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## What is a Thing?



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When people make a study of science and engineering, they focus attention on things. If the area of psychology is neglected for the moment, even those making a study of biology treat the organism, human or animal, as a thing. The thing under consideration is an object. It is subject to us and to our investigation. People have tried to define science, and each definition has its deficiencies. However, for the present purposes, science will be defined as the study of things and a search for knowledge about things. Such a definition includes such areas as history, psychology, theology, anthropology, etc., areas that also require rational thought and discipline. These areas encompass a broader class of things than normally encountered in the physical sciences. However, for this discussion, the definition will include physical things that are of special concern to engineers. What needs illumination then is the question of what is a thing.

### **Rationality Necessary**

The question of what is science and its object of investigation, a thing, cannot be answered from within the domain of science. An apple cannot be defined by comparing it only to other apples. An apple can only be defined in terms of a broader category, such as fruit, in order to understand an apple. Of course, fruit has to be understood in terms of a still broader category of an edible product of plant life. Similarly it is not possible

to define a thing within the category of things. To help answer the question, what is a thing, it is helpful to see what are some of the characteristics of science.

The enterprise of science and engineering is based on rational thought. To quote Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947), the source of modern science is “a medieval insistence on the rationality of God. In the first place, there can be no living science unless there is a widespread instinctive conviction in the existence of an order of things, and in particular, of an order of nature.”[1] This is not something that men had to wait until the 20th century to find out. We all operate in our actual lives with a firm belief in the order of the world. Whether a person is an existentialist, a tree hugger, a new ager, or a holistic health practitioner, he will still expect the light to go on every time he turns the switch on. The world around us has a rational nature to it, and the human investigator instinctively uses rationality to discover its attributes. The hallmark of good science is rationality. Where did this rationality come from? Certainly we know that the world was not created by man, so the world’s rationality did not come from man. The issue of the source of rationality has been often debated, but after sorting through all the possibilities, there are only two left. The first possibility is that God is in matter. This would make nature rational since God who designed and infused nature with His essence would infuse nature with a state of agreeableness to reason. This is the argument of pantheism. God is in everything and everything is god. The second possibility is that God created matter wholly separate from Himself. He would have infused man with rationality also, so that order and rationality have a common source. Man would need rationality to ful-

fill the dominion mandate given him. The latter is the argument from theism and was embraced by many of those in the early stages of modern science, e.g. Isaac Newton, Louis Pasteur, Galileo Galilei, Johannes Kepler, Blaise Pascal, Robert Boyle, Michael Faraday, and James Clerk Maxwell.[2] The evolutionary theory, based on random processes, cannot in principal model the origin of order and rationality.

One cannot really escape this conclusion. He who really believes there is no rationality in this world, has long ago met with an unfortunate death. Those who are involved in astrology, yoga, parapsychology, spirit guides, right half brain artists, or the like must in the end realize the element of rationality in the world.

### **Rationality Insufficient**

Just as one cannot throw out rationality, neither can one embrace rationality as the true source of all knowledge. We have a long list in western culture of politicians and philosophers who have bent the knee to the god of rationalism. Nazi Germany had National Socialism, the Soviet Union had Marxism, and the French Revolution had Voltaire and the goddess of Reason. As for the philosophers, Descartes, sought to base his philosophy on “Cogito ergo sum,” a thoroughly rationalistic enterprise. But he was criticized by other rationalistic philosophers, both idealists and materialists. Immanuel Kant came along and produced his Critique of Pure Reason, Critique of Practical Reason, and Critique of the Judgment. He has been in some ways the favored philosopher of science. But his work was a thoroughly immanence philosophy. It had to find the ground and integration point of all reality within the created order. Kant made a big point of the “dinge an sich,” the thing in itself apart from our experience of it. The thing is defined in terms of things. A person does not need to know German and be familiar with Kantian philosophy to see the logical error here. Things cannot be defined in terms of things any more than apples could be defined in terms of apples.

Rationality is part of our world, but we have

made some terrible mistakes by being rational. The problem is that there can be many self consistent rational systems. Probably the clearest example is found in Euclidean geometry where two parallel lines never meet and a non- Euclidean geometry where two parallel lines do intersect. Both are rational, self consistent systems. They both cannot be right if they are to be applied to the physical world.

A tempting conclusion at this point might be that, in the more substantive areas of philosophy and faith, it is man’s goal to find the right rational system and believe in that. If a rational system is to be chosen in this manner, it will still have to answer the question of what is a thing. If the chosen rational system is based on an immanence philosophy, things will necessarily be defined in terms of things, and the answer will be without content.

Even worse, it has been found that no rational system can be both complete and self- consistent at the same time. This important conclusion did not come from philosophy, but from mathematics. Kurt Godel from the University of Vienna in 1931 published this now famous conclusion. The axiomatic system, which has been the hallmark of mathematics and much of science, was found in principle to be limited. Not even such elementary systems as the number system can be both self-consistent and complete. Finding out what a thing is will of necessity not be found in a strictly rational system. The issue must be taken to a broader field in philosophy.

### **Western Civilization’s Past**

Western civilization has been influenced in many ways by the Greeks. For Plato, the creation of the world was more of an arranging of chaos by the Demiurge, Plato’s divine Reason analogous to human craftsmanship. Previously in Greek history, there had been a conflict in two religions. The earlier one was centered on the vital forces of life, with its formless, perpetual life continuum. The latter centered on the cultural activities of man that emphasized the immortal, rational principle of form which transcended life. The

combining of these two led to a dualistic form-matter religious ground motive. The ground motive is a person's fundamental motivation or driving force and affects all other aspects of his life. It is the basis of life and hence also a philosophy that develops out of life. Aristotle taught that the form-matter ground motives could be fused together. For him matter (or *materia prima*) is the underlying substance that is the same for all things. The essential form accounted for the differences between different things.[3]

Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) attempted to build a synthesis between Greek and Christian thought. For Aquinas, "nature" was the independent "stepping-stone to grace," the substructure of a Christian superstructure. An attempt was made to bring these antithetical motives of nature and grace together in the same way that the Greek form-matter motive was.

"But it is evident that this construction, derived from Aristotle, could not truly reconcile the inherently contradictory motives of nature and grace. Real reconciliation would have been possible only if a higher standpoint had been found that could have transcended and encompassed both motives. However, such a motive was not available."[4]

This Thomistic synthesis has dominated the Roman Catholic thinking for centuries. It was based on the religious ground motive of the Greeks. In particular, Aquinas followed Aristotle's primacy of the form motive of the Greek culture religion over that of matter. If Aristotle had favored the matter motive, all of his logical proofs would have been reversed. Logical thinking is not autonomous with respect to faith. "It is always guided and directed by a faith commitment which in turn is controlled by the religious ground motive that grips one's thinking, either implicitly or consciously."[5]

Even the Protestant Reformation under Martin Luther did not really attack the dualistic ground motive of Nature and Grace. Luther regarded reason (*Vernunft*) as the sole guide in the realm of nature. He did not believe there was a connec-

tion between "natural reason" and the revelation in God's Word. Consequently he expressed no interest in "profane science." His dualism went so far as to make him indifferent to the temporal affairs of the church. Even though he elevated a secular calling to the level of the sacred, there remained this separation.

Late in medieval age, scholasticism broke the Church's artificial synthesis between the Greek and Christian religions. It followed the path of emancipation of the natural man from the faith of the church. Denying any contact between nature and grace, it derived its own ground motive of nature and freedom. The Renaissance was concerned with a rebirth of man in the natural sense. He would take his fate into his own hands. Its deepest religious root was in the human personality of freedom from any faith that claims allegiance and its autonomy from any law except itself. Of course it could not tolerate distinctions between natural and supernatural truths. Hence, modern man's driving force of scientific research was the ideal of complete mastery of nature. In this way the autonomous freedom of the human personality was revealed apart from supernatural powers. But, as with the others, there was the inherent contradiction in the nature - freedom religious ground motive. This is made clear when the free autonomous man turned upon himself in an attempt to gain mastery over the "free personality." If man is mastered by man, then he is not free.

### **Transcendent Philosophy**

If the question about what is a thing cannot be answered by an immanence philosophy, then a transcendent philosophy is needed. The ground motive for this philosophy arose in western thought historically between the Greek form-matter motive and the nature-grace motive. It is the Biblical motive of creation, fall, and redemption and return of Jesus Christ. Here God is recognized as the absolute and integral origin of all things. There is no power that stands against Him. This is in contrast to the conflicting origins in the Olympian gods of Roman thought. The Greek

philosopher, Plato, said the world was the result of the forming activity of the divine rational spirit with a pre-existing “substance.” This is in stark contrast to the Biblical creation *ex nihilo*. Furthermore, in making man in God’s image, God is the religious root unity of man’s creaturely existence.

Modern scientists have overestimated the mathematical, natural-scientific thinking by trying to understand things apart from man. Nature was thought of as nothing more than a constellation of static particles. But the very mathematics used to understand the object of study presuppose human language and thought. Every concept of a natural phenomena is a human affair. Indeed, “nature” apart from man does not exist. To grasp the essence of a thing a person must abstract it from a given reality. This abstraction is a logical and theoretical activity that presupposes human thought. Both reality and man’s conception of reality are created. In this sense then, if man has eternity in him, then things have an eternal significance.

God is the origin of all that is. There is no dualistic ground motive. Man in his religious root unity functions in all aspects of created reality.[6]

All temporal knowledge rests on a religious or pseudo-religious foundation. If a person says that human cognition is self-sufficient, then he is a victim of an illusion. The self has no rest in itself. It only exists in the creaturely mode of meaning that is nothing apart from the Creator. The religious meaning of the created world binds the true knowledge of things to true self-knowledge, and the latter to the true knowledge of God. Though our knowledge of the creation and the Creator are necessarily partial, yet the direction is toward the absolute truth.[7]

Western culture has passed through four religious phases; the Greek form-matter motive, the Christian creation fall redemption return motive, the Aquinas nature-grace motive, and the humanistic nature-freedom motive. Only one of these look beyond man himself to an external Creator in a unified way. Understanding “what is a thing”

necessarily depends on the religious ground motive that a person by faith commits himself to. How the question of a thing is answered leads not only how a person does his science, but how he arranges all of life’s affairs.

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# A Time-Tested Model for Church Leadership



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Christian leaders come from every walk of life. Some are Christian engineers who bring their penchant for logical and careful analysis to issues faced by their churches. Others are salesmen whose flare for building relationships and influencing others become tools for changing church life. Business managers bring their decisive and dynamic approach to many church boards. Is there a style of leadership that can bring unity and effectiveness out of the diverse backgrounds and personalities that assume church leadership? Yes, I believe there is. In recent years, ideas about business and church leadership have converged around a central thesis: The role of a leader is to build a vision around core and profound values and to transform the hearts and minds of followers so they become dedicated to fulfilling the vision. This style is called, transforming leadership. A Contemporary Business Leadership Takes Root During the past two decades, a new style of business leadership has nudged its way to prominence. Management thinkers and renowned business leaders have begun to advocate an approach to leadership introduced by James MacGregor Burns in his Pulitzer prize-winning book, *Leadership*. Some of the most highly regarded corporate leaders model this new approach. Leaders like Jack Welch of General Electric, Herb Kelleher of Southwest Airlines, and Lee Iacocca of Chrysler have given faces to the style. They hold profound values that form the bedrock for

their decisions and actions. From these values, they fashion a vision for their organizations: an image of a future state they see as worthy and within their grasp. They paint verbal pictures of what their companies could become and march forth to steer the course. Detesting the status quo, they challenge their employees with the allure of exciting innovations. With the attraction of their charismatic leadership, they stimulate others to free their minds, to spring from the cage, and to soar. They not only capture the minds and the imaginations of their people, but they also claim their loyalty and support by showing heartfelt concern for their personal and work needs. Clearly, not every businessman chosen for church leadership will be a transforming leader. Yet today, it is the dominant leadership approach advanced by scholars and modeled by respected executives. A Business Manager that Brings a Transforming Style to Leadership in His Church Sam W. (not his actual name) had started his own business while still in his 20s. In those early years, his faith was a smoldering ember, giving little heat and less light. It was in a time of near bankruptcy that his wife convinced him to start going to church again. God revealed his great power and caring in Sams life during this financial crisis. Soon, he was finding a new basis for life in Christ. Sam committed his company, his wealth, and his life fully to Christ about seven years ago. Since becoming a church leader, he has found a basic compatibility between many of his personal values and those of the other leaders of his church. He is sure God has brought him and the other leaders together to fulfill a unique vision. He helped develop and articulate a vision of a dynamic worship, solid Biblical exposition, team-based servant leadership, an involved membership, and a strong outreach to the community and the world. Sam rejects the elitism he has seen in other churches and encourages servant/shepherd leadership. As a church leader, he urges the leadership team to be prepared to serve any need no matter how servile. His practice of servant leadership in his company is shown even

during its season of high product demand when all the employees are under pressure. Sam runs the forklift, sweeps the floors, and does whatever is needed to get them past this season. He wants all the employees to act with this sense of flexibility and humility. He encourages them to develop a sense of ownership and commitment to the company. Sam is a strong and decisive leader. When others are timid, Sam encourages them to paint with bold strokes. He challenges them to think outside the box not just to follow traditions and the status quo. He was chair of the building team of his church when it discovered that its dreams for a new building were beyond its means. He suggested a design/build approach to construction, found a reputable company to do the work, and held them to a budget that was 30% below the architects initial estimated cost. Sam does not view himself as an ideal transforming leader. He was surprised to learn that the other leaders see him as highly charismatic. He gives himself low marks in the area of shepherding the flock. Still, Sam illustrates how God can use transforming business leaders in the work of advancing the lives of other believers in their quest to become more like Christ. Jesus as a Model for Church Leadership Burns transforming leadership parallels much of the leadership approach that Jesus taught his disciples as he prepared them to lead his church. In the selection and training of lay leaders, churches can now find business leaders who practice a style in their businesses that parallels the style modeled by Jesus. Just as we strive to become more like Christ in our personal lives, we can select and train church leaders to be like him in their leadership. The words and deeds of Jesus give a model for selecting and training leaders. In him, we have a complete picture of a transforming Christian leader. Did Jesus teachings of two thousand years ago actually introduce this modern day business and church leadership perspective? The clear answer is, Yes, it did. As we prepare to select and train church lay leaders today, Scripture guides our ideas and behaviors. As he pre-

pared his disciples to lead his future church, he pounded out a steady drumbeat of values. Again and again, he spoke of peace, love, moral purity, concern for the downtrodden, and honesty. Initiated in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus wove his values into the fabric of his teaching. Upon the foundation of these values, he built his vision for the church. In the great commission (Matt. 28: 18-20), he set forth his vision of the church as an instrument for bringing his teaching and his salvation to all nations. In his prayer at the Last Supper (John 17:20-26), he envisioned a body of believers unified with one another and in harmony with God. He foresaw his church as a conduit of his love for the world. He lifted up believers as a body, growing in knowledge of the Father and in spiritual strength. Following Christs example, church leaders today direct their churches toward visions that rest solidly on their values. Surely, no one would claim that Jesus was a slave to the status quo. Like no one else in history, Jesus tossed aside the traditions of his day and set the world on a new and higher course. He replaced rituals, ceremonies, and customs with principles and values that uphold a deeper and more compassionate way of life. While he did not use the term, charismatic leadership, Jesus taught his disciples to earn the admiration of others through gracious, honorable, and caring behavior. He wanted them to build their reputations on character rather than feats of accomplishment. As best illustrated by his final instructions to Peter, Jesus taught the disciples to tend his flock. Not just the Pastor, but also every church leader is to pastor Christs sheep. Following Christs example, a leader removes his sheeps infirmities, empowers them to serve others, nurtures those in need, protects them from attack, and guides them toward growth in him. Jesus spoke his most direct discourse on leadership in response to a plea by James and John for places of high status in his Kingdom (Mark 10: 35-45). In his response, Jesus introduced servant leadership. That day, he taught his disciples that to be effective leaders must sacrificially serve others. They should

not relegate menial tasks to lesser believers, because all share in an equal priesthood. Jesus instructions obliterate elitism in the church. Building Leaders that Transform Lives Only God can bring the character and selfless actions that Jesus encouraged in his disciples. Yet, we can teach church lay leaders, first, to understand this Scriptural model of leadership and, second, to strive to grow in their likeness to Christ in the exercise of this model of leadership. Recently, I conducted a training seminar for a church leadership team in the concepts and practices of transforming leadership. We began by asking each team member to complete a leadership survey for himself and for two of his fellow team members. This survey assessed the use of six key dimensions of transforming leadership: values driven, visionary, charismatic, stimulating minds and hearts, sheep tending, and servant leader. After I lead a discussion of the nature of these key dimensions, we looked at the survey results. The seminar became lively as members began to compare their own perceptions of their leadership with those of the two others who had described them. We discussed why differences existed in the views shown by the three perspectives. I challenged these leaders to strive to become more like Christ in their church leadership. Through this open interaction, they prepared themselves for continued self-examination and for mutual accountability. In later sessions, we looked in more depth at the core Christian values shared by these leaders. We developed a vision of what we believed God wanted their church to become. In the final sessions, we tried to nail down the functions that must be carried out for the church to fulfill its vision. Each member examined his own gifts and interests for areas of service that would lead the congregation to effectively carry out these functions. These leaders examined the values and visions that hold them together and propel them as a team. Now, their challenge is to continue growth in to be more like Christ as church leaders. We see a surprising parallel between Jesus leadership and that of renowned business leaders

of our day. Christians have a two-thousand-year head start on defining the practice of transforming leadership. Yet, I fear that along the way, the allure of secular leadership styles that promised prestige, power, and elitism have enticed many off the path. By understanding Jesus teaching on church leadership, Christian businessmen can adapt their transforming leadership practices to effective church governance.

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