

Daily Life with Christ. Love-5: Understanding the objective, universal, never-changing, eternal nature of love—Philosophy of Language: Aristotle/Aquinas, the door to objective reality—seeing and loving the True/Good/Beautiful.

What in the world does philosophy of language have to do with understanding the objective nature of love? Everything! Language/thought has everything to do with our age of Idealism, and how we think about reality as such. Look at all the hatred on the Left and Right in our country—as Americans hate fellow Americans who do not agree with their ideology/idealism. All over this country, there are families, including Christian families, who will no longer have anything to do with one another because of political views. Consider how Russians recently exploited this hatred and polarization on both sides in their meddling in our election.

There is no doubt that much of Christianity today has been hijacked by the Idealism in the Left and in the Right. Liberal Christians today are more influenced by liberal politics than the Bible; and conservative Christians are more influenced by “conservative” politics than the Bible. Their respective talk shows mold their attitudes and opinions more than the Lord Jesus Christ and the Word of God. If liberal Christians would read their Bibles more, they would appreciate the God-given right of each individual over society. If conservative Christians would read their Bibles more, they would appreciate God-given societal rights over the individual. Or if they would just study what the Bible says about the judging, maligning, and demonizing one another, perhaps they would stop it. I would add that whenever one resorts to name-calling, he is demonstrating that he has run out of rational arguments. For example, the response to liberal arguments with “but he is just a liberal” is neither rational nor dignified, especially for a Christian. A final point: in Idealism, one is totally unable to see the other viewpoint because one is oriented to ideas rather than the person and his point of view. Idealism is always characterized by polarization, suspicion, and fear—not understanding.

This all goes back to basic orientation in life. As I noted in the last article, every person is either an Idealist or a Realist. The Idealist always begins with words/thoughts/ideas and then to beings (and usually judging beings by those first ideas). Realists always begin with beings and then uses words/thoughts/ideas in developing understanding of and communicating about those beings. The Idealist defines reality by words. The Realist defines reality by beings/reality as such.

The transition from Idealism to Realism is life-changing. To walk through the door of Realism is to behold the true/good/beautiful. I cannot emphasize enough the importance of starting with reality rather than starting with words. As Etienne Gilson put it,

The most tempting of all the false first principles is: that *thought*, not *being*, is involved in all my representations. Here lies the initial option between idealism and realism, which will settle once and for all the future course of our philosophy, and make it a failure or a success. Are we to encompass being with thought, or thought with being? In other words, are we to include the whole in one of its parts, or one of the parts in the whole? If intellectual evidence is not enough to dictate our choice, history is there to remind us that no one ever regains the whole of reality after locking himself up in one of its parts. Man is not a mind that thinks, but a being who knows other beings as true, who loves them as good, and who enjoys them as beautiful. For all that which is, down to the humblest form

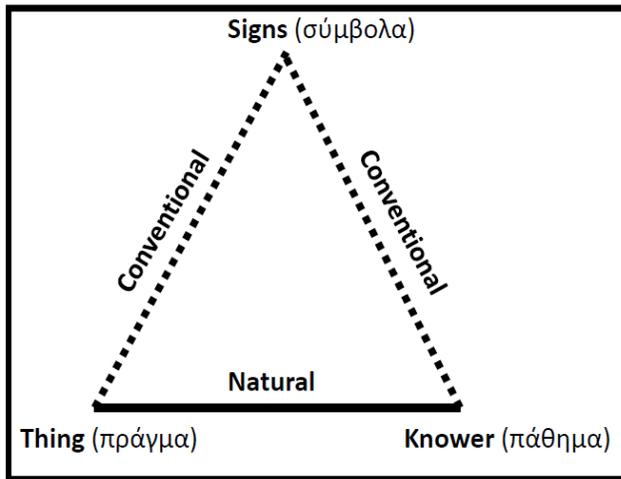
of existence, exhibits the inseparable privileges of being, which are truth, goodness, and beauty.

Idealism is very subtle and deceiving, even for Christians. I was an idealist as a Christian for decades, as a student in seminary and pastor of a local Bible church. However, the fact that I was blessed to attend and teach in an amazing seminary (Tulsa Seminary of Biblical Languages) to learn the original languages of Scripture (8 semesters each of Hebrew and Greek) so I could read God's Word in the original first-hand did not deliver me from Idealism. In fact, it only made it worse; for in Idealism, words define reality rather than objective reality itself being clothed with words. In other words, knowledge of the original languages coupled with Idealism made it very easy to deceive myself into building all kinds of biblical and spiritual reality on words. All kinds of spiritual systems of fellowship with God and the spiritual life can be constructed in Idealism that have nothing to do with objective reality or the Bible as such. As a matter of fact, these word/concept systems often destroy the beautiful form in the various passages in the Bible. For example, the discussion of Galatians 5:14-23 on virtue vs. vice is all about living in God by proper knowledge and proper love (the Idealist destroys the form in this text by injecting 1 Jn 1:9 + Bible doctrine + some conduit formula), or 1 John 1:9 is used to teach that this is the way one abides in God when actually 1 John 4:16 tells us explicitly that "he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him." We will examine this love in detail after we complete the foundation of reality, but I will say without fear of contradiction that the Bible universally teaches that the root, hinge, and fruit of any and all spiritual virtue is love—not mechanics or Baconian conduitism. We must understand love by examining its objective nature, not its word in the original, which is often fashioned by one's spiritual system (Idealism).

As far as this study of love, in Idealism one builds views of love based on ideas and words rather than examining the metaphysical, philosophical, and theological nature of love itself. In Idealism, the conservative will tend to define love in terms of a relaxed mental attitude whereas the liberal will tend to describe it in terms of emotions—and both will be able to find the rationale and scriptures to validate their views—the former will cite the emotionless (emotions as physical up and down passions do not exist in God) love of God (John 3:16) while the latter will emphasize emotions as per 1 John 3:17, "*But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts down his emotions (τὰ σπλάγχνα, gut feelings) how does the love of God abide in him?*"

Enough on Idealism, let us note the Realism of Aristotle/Aquinas in the semantic triangle. Note how the object in the world, not the sign/word is the object of knowledge. Again, in Realism, we start with reality, not language.

Figure 7: Aristotelian Triangle of Reference



Note the difference between Aristotle and the others we have studied. Note the solid line in Aristotle between the knower and the extra-mental thing. Note the dotted line in the others.

Figure 1: Cratylean Triangle of Reference

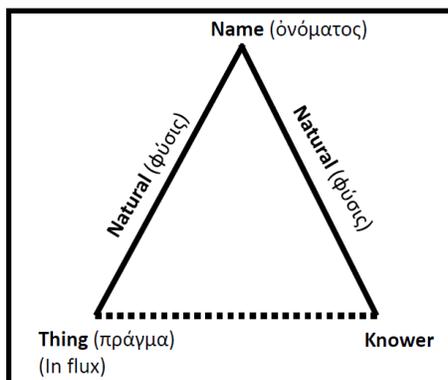


Figure 3: Hermogenian Triangle of Reference

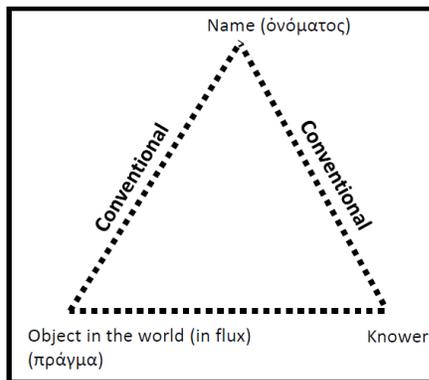
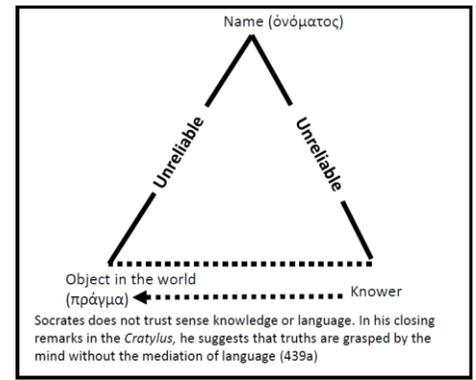


Figure 5: Socratic Triangle of Reference



Again, note the disconnect with reality in all the other systems. In the Cratylean system (the “exegetical” mode), the thing in the world is defined by the name. In the Hermogenian system, we can make up our words and reality (like the way the term “gay” is used today, a term designed for an emotional state not for sexual orientation), for there is no knowledge of the thing in the world by language or otherwise. In the Socratic system, it is all about forms or innate ideas or ideas God puts in our brains—this would be like some Reformers who say that our minds are so broken that we have no way of obtaining truth about God, love, or right/wrong directly from creation, which means we cannot understand God, morality, or truth apart from God implanting those ideas in the head (very Platonic) and the Bible—e.g., Bible-onlyism.

In sum, today there are exegetical churches follow the Cratylean system, many liberal/ecumenical/prosperity churches use the Hermogenian method to make up their own reality, and many Reformers (and even doctrinal churches) do not believe we can know God or

things like morality and love apart from God. What they all have in common is that they are all Idealist in that they all start with ideas rather than reality as such.

Note what the Bible explicitly says about the knowledge one gains from direct contact with reality as such in Romans 1:20, “*For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse.*” This is very Aristotelean and Thomistic. This is Realism!

Again, in the passage above, How is natural knowledge of God gained? By ideas, words, feelings, arguments or directly “by the things that are made?” It is not an accident that those who are heavily influenced by Idealism do not engage in natural theology—even though that is exactly what the Bible teaches. It is not hard to see how such a mindset would also not have confidence in natural knowledge about love as such and thus need to resort to word studies.

Realism not only opens the door to the beauty of all beings, it keeps one from being captured by the talk shows that thrive on Idealism (and fear) as they denigrate and demonize others who do not live in their “reality of word games.” Let us make every effort to connect with and reflect on reality as such and resist every call to move into the subjective and often paranoid and disconnected world of Idealism.

Grace and Truth,

Pastor Don