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Beyond the 'Book of Nature' to Science as Second Person Narrative: from Methodological Naturalism to Teleological Transcendence

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Abstract. The metaphor of nature as a book, and its reading, has arisen in many forms in theological discussions of natural philosophy from ancient to modern periods. It is far less fixed in form than often assumed, however, but reflects cultural contextual shape. It is also too often recruited without challenge, although the implied analogies of authorship, narrative shape, and hermeneutic contain many pitfalls. I explore four flaws in the 'Book of Nature' narrative, finding that they are connected with two related and troublesome tensions – that of 'methodological naturalism' within a theistic framework, and the redundancy of 'natural theology' in its 19th century form. Approaching a theology of science from the perspective of the Wisdom tradition offers a fresh conception of who does the writing, and reading, of nature's living book.

Keywords: Book of Job, God's two Books, methodological naturalism, Second-person narratives, Teleology of Science, Theology of Science, Wisdom tradition

Introduction

Transcendence is not, at least not only, an abstract theological category or a tradition of discourse. Its traditions and questions earth themselves in the most imminent set of relations – between the human and the material. They weave through most of the 'dialogue of science and religion', and share the tangles and problems of its current, unsatisfactory, framing. In this paper I will examine one of the traditional metaphors of a transcendent interpretation of nature, the story of 'God's Second Book', and one of its current problems, the status of 'methodological naturalism', proposing that a fresh critical reframing of the first can resolve hermeneutical issues around the second.

The Story of the Second Book

A metaphorical story of reading has dominated the theological framing of science, or more properly natural philosophy, since the high Medieval period. It is the dual narrative of the Two Books: that of a twin revelation though the Book of Scripture and the Book of Nature. The 12th century scholar Hugh of St Victor in his *De Tribus Diebus*, wrote (Poirel 2002: 9-10):

> For the whole sensible world is like a kind of book written by the finger of God – that is, created by divine power – and each particular creature is somewhat like a figure, not invented by human decision, but instituted by the divine will to manifest the invisible things of God's wisdom.

Reading the two books became a dominant metaphor for the application of human sense, reflection, and insight into nature. As Peter Harrison (2015) points out, the analogy is by no means arbitrary – it accompanies the understanding that a reading of nature was a virtuous discipline analogous to the reading of scripture, a spiritual exercise rather than its early modern reorientation as an epistemology. The Two Books metaphor surfaces in the 13th

century in reflections on the seven liberal arts of the English polymath Robert Grosseteste in the tersest of summaries, 'grammar informs sight' (cf. Gaspar *et al.* 2019), and in the Franciscan scholar Bonaventure, who hints at some of the hermeneutical difficulties such a book would present to an aspirant reader (quoted in Brague 2009: 80):

> The whole world is a shadow, a way and a trace; a book with writing front and back. Indeed, in every creature there is a refulgence of the divine exemplar, but mixed with darkness …

The notion of God's second book reappears in the early-modern era, notably in Galileo, who refers not to its medieval usage but quotes Tertullian directly. But by the early 17th century his well-known account indicates that nature's symbols have metamorphosed from Hugh's creatures into the notation of mathematics (Burtt 2003: 75).

> Philosophy is written in the grand book of the universe, which stands continually open to our gaze. But the book cannot be understood until one first learns to comprehend the language and read the letters in which it is composed. It is written in the language of mathematics, and its characters are triangles, circles and other geometric figures, without which it is humanly impossible to understand a single word of it; without these one wanders about in a dark labyrinth.

Remarkably, the metaphor is modified once more through the transformational process of the Reformation. For if a central tenet of the reformers was that the reading and interpretation of scripture, once the prerogative of the priesthood, becomes the personal task of every vernacular reader, then a similar democratisation of the reading of the second 'book' might also be expected on the grounds of cultural history alone. So it proves to be. Towards the end of the 17th century the narrative of God's second book of Nature is central to the emerging hermeneutical stance of early modern science, in protestant jurisdictions at least. An important example is found in Boyle's advocacy of the early form of citizen-science known as 'Occasional Meditation.' He writes (quoted in Hunter 1990: 284):

> The World is a Great Book, not so much of Nature as of the God of Nature, … crowded with instructive Lessons, if we had but the Skill, and would take the Pains, to extract and pick them out: the Creatures are the true Aegyptian Hieroglyphicks, that under the rude form of Birds, and Beasts etc. conceal the mysterious secrets of Knowledge and of Piety.

The context is key: Boyle is encouraging his lay readers to keep a notebook always to hand, to record their impressions of nature through everyday encounters, and to ponder on their meaning. Both reading and interpretation of nature become the task of everyone, within the same daily rhythm as Bible reading and private meditation. The reading of scripture and the reading of nature have both undergone a reformation.

The metaphor finds its final flourishing in the natural theology of Paley and the authors of the *Bridgewater Treatises* (Topham 1992). Their series subtitle is less frequently reproduced: it is *on the Power, Wisdom and Goodness of God as Manifested in the Creation*. To follow Paley in his deduction of a personal creative agent of interventionist design in the structure of a biological lensed eye is precisely to read and interpret the text of the Second Book in terms of its author. Yet as Topham (1992) points out, the *Treatises* themselves track a growing tendency to emphasise scientific content at the expense of the level of theological hermeneutic that Paley had included in his *Natural Theology* (Paley 1835). They progressively de-emphasised the import of their series subtitle. The book of nature was already distancing itself from the book of scripture as the 19th century's disciplinary fragmentation and disassociation developed. In a final contextual twist to the transformation

of the metaphor before the 20th century, the great mathematical physicist Maxwell noted the potential consequences that publication was no longer confined to the form of the codex and the book, as Matthew Stanley has pointed out (quoted in Stanley 2015: 41):

> Perhaps the 'book', as it has been called, of nature is regularly paged; if so no doubt the introductory parts will explain those that follow, and the methods taught in the first chapters will be taken for granted and used as illustrations in the more advanced parts of the course; but if it is not a 'book' at all but a magazine, nothing is more foolish than to suppose that one part can throw light upon another.

The narrative of the Two Books is compelling for aesthetic, cultural and theological reasons. For those reasons, however, the metaphor is fluid, taking on the shape of the significance of books and their writing and reading in all three corresponding domains of practice. The parallel growth of literacy and science in Europe from the medieval period onwards, the emergence of printing, widespread education, and the new forms of writing and publication that accompany early modern science, also render the metaphor itself almost irresistible. As the cultural frame around the production, reading and significance of books changed, so does the interpretation of the idea of a second divine volume. But simplistic adherence to the metaphorical reading of the Book of Nature as a conceptual framing for science generates a set of irresolvable problems at its nexus with theology. It is well to heed the warnings with which Augustine characteristically hedged its use long before any of the examples quoted above (Augustine *Contra Faustum* XXXII, 20):

> But had you begun with looking on the book of nature as the production of the Creator of all, and had you believed that your own finite understanding might be at fault wherever anything seemed to be amiss, instead of venturing to find fault with the works of God, you would not have been led into these impious follies and blasphemous fancies with which, in your ignorance of what evil really is, you heap all evils upon God.

Four Flaws in the Metaphor of the Second Book

Augustine anticipates the first flaw in the Two Books metaphor – that the understanding of nature, and its representation in current forms of natural philosophy, will be culturally constrained, and subject to the projection of ethical values onto material form. Strong advocate of the universal accessibility of the natural world as reflecting God's creative power as he is, Augustine knows that overinterpretation of nature as a message in itself is a wrong turning. The long story of theodicy (Southgate 2003) raises questions that humans have always wanted to ask of the apparent disorder of nature (see below on *Job*) but when they do, what they see in nature is more likely to pattern the phenomenon of a mirror than a book.

A second structural flaw in the natural-theological reading of the second book became increasingly visible during the nineteenth century, and was exposed in the greatest clarity by the ascent of the theory of evolution by natural selection. The passivity of written text simply fails to follow faithfully the emergent explorative potential of the tree of life. A written word is written once, and implies an immediate and proximal author. Yet an evolved species, perfectly accommodated to its environmental niche, did not require a pen to inscribe it there. Once Hugh of St. Victor's 'figures' start taking on lives of their own, speciating and exploring new 'texts' within the code of life, the metaphor begins to add inadequacy to a tendency to mislead.

A third implication of the metaphor of the second book is that its readers may deduce the character and purpose of its author through more or less sophisticated levels of reading.

Nature becomes a veiled or coded message from, and concerning, its Author. So if the Sacred Page can say of itself (Ephesians 3: 4-5 [NIV])

> In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets

then nature also becomes a once-veiled but increasingly transparent mode of insight into the person and nature of God. In the developed form of reading nature that became Natural Theology, we look *through* nature towards a vision of its Creator. Wary as Luther was of the findings of early modern science, he was no critic of the second book analogy (Bornkamm 1958: 179):

> All creation is the most beautiful book or bible, for in it God has described and portrayed Himself.

Attractive though such neo-oracular, albeit Christianised, interpretation of how to read nature might be, it runs as rapidly as the projection of the first problem into the thicket of theodicy – what must we deduce, in this mode of reading, about the creator of catastrophes and carnivores? We hear echoes of Augustine's warning that readers will find evils as well as glories on the face of a reading of nature, and attribute both to the intentional fiat of its Writer. This reading also elicits Maxwell's astute observation that books are written in order, with sequential explanation and development. Attempting to read a work more organic and fluid as if it were written as a single book leads to irresolvable hermeneutical problems.

A fourth issue, delayed until it appears on the beach of the late-modern period as the tide of near-universal theism retreated, is a problematizing of scientific method itself. If the effective practice of science is unaffected by any personal stance of belief, and if both its methods and conclusions align with a material metaphysics, namely the set of practices and assumptions termed 'methodological naturalism' (Okello 2015), what value theistic belief and practice? To summarise the issue: the daily practice of scientific research is pursued *etsi deus non daretur* – the existence of, or belief in, a creating deity does not affect the laboratory or theoretical practice of science, or the likelihood of its success. Transcendence is not a scientific category, and science is pursued within an ontology of the material only. It is important to note the weakness of the claim: the extent of 'naturalism' is restricted to the methodological, not by extension to an entire worldview. Methodological naturalism does not imply metaphysical naturalism. Yet the adoption of methodological naturalism has sat uncomfortably with some believers, and some theologians (*e.g.* Plantinga 1997), because its deployment of a method that ostensibly ignores the divine seems to imply the irrelevance of a position of faith. However, attempts to reintroduce particular differences in scientific methodology with an ostensibly theistic methodology of science run into insuperable problems at the experiential and epistemological levels. A recent, and thorough, debate on the theological admissibility or otherwise of methodological naturalism has recently played out in the journal *Zygon* (Torrance 2017, Ritchie and Perry 2018). There is not the space here to revisit the arguments of that debate, but I wish instead to develop the discussion of alternative metaphors to clarify the possible alternatives for the starting point of such a discussion. Before the issues even arise there is a tacit assumption that when we do science we are 'reading' nature, together with all the metaphorical baggage that the second book analogy hauls with it over two millennia.

A Joban Wisdom Approach

The impasses generated by the confrontation of an uncritical use of the metaphor of the Second Book within debates on methodological naturalism can be traced to the progressive narrowing of a philosophy of science to epistemology, ontology and methodology – ironically the very categories that would be employed in literary criticism (of reading), ignoring another essential human category of teleology. The gradual silencing of the category of purpose from academic discourse is itself a potential source of its marginalisation, and plays to the pretence of a human viewpoint onto nature abstracted from it, rather than embedded within it.

Within Christian theology it has become necessary to look for another narrative metaphor, that more faithfully frames the *relational, immersed and interactive* aspects of the human condition to the natural world. Such a reframing should be able to account for the success of methodological naturalism within a theodicy, and place science within a coherent setting in relation to the narrative of creation-fall-election-incarnation-resurrection-new-creation. In particular, its relational content must be at the same time faithful to our experience of nature, and to the theological story with which we make sense of our human condition.

In complementary terms, late-modern discourse has tended to categorise narratives about nature as 'third person'. In her magisterial reworking of theodicy by example, Eleanor Stump (2010) points out that much Biblical narrative is inherently 'second person', and that the category-error of forcing 'third person' structure onto it leads to artificial hermeneutical problems, similar to the four flaws we have identified in the 'Book of Nature' metaphor for nature and its concomitant approach to science. A vital case in point is found in the *Book of Job*, which adopts not only a second-person approach to theodicy, and to the relationship between God and humans (through the example of Job himself), but also introduces a second-person approach to the relationship between humans and the natural creation (McLeish 2014). I have contended that, within the Biblical Wisdom tradition, the *Book of Job* constitutes the best Biblical starting point for a narratology of the human relationship of the mind with physical creation, reading from the point at which God finally speaks to Job (after 37 chapters of silence) in chapter 38: 4-7:[1]

> Where were you when I founded the earth?
> Tell me, if you have insight.
> Who fixed its dimensions? Surely you know!
> Who stretched the measuring cord across it?
> Into what were its bases sunk,
> or who set its capstone, when the stars of the morning rejoiced together,
> and all the sons of God shouted for joy?

The writer delineates a beautiful development of the core creation narrative in Hebrew wisdom poetry (a form found in Psalms, Proverbs and some Prophets that speaks of creation through 'ordering', 'bounding' and 'setting foundations' – Brown 2010), but now in the relentless urgency of the question-form, throughout its history the imaginative core of scientific innovation. The subject matter of the poetic question-catalogue moves through meteorology, astronomy, zoology, finishing with a celebrated 'de-centralising' text that places humans at the periphery of the world, looking on in wonder at its centre-pieces, the great beasts Behemoth and Leviathan. This is an ancient recognition of the unpredictable aspects of the world: the whirlwind, the earthquake, the flood, and unknown great beasts.

[1] We take quotations of the text from the magisterial new translation and commentary by David Clines, Vol. 3 (2011).

Long recognised, as a masterpiece of ancient literature, the Book of Job has attracted and perplexed scholars in equal measures for centuries, and is still today a vibrant field of study. David Clines, to whom we owe the translation employed here, calls the Job 'the most intense book theologically and intellectually of the Old Testament' (Clines 1989). Job has inspired commentators across vistas of centuries and philosophies, from Basil the Great, to Kant, to Levinas. Philosopher Susan Neiman has recently argued the case that the Book of Job constitutes, alongside Plato, a necessary source-text for the foundation of philosophy itself (Neiman 2016).

Although readers of the text have long recognised that the cosmological motif within Job is striking and important, it has not received as much comprehensive attention as the legal, moral, and theological strands in the book, with a few notable exceptions (see Habel 1985 and Brown 2010). Arguably the identification of a direct link of the subject matter of Job to the human capacity for natural philosophy goes back at least as far as Aquinas, who refers at several points to Aristotle's *Physics* in his extensive commentary on the wisdom book, but these connections are rare in preference to metaphorical readings. Contemporary reflections on the relevance of the nature wisdom of Job for science, especially by scientists, are rare; for exceptions see the limpid reflections on the practice of science as interpreting messages from the Joban whirlwind by anthropologist Loren Eisely (1978), or the scientific theological reading of Job in physicist Tom McLeish (2014). There are, however, earlier instances of direct attribution of motivation for scientific investigations to the nature poetry in Job, and in particular to the extended questions posed by Yahweh to Job over successive realms of nature (chapters 38-42), known as the 'Lord's Answer' from which is extracted the quotation above. Theodoric of Freiberg pursued experiments in the early 14th century on the refraction of rays of white light by water-filled glass spheres, as models of raindrops, and published the first satisfactory solution to the cause of rainbows at the level of geometric optics, his *De Iride*, between 1304 and 1310 (Crombie 1953). In his earlier work on the nature of light itself, *De Luce et eius Origine*, Theodoric begins with the question, 'By what way is the light scattered and heat distributed upon the earth? (Job 38) This difficult question the Lord proposed to holy Job' (Crombie 1953: 243). Theodoric takes up the challenge by a discussion, within Aristotelian physics to be sure, of the double-nature of light within transparent media.

The progressive de-emphasising of connections between ancient and modern discussions of cosmology that accompanies the distancing of the 'two books' over the last two centuries might partly explain why The Lord's Answer to Job has had such a problematic history of reception and interpretation. The traditional interpretation challenges repeatedly whether the text, assumed to be tackling theodicy as its principal topic, really does answer Job's two questions about his own innocence and the meaninglessness of his suffering. Finding 'The Lord' of chapters 38-40 inadequate in this regard, it questions whether the voice in the creation hymns really corresponds to the creator Yahweh of the Psalms, the Pentateuch and the Prophets, and challenges the coherence of the textual transmission (Clines 2011). Some scholars have found the Lord's Answer to Job spiteful, a petulant put-down that misses the point and avoids the tough questions (Robertson 1973). But are these interpretations justified? Even looking at the text through the fresh lens of science today resonates with the *difficulty* of questioning nature, even its painfulness, as well as its *wonder* – that is how scientists respond at a first reading time and again.

To begin to answer, at a textual level, the charge that the 'Lord's Answer' isn't an answer, we need to observe that the intense nature imagery of the Book is by no means confined to Yahweh's voice. On the contrary – nature imagery is employed from the very outset of the prologue, and throughout the disputations between Job and his friends. Indeed, every theme picked up in the Lord's Answer *has already appeared in the cycles of dialogue between Job and his friends*. The entire book is structured around the theme of wild nature. There is, furthermore, an ordered pattern in the realms of creation explored predominantly in

the three cycles of speeches, moving from inanimate, to living, then to cosmological nature, as the tension between Job and his friends reaches its crescendo of personal invective in the third cycle (McLeish 2014).

Between the speech-cycles and the Lord's Answer is a third vital strand of material. For the question to which chapter 38 is the answer, is found in the equally magisterial 'Hymn to Wisdom' of chapter 28, which begins with a remarkable metaphor for human perspicuity into the structure of the world – that of the miner underground:

> Surely there is a mine for silver, and a place where gold is refined.
> Iron is taken from the soil, rock that will be poured out as copper.
> An end is put to darkness, and to the furthest bound they seek the ore in gloom and deep darkness.
> A foreign race cuts the shafts; forgotten by travellers, far away from humans they dangle and sway.
> That earth from which food comes forth is underneath changed as if by fire.
> Its rocks are the source of lapis, with its flecks of gold.

The underground world takes a reader completely by surprise – why did either an original author or a later compiler suppose that the appropriate step to take in the text at this point was the descent of a mineshaft? Reading on,

> There is a path no bird of prey knows, unseen by the eye of falcons.
> The proud beasts have not trodden it, no lion has prowled it …

There is something uniquely human about the way we fashion our relationship to the physical world. Only human eyes can *see* the material world from the new viewpoint of its interior. The writer refers to the technologically-assisted sight of the miner, both dug into a subterranean shaft, and illuminating it artificially. But the comparison with beasts endowed with acute vision points beyond, to the sight of the creative imagination that in respect of the hidden structures of nature is uniquely human. It is an enhanced sight that asks questions, that directs further exploration, that wonders.

The Hymn then reveals its intent – it is a search for lost Wisdom, but neither depths nor oceans nor the busy marketplace can provide any clue to its whereabouts. The conclusion of the hymn makes a shocking parallel between the human wisdom of the miner, and the divine wisdom of the Creator (28: 23-27):

> But God understands the way to it; it is he who knows its place.
> For he looked to the ends of the earth, and beheld everything under the heavens,
> So as to assign a weight to the wind, and determine the waters by measure,
> when he made a decree for the rain and a path for the thunderbolt –
> then he saw and appraised it, established it and fathomed it.

It is by no means true that the hymn concludes that wisdom has nothing to do with the created world, for the *reason* that God knows where to find it is precisely because he 'looked to the ends of the earth, … established it and fathomed it'. It is, as for the underground miners, a very special sort of looking – involving number (in an impressive leap of the imagination in which we assign a value to the force of the wind) and physical law (in the controlled paths of rain and lightning). This is an extraordinary claim: that wisdom is to be found in participating with a deep understanding of the world, its structure and dynamics.

A reading of the entire Book of Job reveals a continual navigation of alternatives in possible relationships between the human and the material. This question threads throughout the cycles of speeches, the Hymn to Wisdom and the Lord's Answer (McLeish 2014). From 'nature as eternal mystery' to 'nature as moral arbiter', alternatives are rejected. Remarkably,

the interpretation of 'God's Second Book' is one of a sequence of at least six possible framings of human relationship with the natural world. This is the theme of Job's fourth, and youngest companion, who reserves his words (and even his presence) to the very end of the discourses (36: 22-25):

> Behold, God is exalted in his power; who is a teacher like him?
> Who prescribed for him his conduct? Who said to him, 'You have done wrong'?
> Remember to extol his work, which mortals have praised in song.
> Every person has seen it; humans have gazed on it from afar.

Nature is (as Eiseley 1978 affirms) a Teacher, but one whose lessons are hidden in coded and chaotic form.

The conclusion of the Hymn to Wisdom itself (ch.28), as well as the Lord's Answer (ch. 38-42), points to a new notion of relationship with nature, beyond those of judge, mystery or book. This new voice hints at a balance between order and chaos rather than a domination of either. It inspires bold ideas such as a covenant between humans and the stones, thinks through the provenance of rainclouds, observes the structure of the mountains from below, wonders at the weightless suspension of the earth itself. It sees humankind's exploration of nature as in *Imago Dei*, and a participation in the creative force of Wisdom herself, and in her penetrative and perpetual gaze into the structure of nature as a dynamical, exploratory process of creative potential.

A Renewed and Reversed Natural Theology

The story of the search for wisdom through the perceptive, renewed and reconciliatory relationship with nature, begins to look like a potential source for a new theological narrative of nature in our own times. It is rooted in creation and covenant, rather than Aristotelian tradition, yet recognises emergent causation, including the divine; it recognises reasons to despair, but undercuts them with hope; it points away from stagnation to a future of greater knowledge, understanding and healing; it is centrally teleological. Furthermore, it offers a stark opposition to the stance of traditional natural theology. Rather than reading into (the book of) nature in the hope of perceiving God, or learning principally about divine attributes and action, we look *with* the Creator into creation, participating in his gaze, his love, and his co-creative ability to engage in nature's future with responsibility and wisdom.

The 'geometry' of this natural theology is entirely reversed from that implied by the framing of its 19th century instantiation. Nature is not now a veil through which humans peer, albeit with an enhanced and scientific perspicuity, to read dimly the outlines of divine nature and purpose. Instead, and with the same theological shock as the proximity and similarity of the gaze into subterranean nature by the miner and Yahweh in Job 28, human regard of material nature is from a perspective shared with its Creator, albeit clouded. The relational, epistemological and ethical consequences of this radically-revised natural theology are of considerable consequence. It is immediately apparent that humanity is de-centred from nature but in an unforced way and without diminution of a status *in imago Dei* or a downplaying of covenantal relationship in regard to a mandate of responsible dominion. A Joban-wisdom natural theology is radically non-anthropocentric while elevating human potential for creation, understanding and creation-care. The creative gift to the natural world of freedom, complexity and self-expression (Page 2009) calls humankind not just to read, but to participate in response to the divine. As Normal Habel (Habel 2001: 77) similarly concludes his outline of an 'inverse cosmology' from *Job*, 'Earth is a complex combination of creations, each of which has a designated way, place and wisdom. The function of Earth is not first and foremost to serve the interests of humanity or heaven.'

The notion of 'second person narrative' (Stump 2010) takes on a wider significance within a relational theology of nature that takes Job's experience of the Voice from the whirlwind as a starting point. For the second-person structure of the trinity of relationships between God, nature and humankind breaks free of any particular interaction, and becomes an invitation to those of Job's descendants who will engage in finding the answers to the Lord's questions about light, the cosmos, ice and snow, the animal world and more. It is an invitation that blurs the third-person distinction of subject and object as much as it urges a theological anthropology that is both immersed in and above the world. The divine is both unseen and transcendent – we are 'looking the other way', into creation in the light of God rather than through creation towards a reflection of God – and imminent, from a human proximity to the divine through election, image and a shared perspective onto the world. The 'Second Book' metaphor dissolves before such a free, dynamic, responsive and interpersonal theology of nature. The analogy has broken down long before the time we have agreed that nature's text is really interlinked hypertext, and is not fixed but is continually re-edited, by itself and by its human readers who are both embedded within its pages and co-authorial.

The critical reframing of the Two Books metaphor from the perspective of Joban wisdom is by no means the only possible approach. An alternative, and appealing, starting point is from a Trinitarian view, a version of which, based within the Lutheran tradition, has very recently been given by Schwöbel (2018). Intriguingly, a very similar relational structure emerges, with a stress on open potential in nature in which participation in the divine word becomes creative act. There is clearly strong potential to compare alternative critiques of the metaphor, as apparently distinct starting points may reflect a common deeper structure. In the case of Wisdom and Trinity, such a finding is not, perhaps, surprising.

As a final corollary, the uneasy discussion around methodological naturalism is strongly modified within a 'science engaged theology' (Ritchie and Perry 2019) that develops from such a wisdom perspective. The set of practices and communities of practice that we term 'science' are now, whether their practitioners know it or not, engaged in a second-person response to Creator and creation is wrapped up in purpose. The question of whether a theistic worldview ought to make a difference in the methodological pursuit of scientific knowledge indicates a sort of category error. The very possibility of science, and the human mandate to observe and to understand nature, is itself already entirely 'theological'. Methodological naturalism is unproblematic within a theistic worldview because it is God's own gift of insight to humans, as creative chaos becomes the gift to nature of freedom in possibility.

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