology help us to build a biblical understanding of what it means to know something?
7. How does Genesis 22 deepen our understanding of the Bible's *u*-shaped dynamic? How does it subvert the contractual, *n*-shaped pattern of relating to God?

MOSES, THE EXODUS, AND THE TORAH



Figure 51: The Dichotomy of Modern Criminal Justice

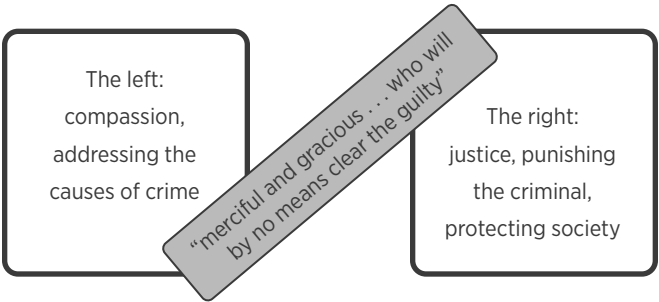


Figure 52: Modern Criminal Justice Diagonalized



Figure 53: The *u*-Shaped Dynamic: God Blesses and We Respond



Figure 54: Before the Sacred-Secular Divide

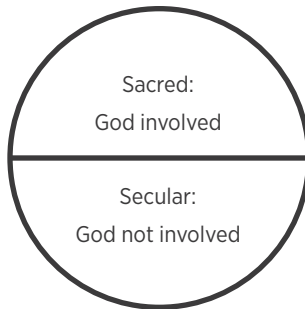


Figure 55: The Sacred-Secular Divide

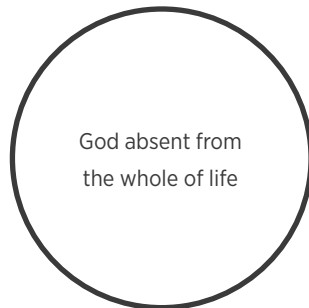


Figure 56: The Disappearance of the Sacred

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. **HOT TAKE:** Take your most encouraging thought from this chapter, write it in a brief sentence on some paper, and stick it on your fridge.
2. How can the name that God reveals to Moses help us to understand and navigate dilemmas in modern criminal justice?
3. How does the exodus story critique today's ideologies of freedom?
4. Explain how the exodus-inspired emancipation narrative is used by both the political left and right today, and both by those who laud reason and by those who denigrate it.
5. In what way is the exodus narrative history "from below"?
6. Identify and comment on three ways in which the plausibility structure of late modern society makes belief in God odd and countercultural.
7. Take one example from the Torah of a way in which "higher time" is folded into "secular time." How does this change our experience of time?

PROPHECY AND POWER

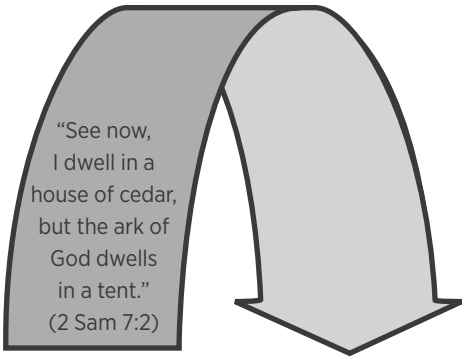


Figure 57: The *n*-Shaped Dynamic: We Offer and God Responds

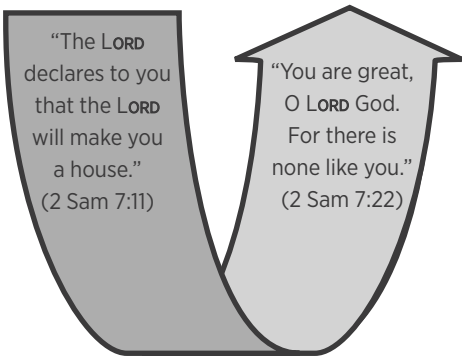


Figure 58: The *u*-Shaped Dynamic: God Blesses and We Respond, Part 2

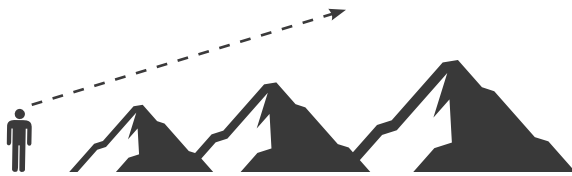


Figure 59: The Three Peaks of Prophetic Fulfillment

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. **HOT TAKE:** If your memory of this whole chapter is about to be wiped in ten seconds' time but you can only keep one thought from it, what would you choose to keep and why?
2. What conclusions can we draw from the fact that the accounts of the kings of Israel and Judah in the Bible present a warts-and-all account of the rulers of God's people?
3. How does 2 Samuel 7 echo and develop the *u*-shaped paradigm of relating to God that runs throughout the Bible?
4. What difference does it make that the kings of Israel and Judah do not write the law but are enjoined to obey it?
5. How is the institution of prophecy in the Bible different to kingship and the priesthood? What is the significance of these differences?
6. Choose one instance of prophetic satire or mockery in the Bible (perhaps 1 Kgs 18:27 or Isa 44:16–17). How is satire being used in your example, and how might similar uses of satire be employed today?

PROPHECY AND CULTURAL CRITIQUE

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. **HOT TAKE:** You are a television journalist interviewing the author of this chapter. Write down four questions that you think will help your viewers get a sense of what the chapter is about.
2. In the light of the function of biblical prophecy to expose false ideologies of the nation, discuss Paul Ricœur's contention that "the first temporal structure of prophecy is not foresight but the irruption of real history."
3. How does biblical prophecy undercut those who would seek to denounce others while remaining free from accusation themselves?
4. Do you agree with Karl Marx that "the critique of religion is the prerequisite of every critique"? Explain your answer.
5. To what extent do you agree with Merold Westphal that we can see modern cultural critics such as Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche as prophets? In what senses do you think the term appropriate, and in what senses is it inappropriate?
6. In your own words, try to summarize how and where idolatry is present in contemporary society? How is idolatry a particularly useful category for Christian cultural critique?
7. What do categories like "people of faith" and "faith communities" reveal about how our society sees the claims of Christ?

WISDOM LITERATURE

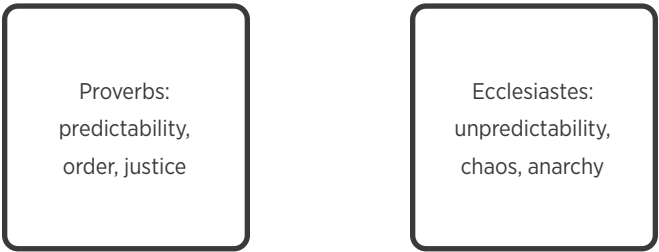


Figure 60: Wisdom Literature Dichotomy

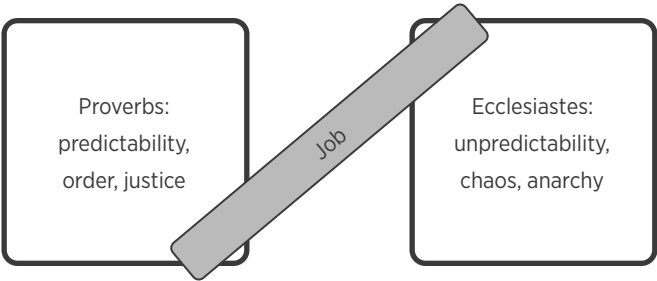


Figure 61: Wisdom Literature Dichotomy Diagonalized

STUDY GUIDE

1. **HOT TAKE:** Draw a quick diagram of this chapter. You can set it out however you like, perhaps as a mind map or with a picture for each main idea.
2. How is the presentation of the kings of Israel and Judah in the Bible different from the picture of monarchy that emerges in other sacred texts?
3. How does wisdom literature diagonalize the two positions that Christians should either ignore all pagan learning or seek to imitate it?
4. What would be lost if the Bible collapsed the contrasting perspectives of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes into one book?
5. Chesterton writes that the Bible “looks at the world through a hundred windows where the ancient stoic or the modern agnostic only looks through one.” Explain what you think he means, with examples from the wisdom books.
6. What conclusions should (and shouldn’t) we draw from some fragments of pagan wisdom being incorporated into the biblical canon?
7. Are you temperamentally more at home in Proverbs or in Ecclesiastes? How can your response to that question help you to resist rewriting the Bible in your own image?

INCARNATION, SPACE, AND TIME

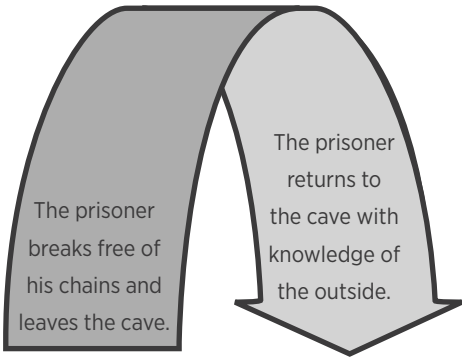


Figure 62: The *n*-Shaped Epistemology in Plato's Cave

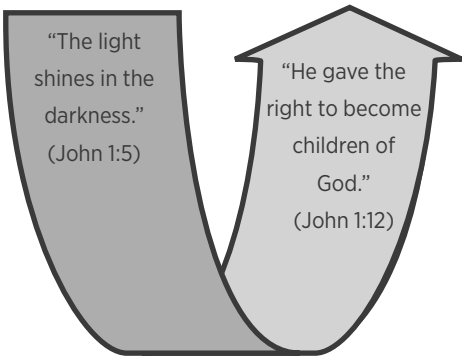


Figure 63: The *u*-Shaped Epistemology of John 1

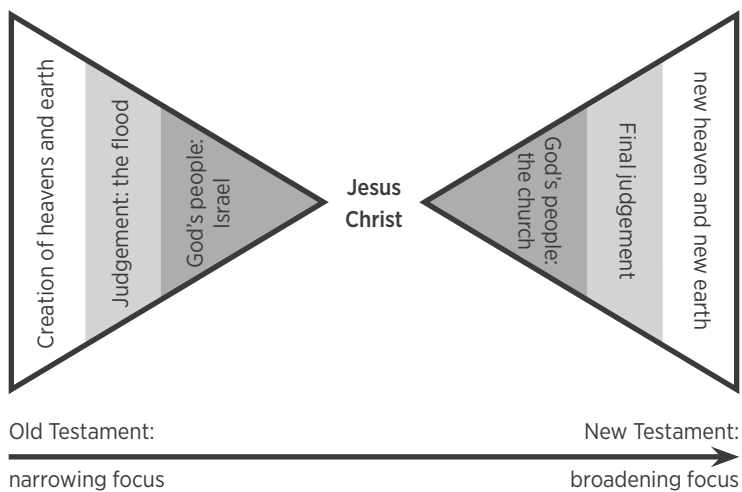


Figure 64: The Chiastic Structure of the Bible

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. **HOT TAKE:** Think of one friend or family member who might be encouraged by something in this chapter. Compose an email or text message to them right now that begins, “Hey, I’ve just read this and I thought I’d share it with you.”
2. How does John’s proclamation that “the light shines in the darkness” question and subvert both ancient and modern paradigms of knowledge?
3. In what way is knowledge of ultimate things *u*-shaped in the Bible? What difference does that make to our view of ourselves and of God?
4. Why does the incarnation present a scandal to the modern world?
5. What difference does it make to the Christian view of the world that the incarnation happened in history?
6. Define what philosophers mean by “Lessing’s ditch,” and describe how the incarnation relates to it.
7. Why does Heidegger say that the very idea of a Christian philosophy is an “absolute ‘square circle’”? Do you think his view agrees with a biblical perspective on reality? Explain your answer.
8. “It does not matter what you believe, as long as you believe it with all your heart.” What handle does the incarnation give us on that statement?

INCARNATION, MATERIALITY, AND PERSONALITY

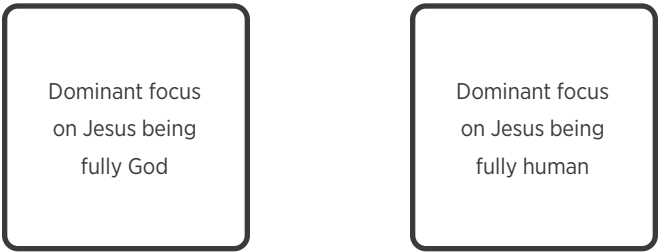


Figure 65: Dominant Focus Dichotomy

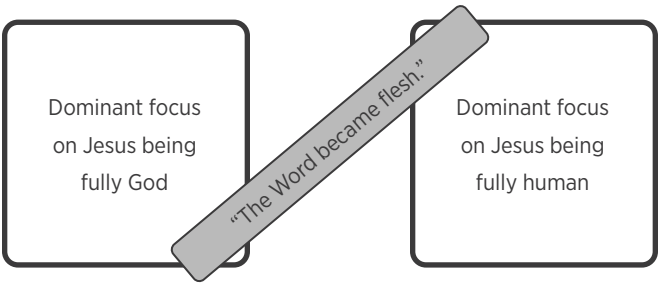


Figure 66: Dominant Focus Dichotomy Diagonalized

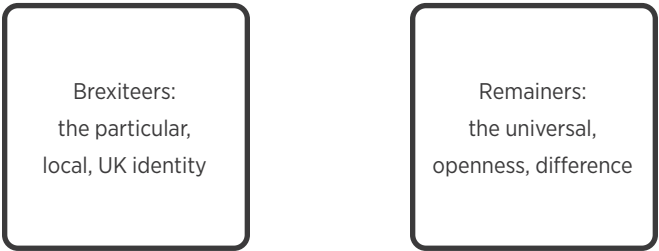


Figure 67: Tomlin's Brexit Dichotomy

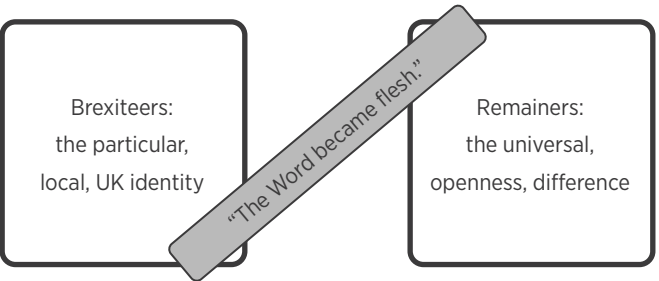


Figure 68: Tomlin's Brexit Dichotomy Diagonalized

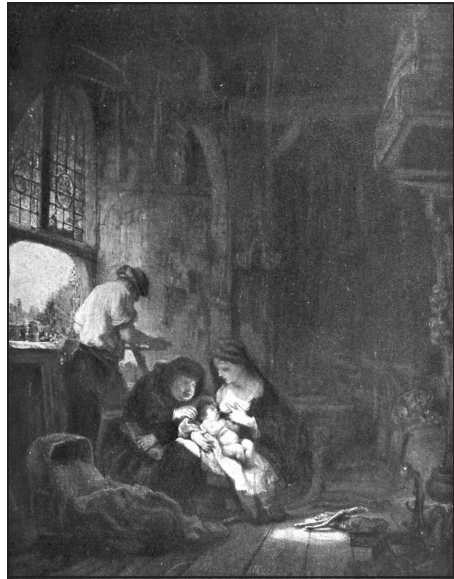
STUDY QUESTIONS

1. **HOT TAKE:** Write down a three-sentence prayer to God responding to this chapter. You might focus on some aspect of his character to praise him for, a gift to thank him for, or something to ask him for.
2. How is your society both “materialist” and “immaterialist” today? Give one example of each tendency from your own experience.
3. Consider the analysis of the Brexit debate in this chapter. Take another political or social issue from your own experience and try to analyze it in a similar way.
4. Is it not enough that the incarnation is historical, particular, and material? Why is it important to add that it be personal as well?
5. In what way are the four scandals of the incarnation not simply negations of modernity’s four prejudices?
6. What is the difference between claiming that the Bible presents a metanarrative and a mesonarrative? What modern pathologies does the biblical mesonarrative help us avoid?

THE MINISTRY OF JESUS, LOVE OF GOD, AND LOVE OF NEIGHBOR



Virgin of Vladimir, 1131, Tempera on Wood.
Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.



Rembrandt van Rijn, *Holy Family*, 1640.
Oil on wood. Musée du Louvre, Paris.



Michelangelo, *Doni Tondo*, c. 1507. Oil and tempura on panel. Galleria Uffizzi, Florence.



Pieter de Hooch, *The Courtyard of a House in Delft*, 1658, National Gallery, London.

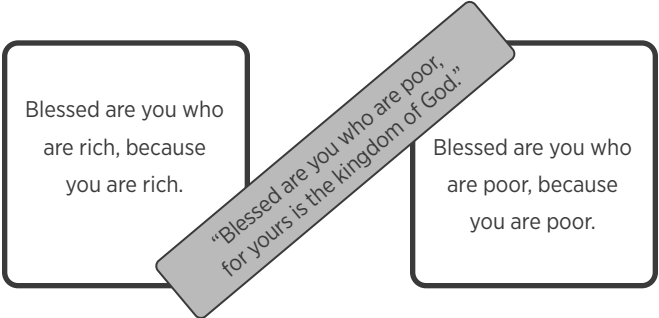


Figure 69: Blessed Dichotomy Diagonalized

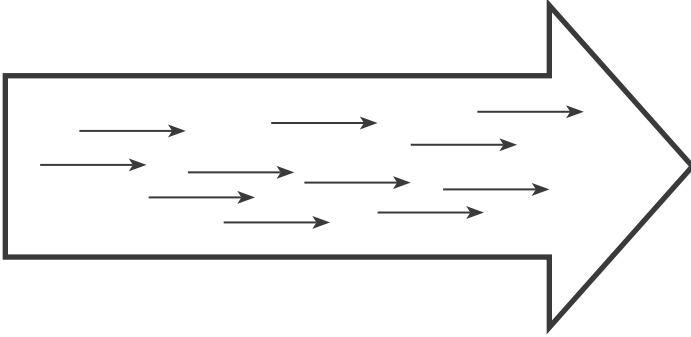


Figure 70: Aligned Love

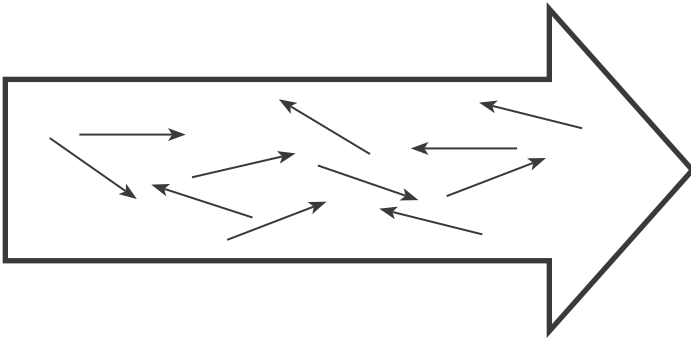


Figure 71: Clashing Loves

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. **HOT TAKE:** Take your most encouraging thought from this chapter, write it in a brief sentence on some paper, and stick it on your fridge.
2. How are the genre, language, and content of the Gospels politically subversive?
3. Explain the “great reversal” and give one example of how it has shaped the outlook and assumptions of the modern West.
4. How do the marginalized groups that Jesus helps and foregrounds in his ministry differ from those most often depicted as marginalized in the late-modern media?
5. How does Jesus’s attitude to poverty and riches diagonalize common attitudes of late modernity?
6. How does the full-orbed biblical ethic of love challenge modern political and ideological dividing lines?
7. How does looking at people through the lens of love help us to understand ourselves and others? Can you give an example from your own experience?

THE CROSS, SUBVERSION, AND GRACE



Alexamenos Graffito



Drawing of image on
Alexamenos Graffito

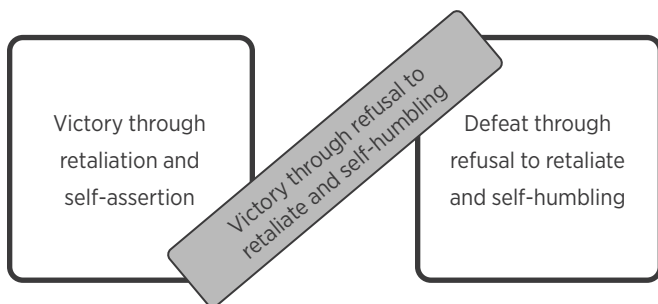


Figure 72: Victory-Defeat Dichotomy Diagonalized

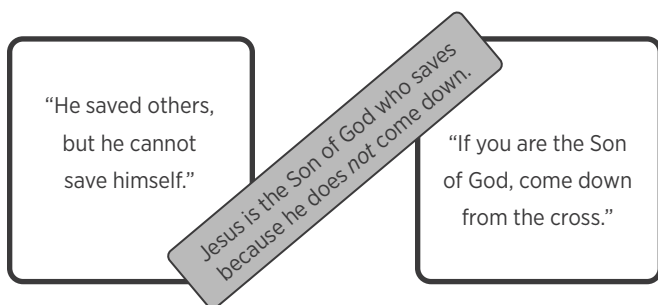


Figure 73: Glory-Weakness Dichotomy Diagonalized

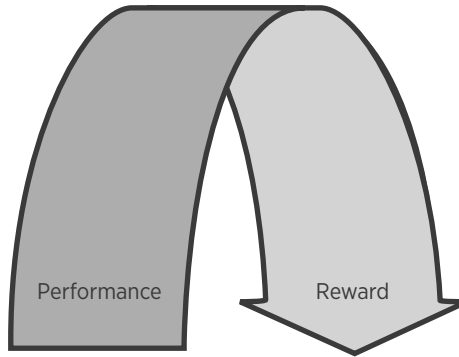


Figure 74: The *n*-Shaped Dynamic: Performance and Reward

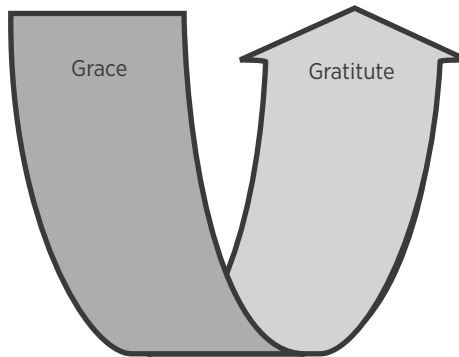


Figure 75: The *u*-Shaped Dynamic: Grace and Gratitude

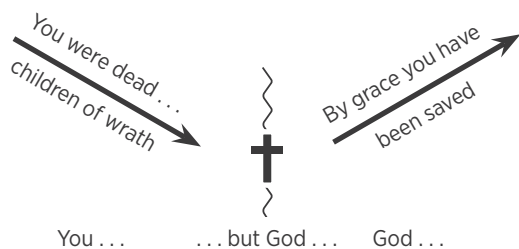


Figure 76: The Nonlinearity of Biblical Grace

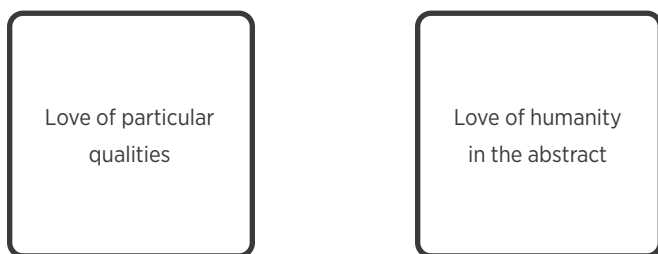


Figure 77: The Dichotomy of Love

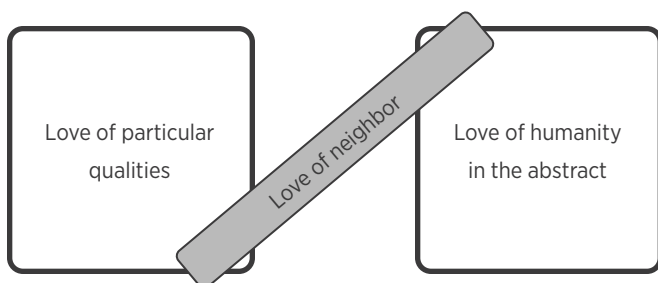


Figure 78: The Dichotomy of Love Diagonalized

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. **HOT TAKE:** Write a brief poem or draw a little picture that captures your main takeaway from this chapter.
2. How does the cross rewrite the Roman narrative of brute power and oppression?
3. Discuss a contemporary example of “linear” strength, perhaps in our politics or in our society. How does the weakness of the cross contrast to this example of power?
4. In what sense is the cross part of the logic of superabundance?
5. How does the “performance narrative” show itself in your own experience of society, and how does the cross provide the paradigm for a different approach to life?
6. How does Jesus’s injunction to “love your neighbor” diagonalize two contemporary pathologies of love?

THE CROSS, ASYMMETRY, AND PARADOX



Figure 79:
The Scandalous
Cross, Part 1

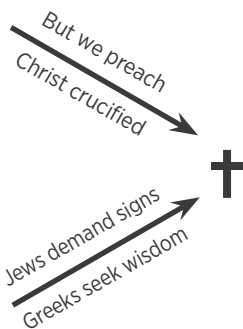


Figure 80:
The Scandalous
Cross, Part 2

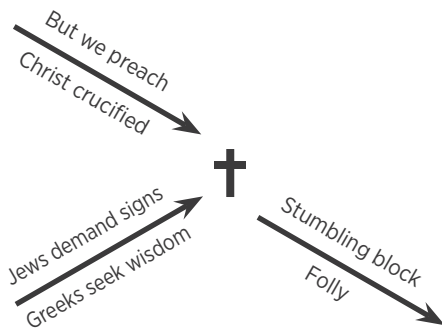


Figure 81: The Scandalous Cross, Part 3

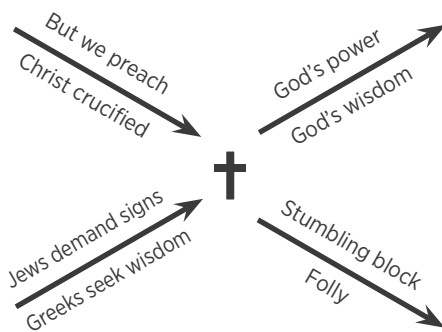


Figure 82: The Scandalous Cross, Part 4

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. **HOT TAKE:** Think of the next meal you will share with someone else. Pick one thing from this chapter that you think might interest/challenge/encourage them, and write down a form of words you might use to talk to them about it.
2. How does the superabundance of the cross challenge the twin late modern totalities of the state and the market?
3. In what way does the cross represent “a singular interruption” in Western patterns of thinking?
4. Think of a significant way in which late modernity puts the logic of superabundance in the service of the logic of equivalence. In your own words, describe how the Bible challenges this.
5. What does it mean to understand the cross as a paradox?
6. Take a value or aspiration that you see in your own culture, and try to analyze it in terms of the fourfold schema drawn from 1 Corinthians 1 as presented in this chapter.

THE RESURRECTION, TRANSFORMATION, AND POWER

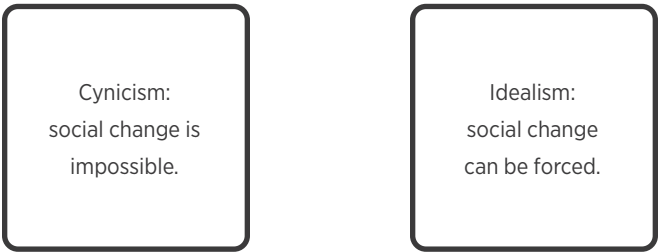


Figure 83: Cynicism-Idealism Dichotomy

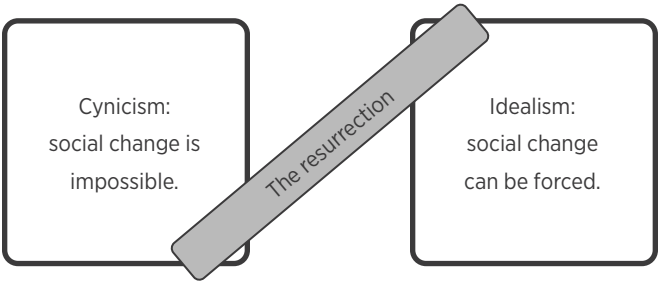


Figure 84: Cynicism-Idealism Dichotomy Diagonalized

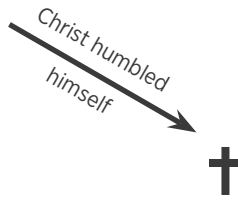


Figure 85: The
v-Shaped Dynamic in
Philippians 2, Part 1

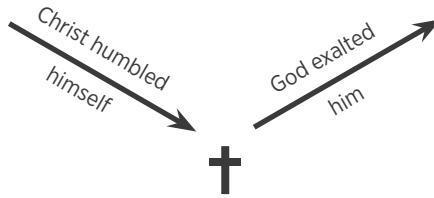


Figure 86: The v-Shaped Dynamic in Philippians 2, Part 2



Figure 87: Sovereign-Servant

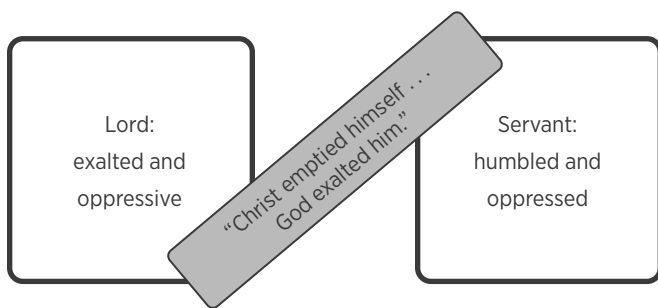


Figure 88: Lord-Servant Diagonalized

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. **HOT TAKE:** This chapter argues that the resurrection brings a new reality, a new freedom, a new song, a new mission, and a new worldliness. Choose one of these implications of the resurrection and write one sentence on how your own life is changed, or might be changed, in the light of it.
2. How does the resurrection diagonalize pathological attitudes to social change?
3. Explain how the resurrection is neither a conservation of what there is nor a rejection of what there is.
4. How does the account of the cross, resurrection, and ascension in Philippians 2:5–11 help us to think about authority, power, and weakness in a new way?
5. According to C. S. Lewis, how does the chivalric ideal capture something important about Christ? Where do we still see this Christ-shaped pattern in our values and expectations today?
6. How does the Philippians 2 dynamic challenge our ideas about self-renunciation and self-fulfillment?
7. How is Christ's sacrifice different to that depicted in Sophocles's *Oedipus the King*?

THE LAST DAYS, CHURCH, AND SOCIETY



Figure 89: The Market State

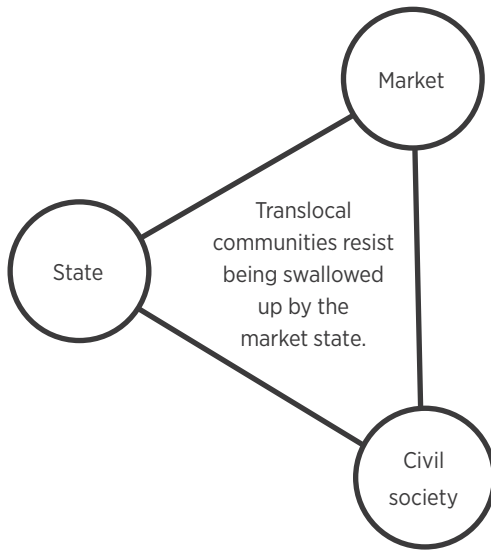


Figure 90: Translocal Communities and the Market State

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. **HOT TAKE:** Think of one person from your church or small group who may benefit from something in this chapter. Right now, compose an email or text message for them; the message begins, “Just read this and was told to share it with a friend.”
2. What is simple social space, and how does it relate to the church in the last days?
3. What dangers might arise from seeking to remake the church in the image of a state or of a for-profit corporation?
4. How does the church nuance and complexify the simple modern relationship between the individual and the state?
5. Think about where you see our society’s core myths in your everyday life: the myth of effort guaranteeing success or the myth of authenticity achieved through rejecting convention. How does the Bible’s counternarrative challenge these common myths?
6. Consider some of the “pedagogies of insignificance” in your average day. What are they forming you to desire, hope for, fear, or identify with?

THE LAST DAYS AND PARALLAX LIVING

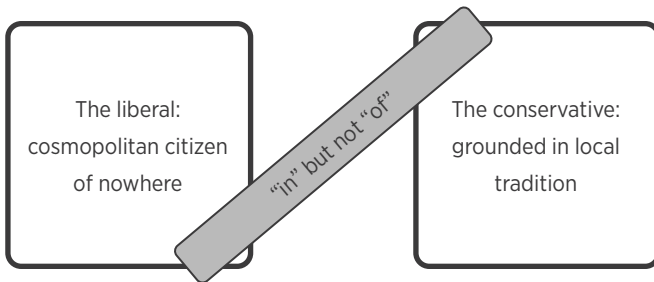


Figure 91: Liberal-Conservative Dichotomy Diagonalized

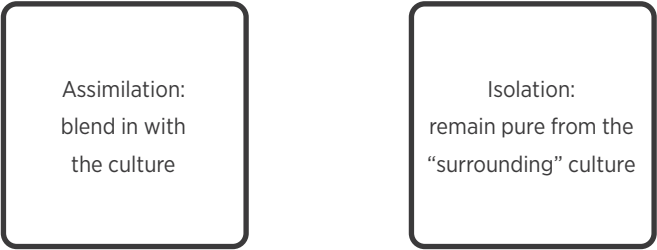


Figure 92: Assimilation-Isolation Dichotomy

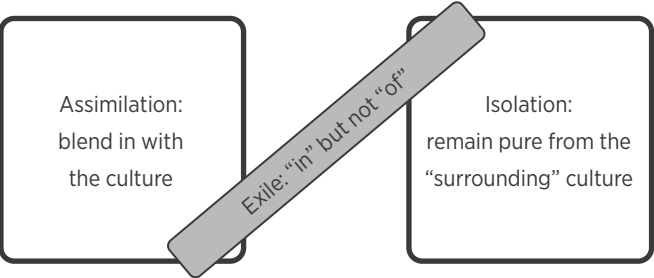


Figure 93: Assimilation-Isolation Dichotomy Diagonalized

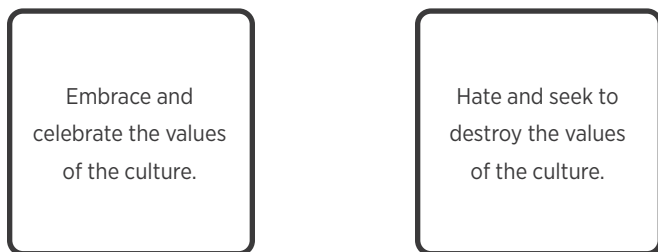


Figure 94: Celebration-Hatred Dichotomy

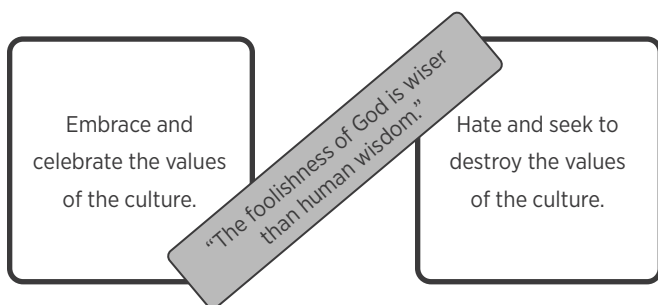


Figure 95: Celebration-Hatred Dichotomy Diagonalized

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. **HOT TAKE:** Summarize this chapter in ten words exactly.
2. Explain the parallax principle of Christian living in the last days. Why are both lenses important?
3. Christian living in the last days is variously described in this chapter as living forward, as gerundive, and as eschatological realism. Choose the expression that most helps you to capture the Bible's vision of "now and not yet," and prepare an adult Sunday school presentation on it. The presentation is to last fifteen minutes and include examples from your own experience.
4. Why is it important for Christians to work for the shalom of the cultures and cities in which they find themselves? Discuss one example from your own life.
5. How does Jeremiah's letter to the exiles help Christians to avoid two opposite errors in the last days?
6. Assimilation and isolation look like two opposed attitudes to culture, but they have much in common. What do they share, and how can they be avoided?
7. How should Christians navigate the choice of either celebrating the culture's values or being branded as dangerous haters?
8. In what way are both Christian renunciation and enjoyment in the last days to be understood as tactics rather than as constraints or indulgences?

THE LAST DAYS AND GIVING TO CAESAR WHAT IS CAESAR’S

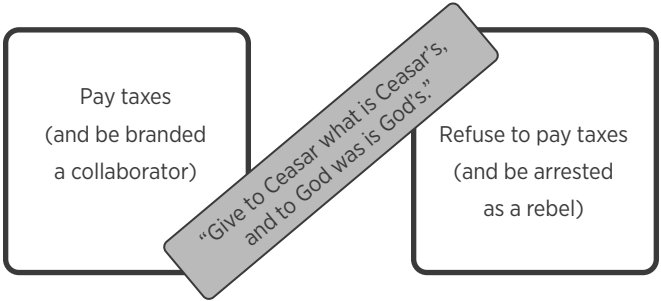


Figure 96: Tax Dichotomy Diagonalized

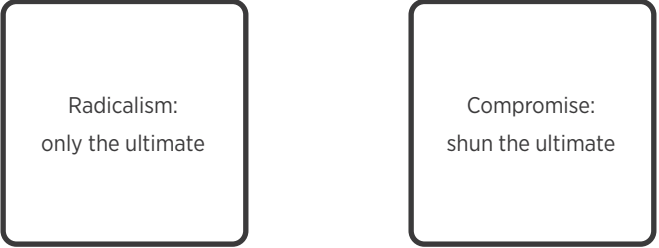


Figure 97: Radicalism-Compromise Dichotomy

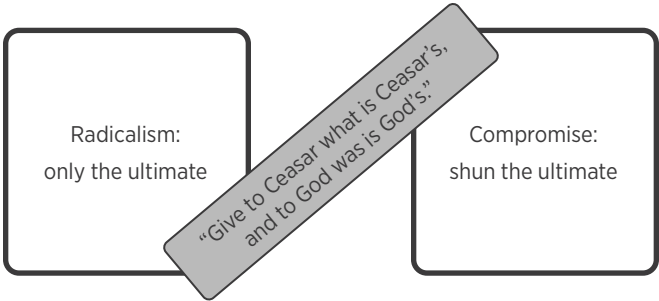


Figure 98: Radicalism-Compromise Dichotomy Diagonalized

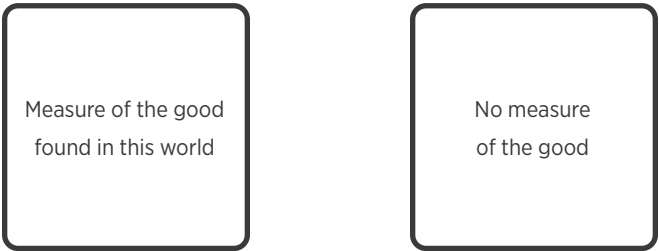


Figure 99: Measure of Good Dichotomy

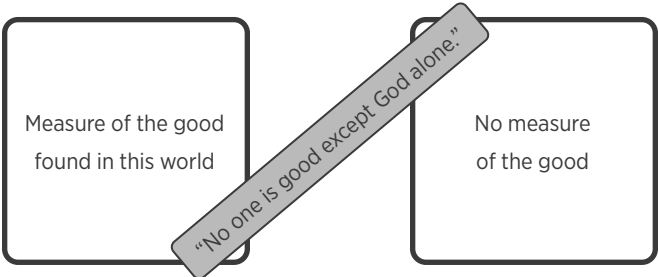


Figure 100: Measure of Good Dichotomy Diagonalized

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. **HOT TAKE:** Quickly write down one thing from this chapter that challenged you, one thing you want to share with someone else, and one thing that you disagree with.
2. In what way is giving to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's not like sorting skirts from blouses?
3. Evaluate the usefulness of Bonhoeffer's categories of the ultimate and the penultimate for helping Christians to understand how to live in the last days.
4. Why should the Bible predispose Christians to be particularly good cultural critics?
5. What is the hermeneutics of charity, and how does it help shape the way that Christians should interact with culture?
6. An unbelieving friend says to you, "Christians should always love. That means you need to be nice to me and agree with everything I say." What might you reply? Explain your response.

THE LAST DAYS AND MODERNITY

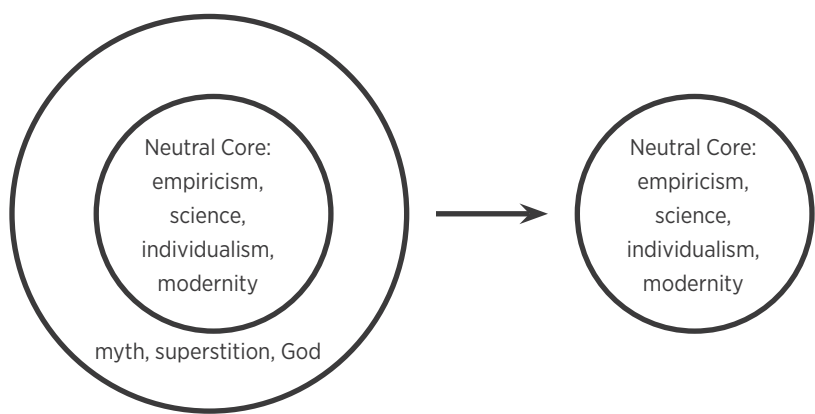


Figure 101: Modern Secularism’s Self-Understanding as a Subtraction Story

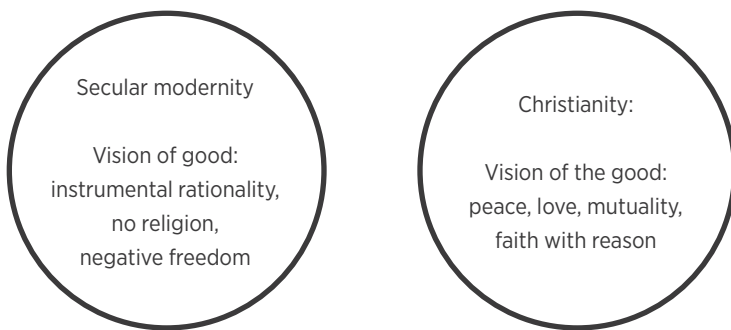


Figure 102: Secular Modernity and Christianity Both
Carry Positive Visions of the Good Life

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. **HOT TAKE:** Choose something from this chapter that challenged, encouraged, or convicted you. Pray about it for one minute.
2. Explain and critique the statement: “People of modernity! I see that in every way you think yourselves very irreligious, but your irreligion is very Christian.”
3. Why are the twin ideas of the individual and the universal important for an understanding of late modernity?
4. Explain how early Christian martyrs introduce a new sort of heroism into society?
5. What is the *migration thesis* of the secular? Find one example from your own experience and describe it.
6. Do you agree with Charles Taylor that the characteristic condition of late modernity is not secularization but being *cross-pressured*? Explain the term and try to illustrate your answer with examples from your own experience.
7. In what sense is our secular age ironic? Which aspects of it are new, and which are familiar from the history of the church?

ESCHATOLOGY AND APOCALYPTIC

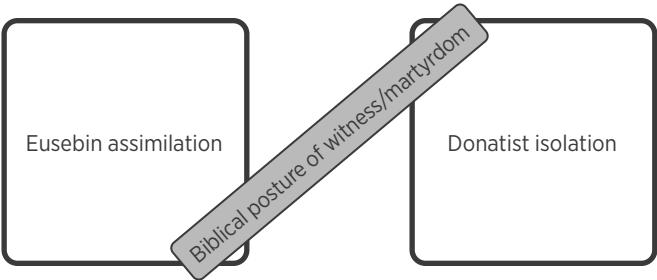


Figure 103: Eusebian-Donatist Diagonalized

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. **HOT TAKE:** Write a quick one-hundred-word review of this chapter, summarizing what the chapter covers and what you think of it.
2. A friend is reading through the book of Revelation and grumbles, “Why all these symbols? John should just say what he means!” What would you reply?
3. Look at the descriptions of the prostitute and the beast as they are described in this chapter. What adjectives would you use to capture the regime John is depicting? To what extent do you see those same adjectives describing our current situation in late modernity?
4. How is the New Jerusalem different to Babylon? List and comment on all the contrasts you can find.
5. How does the figure of the martyr in Revelation help Christians to orient themselves in the last days?
6. How should passages like the winepress of God’s wrath in Revelation 14 shape a Christian approach to politics and society?

ESCHATOLOGY AND TIME

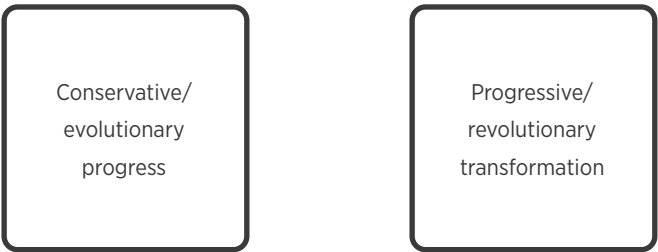


Figure 104: Conservative-Progressive Dichotomy

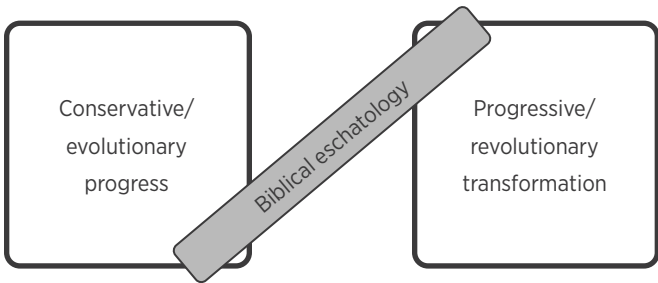


Figure 105: Conservative-Progressive Dichotomy Diagonalized

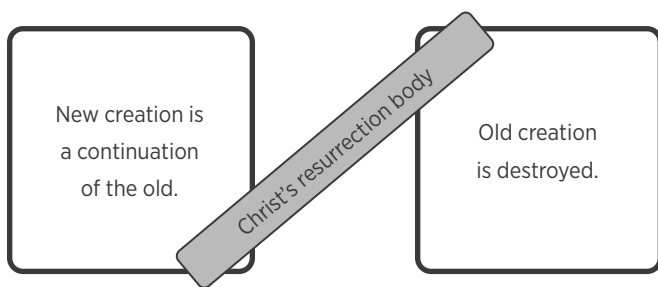


Figure 106: New-Old Creation Dichotomy Diagonalized

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. **HOT TAKE:** Quickly write down your top three takeaways from this chapter. Don't think too much about it.
2. What difference does it make to the biblical view of the world that temporal existence has a definite end rather than just going on indefinitely?
3. How do the conservative idea of gradual progress and the Marxist-inspired idea of revolution both borrow from Christian eschatology? How do they both fall short of its complexity?
4. "Belief in final justice is the only consistent and comprehensive basis for social activism in the present." How so?
5. How do you make sense of the verses in the New Testament that suggest a continuity between this world and the next, and those that suggest a rupture? How does the complex picture of time that emerges from this biblical witness help to shape a Christian attitude to culture and society?
6. What are the cultural and social implications of the new earth being a temple-garden-city?

ESCHATOLOGY AND IDENTITY



Figure 107: Autonomy

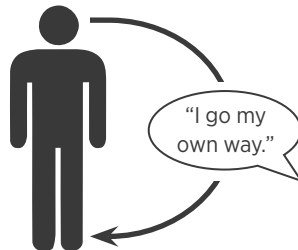


Figure 108: Heteronomy

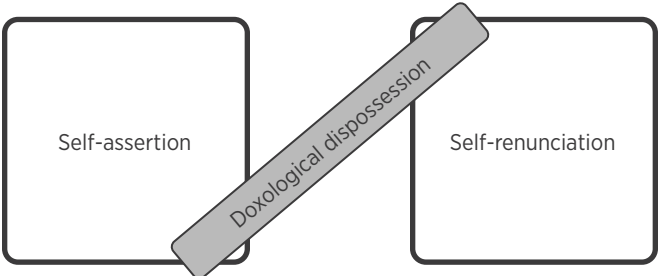


Figure 109: Self-Assertion-Renunciation Dichotomy Diagonalized

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. **HOT TAKE:** Prepare a one-minute presentation on this chapter for your next church small group meeting. Try to make it relevant for specific members of the group.
2. How does the modern notion of possessive individualism condition us to think about our identity?
3. “Consumers use brands to ‘produce’ an identity via purchase.” Choose one product you have used and describe how it functions in this way.
4. Choose an advertising slogan from your culture, like the “Go your own way” example discussed in this chapter. Explain how it helps to construct identity. Does it function as a noble lie?
5. Find and discuss an example of how the late modern market paradigm commodifies even resistance to it, like the “Fifteen Million Merits” example in the chapter. Do you think that Christian identity has been commodified in this way?
6. Explain the term *doxological dispossession* and how it functions as a mode of identity formation.
7. In what respects is the biblical pattern of identity eschatological? How might this be experienced as a relief and a liberation for Christians?

ESCHATOLOGY AND CULTURE

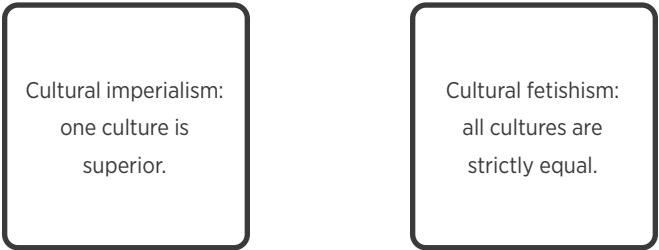


Figure 110: The Dichotomy of Comparing Cultures

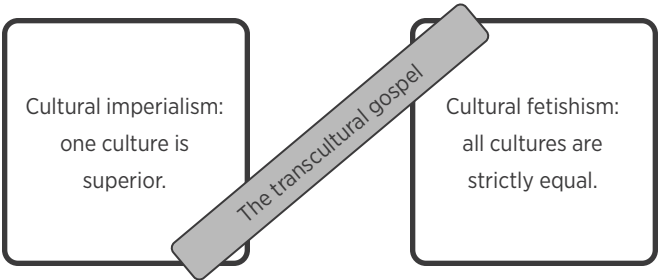


Figure 111: The Dichotomy of Comparing Cultures Diagonalized

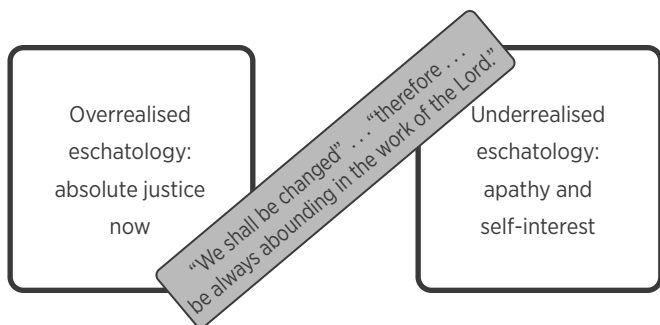


Figure 112: Eschatology Dichotomy Diagonalized

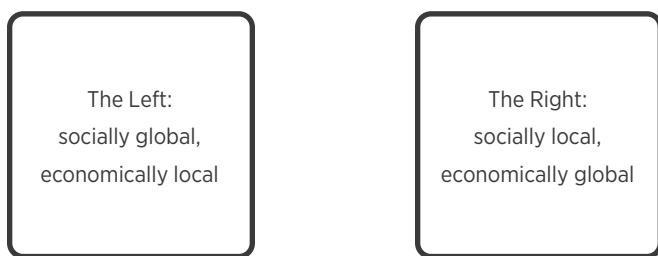


Figure 113: Latour's Global-Local Dichotomy

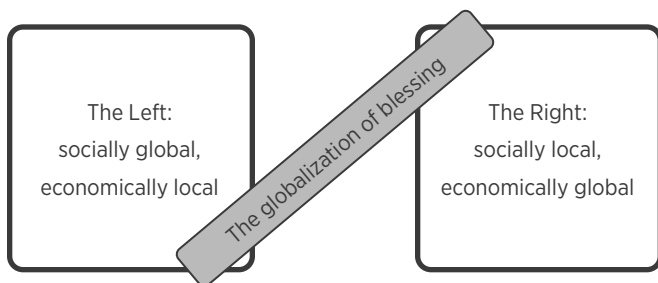


Figure 114: Latour's Global-Local Dichotomy Diagonalized

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. **HOT TAKE:** Take one thought from this chapter and write a note to *yourself* five years ago. The note begins, “You really need to think about this because . . .”
2. What does Revelation 7 teach us about God’s truth and human cultures?
3. What distinctive contribution can a biblical perspective make to late modern debates about diversity and integration?
4. What is an overrealized cultural eschatology, and what is an underrealized cultural eschatology? Give one example of each from your own experience.
5. What are the differences between Babylon’s “globalization of domination” and Jerusalem’s “globalization of blessing”?
6. How does the pattern of the Bible’s globalization of blessing help to shape a Christian attitude to and engagement with political life in the present?
7. How does the vision of the New Jerusalem fulfil the deepest values of both the political left and the political right?

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