

THE UNITARY RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ETHICS AND EPISTEMOLOGY IN THE THOUGHT OF T. F. TORRANCE

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Abstract: *T. F. Torrance's general rejection of dualism is present in many of his works. His rejection of the dualism between epistemology and ethics is important for understanding the totality of his thought. In this paper, I will discuss three concrete case studies that reveal the unitary relationship between ethics and epistemology in Torrance's thought. This is followed up with documentation that reveals that this unitary relationship is not accidental or an afterthought, but forms a vital strand of all of Torrance's thinking.*

T. F. Torrance objected to many forms of dualistic thinking. We can find his rejection of cosmological, epistemological, and Cartesian dualisms in many of his writings. A further dualism rejected by Torrance, though far less fully documented either in the primary or secondary literature, is the dualism between epistemology and ethics. For Torrance, authentic knowledge of any object must be knowledge according to the nature of the object, *kata physin*, and not according to convictions or frameworks of thought deriving from elsewhere.¹ This epistemological conviction is, at the same time, an ethical one. We can see that our need to think of things in this way as flowing from the concern to behave toward things in an appropriate way. Conversely, our ability to behave appropriately toward things depends on our ability to know them according to their natures.

In this paper, I shall begin by presenting three cases where Torrance's epistemological and ethical convictions intertwine. Once that is done and we have an example of the kind of thing to look for in Torrance's work, I shall turn

1 Torrance, *Preaching Christ Today: The Gospel and Scientific Thinking* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1994), 45 (hereafter *PCT*).



my attention to other passages that show that this unitary relationship between ethics and epistemology in Torrance's thought is not accidental but characteristic of his entire way of thinking.

Torrance and the Anselmian notion of truth

Torrance frequently engages with Anselm's work, *De Veritate*, when explaining his understanding of truth.² In these various discussions, Torrance draws out three different levels in which something may be said to be "true." First, there are what Torrance calls the two "truths of statement." The first of these is the kind of truth a statement has when it makes grammatical sense, though both Anselm and Torrance acknowledge that this is not what we usually mean when we say that a statement is "true."³ Secondly, a statement is considered true when it refers to some state of affairs beyond itself in a faithful and appropriate manner. When a statement has both truths of statement, we say it has "truth of signification."

Beyond this level of truth is what Torrance calls the "truth of being." A thing is what it is and not something else, which means that there is a certain "truth" or "rightness" inherent in being that cannot be reduced to statements *about* being. As it is to *being* that our statements refer, Torrance sees the truth of being as being more basic (in the sense of fundamental) than the truths of statement. Lastly, the truth of being depends upon the supreme truth of God for it to be what it is. In this way, the concept of "truth" is something that, first and foremost, refers to the being of God, in a secondary sense to created being and, in a tertiary sense, to our statements *about* being.⁴

While this reflection is clearly relevant for understanding Torrance's ontology and epistemology, it is also relevant for understanding his ethic as well. Truth is

2 Major discussions can be found in *Reality and Evangelical Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Publishing Co., 1982), 126-137 (hereafter *R&ET*); *Reality and Scientific Theology*, revised 2002, Wipf and Stock ed. (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1981), 143-147 (hereafter *R&ST*); "The Place of Word and Truth in Theological Inquiry According to St. Anselm," in *Studia Mediaevalia Et Mariologica*, P. Carolo Balic OFM *Septvagesium Explendi Annum Dicta*, ed. Zavalloni, O. (Rome: Antonianum, 1971), 142-147 [131-160]; "Ethical Implications of Anselm's *De Veritate*," *Theologische Zeitschrift* 24, no. 5 (1968), 309-313.

3 See the major discussions in Torrance as well as Anselm, "On Truth" [*De Veritate* 2], in *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*, tr. Ralph McInerny, ed. Brian Davies and G. R. Evans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 154.

4 Note that this is very different from the mainstream understanding of "truth" in which truth is seen to be applicable primarily, if not exclusively, to statements in their relation to being.

not something we may be indifferent toward. As Torrance says, "We owe it to the truth to be truly related to it."⁵ It is not enough to *speak* rightly, we must also *behave* rightly toward truth, whether the truth of being or the supreme truth of God. This speaking rightly and behaving rightly, while conceptually distinct, are characterized by a unitary relationship through their connection with the supreme truth of God.

There is a difference between the truth of action and the truth of signification, however, not only because their respective rightnesses vary according to the things themselves, but because in moral actions it is demanded of us not only to do what we ought in accordance with an objective rightness but to will that rightness for rightness' sake. Nevertheless in both we are concerned ultimately with one and the same rightness through participation in the Supreme Truth or Supreme Rightness of God.⁶

In this way we see that, for Torrance, epistemology and ethics are not finally separable but form two facets of an integrated approach for engaging with reality that includes both our knowing and our behavior.

Torrance on Legal Reform

In his short book, *Juridical Law and Physical Law*,⁷ Torrance argues for the need to reform British legal practice. He first discusses the problem as he sees it, following up his diagnosis with a concrete program for reform. This demonstrates, perhaps more clearly than any of his other publications, the unitary relationship between ethics and epistemology in Torrance's thought.

The problem faced by British legal practice, as Torrance sees it, is that the rulings of formal law, or the law enacted formally by the official legislative power of a nation, are seen as sovereign over the rulings of common law, or the law developed over time in various courts across the nation which dealt with actual, concrete, questions of justice. This practice arises from the more basic conviction that law is subject to the legislature, which stands in stark contrast to the conviction embedded in the common law tradition that it is the business of the courts to "discover" laws rather than to "invent" them.

5 Torrance, *Transformation and Convergence in the Frame of Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1984), 304 (hereafter *T&C*). See also *T&C*, 317; *R&ET*, 127, 145.

6 Torrance, "Ethical Implications of Anselm's *De Veritate*," 319.

7 Torrance, *Juridical Law and Physical Law*, 2nd ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1997, hereafter *JL&PL*).

Torrance provides something of a genealogy of the idea that the legislature is sovereign, even over law itself, which has the effect of showing that the convictions embedded in the practice of common law predate those of formal law. Additionally, Torrance argues that common law arose organically out of the struggle to articulate the implications of justice rather than by being imposed artificially upon the people and their relationships. Torrance traces the history of British legal reform back through Locke and Bentham (though being influenced by Newton's conception of physical law).

Briefly, the trajectory of thought goes something like this. The Newtonian dualism between "absolute, true, mathematical time and space and relative, apparent, sensible time and space" inspired, in Locke, a similar dualism between common law and formal law.⁸ This way of thinking led Locke to argue that, since "nature is made of material substances which . . . obey the purely mechanistic laws of Newtonian physics; thus there is no basis for social laws in nature."⁹ Given this lack of necessity, all laws were to be seen as being the product of social convention or convenience. This resulted in a kind of legal positivism.

Locke's own views retained protective devices that would prevent the usurpation of the legislature over the people. After all, if law is the result of positivistic convention rather than necessity, it follows that the people must retain the right to withdraw legislative authority from the government "if it acts contrary to the will of the majority and [such authority may then] be entrusted to another government, for the people alone perpetually retain a supreme power and only voluntarily delegate it to the legislative assembly so that it may establish a standing rule, common to them all, by which they may enjoy their prosperities in peace and safety."¹⁰

However Britain adopted, under the influence of Jeremy Bentham and contrary to Locke's views, a single house of Parliament entrusted with total sovereignty to make and impose law on the people.¹¹ Bentham had claimed that there must be an "omnicompetent legislation" because "any limitation of sovereignty is in contradiction to the general happiness principle."¹² While this step leads to something that is, strictly speaking, no longer a form of positivism,¹³ Torrance

8 *JL&PL*, 6, 8.

9 *JL&PL*, 8, in a quote from F. S. C. Northrop.

10 *JL&PL*, 11.

11 *JL&PL*, 14-15.

12 *JL&PL*, 14.

13 Positivism has traditionally prided itself on staying close to the empirical data, holding

still speaks of this change as being the *result* of legal positivism. Whether he is correct in using this term or not, it seems reasonable to claim that the rise of legal positivism paved the way for such a “hardening” of the authority of the legislature which seems to be the real root of Torrance’s concern with the British legal system.

At its root, Torrance is criticizing the conventionalist conception of law in favor of a realist conception.¹⁴ Indeed, the central question is “whether the law rests upon what the American Constitution calls ‘self-evident principles’ or not, that is, whether at bottom it has to do with what is intrinsically true and right.”¹⁵

What does Torrance think should be done?

Before exploring his concrete views on legal reform, Torrance connects the change he sees as necessary with the epistemological change he has found in the natural sciences. Newtonian science separated geometry from experience and then clamped the axiomatic and deductive geometric framework down upon experience.¹⁶ Just as Einstein fixed this error by bringing geometry into the heart of physics, so legal science could be corrected by bringing common law into the heart of formal law.

Torrance’s explicit reflections on juridical law are shaped by his conviction that all our thinking and behavior is rational only if it is *kata physin*. “All authentic knowledge, including legal knowledge, depends upon belief in and recognition of orderly patterns inherent in the universe.”¹⁷ Torrance develops the distinct elements of legal science in a way that strikingly parallels his epistemological reflections.

While in legal science we are no less obliged than in natural science to *think* of realities strictly in accordance with their nature, in legal science we are especially concerned with the obligation to *behave* strictly in accordance with

scientific theories as nothing more than convenient “mental fictions” (Mach’s term) that we use for organizing our thoughts. If we are to see formal law as being analogous to our theoretical expressions in natural science, it would seem that it is not appropriate to call the resulting position, opposed by Torrance, “legal positivism.” It would seem that a consistent legal positivism would react just as strongly to the Benthamite perspective as Torrance, though its subsequent development might be very different indeed.

14 *JL&PL*, 14. Torrance sees the conflict between these two conceptions as going back at least to the 1760s.

15 *JL&PL*, 15.

16 *JL&PL*, 24.

17 *JL&PL*, 27.

the nature of things. Hence we are obliged by reality itself to behave toward human beings as persons and not as animals, and to behave toward animals as living sentient organisms and not as inanimate rocks, so that appropriate positive laws are 'made' in order to articulate and make public the hidden regulative principles in those obligations. Thus, we elaborate legal systems, not in order that we may do as we please, but that we may be directed to do in common as we are obliged to do under the compelling claims of reality and its intrinsic rationality.¹⁸

This similarity of language and presentation further cements the unitary relationship between epistemology and ethics in Torrance's thought.

Torrance's positive recommendations for legal reform largely appropriates an approach to law-making put forward by Alan Watson, then Professor of Civil Law at the University of Edinburgh.¹⁹ While the content and structure of the resultant legal structure are taken from Watson's essay, Torrance presents what he believes to be the most important elements of Watson's position within a framework picked up from Einstein's essay, "Physics and Reality."²⁰ To understand the significance of this presentation, we must take a brief glance at Torrance's appropriation of Einstein in his discussions of scientific epistemology.

Torrance follows Einstein in ordering our knowledge by dividing our scientific thinking into three conceptual levels. "At the ground or primary level of daily life our experiences and cognitions are naturally and inseparably combined together. Here our basic concepts are intuitively comprehended and are directly correlated with the complexes of sense experiences."²¹ However, this level is not scientifically satisfactory on its own because it is not characterized by logical unity. "Hence scientific operations begin with a movement from this level of everyday thinking close to experience to a second level, where we seek

18 *JL&PL*, 28.

19 Alan Watson, "Two-Tier Law: A New Approach to Law-Making," *The International and Comparative Law Quarterly*, vol. 27, no. 3 (Jul., 1978), 552-575, 552. Indeed, it is easy to find several portions of text that seem to have been lifted, word-for-word, from Watson's essay.

20 Albert Einstein, "Physics and Reality," in *Out of My Later Years* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1950), 59-97, specifically the section titled, "The Stratification of the Scientific System," 63-65. The most important discussions on this topic in Torrance's work can be found in *The Ground and Grammar of Theology* (Charlottesville, VA: The University Press of Virginia, 1981), 156-159 (hereafter *G&G*), and *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being, Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), 82-88 (hereafter *CDG*). Also, see my discussion in Travis M. Stevick, "Truth and Language in the Theology of T. F. Torrance," *Participatio* 2 (Supp. Vol., 2013): 67-101.

21 *JL&PL*, 54.

to order the basic concepts in our understanding of the world by connecting them up into a coherent theory, in the process of which we shed what we judge to be unnecessary, or merely peripheral, cognitions and ideas."²²

This secondary level is *also* not sufficient in itself. It aims to facilitate encounter with reality, but is also inherently "revisable in the light of what becomes disclosed and is thereby made a more effective instrument of disclosure."²³ If this secondary level is consistent, it must find its comprehensiveness in a tertiary level. The movement to this level "involves the revision and clarification of the theorems already used, in testing the compatibility of the structure they build to experience, and the formalization of a higher and more tightly ordered theory will also have to be put as a question to reality and be clarified, revised, and simplified in the process."²⁴ All of this is aimed at reaching, as Torrance quotes Einstein, "a system of the greatest conceivable unity, and of the greatest poverty of concepts of the logical foundations, which are still compatible with the observations we made by our senses."²⁵

Watson's contribution to legal reform is of interest to Torrance in both its goals and its structure. Watson aims for our law to fulfill three requirements: First, it must be capable of responding to the needs and concerns of a society; second, it must be comprehensible to the people to whom it is relevant; and third, it must be as comprehensive as possible.²⁶ Watson attempts to achieve this by the institution of a tiered structure of law, with a first and second tier, where the first tier aims to be as comprehensible to the layperson as possible, the second tier (which also carries the force of law) aims to make it as comprehensive as possible. Additionally, there should be an "interpretive committee" who would attempt to "make the law responsive to what the community needs and wants."²⁷

These goals are achieved with three levels of legal concepts. Torrance explicitly connects Watson's ideas with Einstein's.

Professor Watson's essential intentions are very similar to those of Einstein in his account of the general method of science, although Watson's two tiers would correspond rather to the levels of ordinary science and meta-science. A basic level corresponding to the 'informal physics' which we spontaneously acquire in our daily unreflecting adjustments to nature is left out of the picture – that is,

22 *JL&PL*, 54-55.

23 *JL&PL*, 55.

24 *JL&PL*, 55.

25 *JL&PL*, 56.

26 Watson, "Two-Tier Law," 552.

27 Watson, "Two-Tier Law," 557.

the unwritten law embedded in the ontological structure of community life on which we implicitly rely, corresponding to Einstein's primary level close to the complexes of sense experience – but it is doubtless assumed.²⁸

That Torrance would assume that Watson had realist convictions that he had left tacit is telling. There is reason to believe that Watson is far more "positivistic" than Torrance with regard to law-making. Not only is Watson silent as regards the concern to "discover" rather than "make" law,²⁹ he also repeats the goal that law is intended to reflect the needs and wants of the community and never mentions Torrance's conviction that law is to uncover the moral law already implicit in our unreflecting interactions with one another.³⁰

Of course, this observation only speaks to the likelihood that Torrance has taken Watson's proposal in a direction not sufficiently warranted by Watson's own essay. It does not necessarily negate Torrance's own perspective or make it inconsistent. Rather, it reveals that Torrance is not merely repeating Watson's proposal but is creatively appropriating it in such a way that it fits in more neatly with Torrance's wider concerns.

"The institution of first rank law, then, represents the organization of the law into a general code which is immediately comprehensible to most citizens, whether they are legally trained or not, and which will provide answers to the great majority of their legal problems."³¹ That is to say, the first rank of law would attempt to organize our experience and observations of justice at the tacit level into some kind of unified account of the underlying reality that gave rise to those experiences and observations.

The institution of second rank law represents the provision of an authentic and authoritative interpretation of first rank law together with the function of constant revision and improvement of it, which would have the effect of unifying first rank law and making it consistent, thereby also ensuring its comprehensiveness.³²

Torrance's account of both first and second rank law precisely parallels his discussions of the function of the "first" and "second theoretical levels" in scientific inquiry more generally.

28 *JL&PL*, 61.

29 Watson, "Two-Tier Law," 554, even suggests that the belief that courts "merely find existing law" rather than create law, is "fictional."

30 *JL&PL*, 46-47.

31 *JL&PL*, 61.

32 *JL&PL*, 61.

Torrance argues that the two tiers of law are not entirely sufficient but a third tier needs to be added. Unlike the other two tiers, this third tier would not have the force of law, but would serve as a kind of meta-law, through which the other two tiers could be tested “upon sheer justice” and would fulfill the purpose of both a supreme court of appeals as well as a bill of rights, and would “therefore [be] without subordination to the legislature.”³³

We must note that Torrance connects this third tier of legal structure with the tertiary level (or second theoretical level) in Einstein’s thinking. In point of fact, since Torrance has assumed that Watson’s two-tiered approach to law *assumes* a level parallel to Einstein’s first stage of scientific inquiry, this “third” tier is actually analogous to a *fourth* Einsteinian level. This is, again, not a critique of what seems to be Torrance’s point, since Einstein’s system (as well as Torrance’s normal appropriation of it) places no *a priori* limit on the number of levels that may be necessary for proper scientific procedure, only that three levels is often sufficient.³⁴

We see in this case study that Torrance speaks of the way to reform legal practice in ways that precisely parallel several of his discussions of epistemology. This provides a significant and concrete example of how, for Torrance, ethical and epistemological reflections are not to be separated, but constitute two different facets of an integrated approach to reality. If we want to know something or someone as we should, we must know it or them kataphysically; if we want to behave toward something or someone as we should, we must do so kataphysically.

Order

It must be noted that, when Torrance specifies that we must know things according to their natures, he does not mean to imply that we can treat objects and persons as atomistically separable units. Rather, things and persons are what they are, in part, due to their relations with other objects and persons. Torrance calls these kind of person-constituting relations “onto-relations.”³⁵ Further, objects, persons, and their relations are not chaotic in nature, but orderly. He also makes a distinction between the divine order inherent in the

33 *JL&PL*, 65.

34 *CDG*, 84.

35 The term, “onto-relations,” can be found in *R&ET*, 42-51; *The Mediation of Christ*, revised ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: Helmers and Howard, 1992), 47; *T&C*, 230; *Space, Time and Resurrection* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976), 185; *CDG*, 102-103; *Christian Theology and Scientific Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 26-27, 51 (hereafter *CT&SC*); *Divine and Contingent Order*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 109-110; *JL&PL*, 43-44; *G&G*, 174.

being of God and the contingent order that characterizes creation. According to Torrance, the presupposition of order is indispensable in rational activity. "All rational knowledge has to do with order, in developing an orderly account of the way in which things actually are in their own inherent structure or intelligibility. If they were not orderly in themselves they would not be intelligible to us and would not be open to rational description and explanation."³⁶

This conviction, that the order inherent in things, whether divine or contingent, carries moral weight. Torrance writes the following, referring to the "kind of order that is disclosed through the incarnation of the Word," though he could just as well have been speaking of the contingent order in other fields of inquiry and engagement. "Since this is an order that we may apprehend only as we allow our minds to yield to the compelling claims of reality, it is found to be an order burdened with a latent imperative which we dare not, rationally or morally, resist, the order of how things actually are which we may appreciate adequately only as we let our minds grope out for what things are meant to be and ought to be."³⁷ Thus, reality being what it is and not something else places demands upon us that must be obeyed in both epistemology and ethics.

As the above quotation makes clear, Torrance believes that the dualism between "is" and "ought" is yet another dualism that must be overcome.³⁸

The recognition that a proper scientific description of contingent realities and events provides an account not only of how things actually are but of how they ought to be goes far toward bridging the unfortunate gap between natural science and moral science or ethics. After all, if in rigorous scientific inquiry we feel obliged to *know and understand* things strictly in accordance with their natures, in a true and faithful way, it is also the case that we feel ourselves obliged to *behave* toward them strictly in accordance with their natures, in a true and faithful way. Thus true knowledge and right behaviour are both responses to the compelling claims of reality which we cannot rationally or morally resist. This is surely an essential part of what we mean by the *scientific conscience*. If science and ethics overlap at this crucial point, it seems clear that commonly accepted views of science and ethics must change in order to do justice to the double fact that there is an inescapable moral ingredient in scientific activity

36 *The Christian Frame of Mind* (Colorado Springs: Helmers and Howard, 1989), 17 (hereafter *CFM*).

37 *CFM*, 34.

38 See *PCT*, 43; *CFM*, 88. Torrance sees the split between "is" and "ought" as being related to the split between "how" and "why." See also *CFM*, 25. Some implications of the bringing together of "is" and "ought" can be found in Christopher Holmes' contribution to this volume. A study of how Torrance might overcome the Humean critique on this topic would be deeply interesting, but beyond the scope of this volume.

and an inescapable ontological ingredient in ethical behaviour. There is a proper interrelation between the “is” and the “ought,” between being and obligation, which we need to recover today in natural, moral, and legal science alike.³⁹

This passage makes it clear that, for Torrance, epistemology and ethics are not to be separated. epistemological language (“scientific description,” “know and understand”) and ethical language (“obliged,” “inescapable moral ingredient”) are woven together to give voice to what may be called “ethico-epistemological convictions” (“scientific conscience,” “we cannot rationally or morally resist”).

Unitary Epistemology and Ethic in Torrance’s Writings

By way of review, let us consider the three examples presented so far. First, we saw that Torrance’s appropriation of Anselm’s concept of truth wove together the convictions that we must labor to ensure that our statements are related appropriately to being (which, in its turn, must be related to the supreme truth of God) so that the latter can confer truth on the former. This was seen as an ethical as well as epistemological concern, as we owe it to the truth to be rightly related to it. Second, we saw that when Torrance recommended the reform of British law, an undoubtedly ethical field, he approached the issue in a remarkably parallel way with his approach to epistemological concerns. Finally, Torrance’s commitment to order, both as it is and as it *ought* to be, reveals epistemological and ethical concerns to be interwoven to form an integrated whole.

Now that we have seen ways in which *kata physin* forms, for Torrance, both an epistemological and an ethical principle, we are in a position to see these intertwined concerns throughout his writings more clearly. This section will be composed of passages found in Torrance’s writings accompanied by brief commentary to draw out their significance for this discussion. It is the aim of this approach to make it clear that the unitary relationship between epistemology and ethics is not isolated to a few case studies but is characteristic of all Torrance’s thought, to be found in his “scientific” writings over his entire career. All italics will be added to highlight the most relevant sections of the passages.

Perhaps the most “user-friendly” exposition of the practical implications of Torrance’s principle of *kata physin* as well as the epistemology and ethic bound up with it, is found in his 1992 address “Incarnation and Atonement in the Light of Modern Scientific Rejection of Dualism.”⁴⁰ It will be quoted here at length.

39 *CFM*, 53.

40 Published in *PCT*, 41-71.

Let me indicate how this rigorous scientific inquiry operates. Suppose we inquire into the nature of a tree and bring all our rational faculties to bear upon it. In doing so we develop a modality of the reason that is appropriate to the specific nature of the tree and do not treat the tree as we would a rock or a human being, for that would be to think of it contrary to its nature, *κατὰ φύσιν*, as the Greeks would say. The tree is alive but not personally alive, and so we adapt our mode of knowing and reasoning in accordance with its nature as a tree. Suppose then we switch our inquiry to a cow, which is a living thing like a tree but is an animal, which unlike the tree is a moving being. Here there takes place another switch in the modality of our reason, in which it is adapted to the specific nature of the cow as an animal. Our scientific method is the same, knowing something as rigorously as possible in accordance with its nature. But when we then turn our inquiry toward a human being, the modality of our reason changes yet again in accordance with the nature of the human being. Here a radical change is involved because unlike a cow a human being can talk back to us and reveal something of himself or herself to us. Moreover, a human being is a rational agent with a depth of intelligibility that a cow does not have, and a human being is personal in nature, which calls for a two-way relation, a personal interaction, between the knower and the one known. We cannot get to know another human being if we stand aloof and say, now just you keep dumb, and let me try and understand you. We cannot really know another human being except in a two-way interaction with him or her. We have to open our heart and mind to him or her and listen to what he or she has to say about himself or herself. It is only in and through personal interaction that we get to know another human being. In fact, we probably really know others only as we reveal ourselves to them, rather than merely by trying to find out what they are in themselves by way of impersonal observation and deduction.⁴¹

Torrance here speaks both of how we come to know things as well as of how we ought to *behave* toward those same things. A deficiency in our knowledge of a thing will necessarily bring about a deficiency in ethical behavior, either to a greater or lesser degree. Conversely, an unwillingness to behave kataphysically will lead to a deficiency in knowledge.

Reason is our capacity to behave consciously in terms of the nature of what is not ourselves, that is to say, the *capacity to act in accordance with the nature of the object*. Hence true thoughts are thoughts which refer properly to reality and which are thought in accordance with the nature of the object to which they refer. They are not true if they refer to certain objects in a mode that is determined by the nature of other and different objects; they cannot

41 *PCT*, 46-47.

be true, for example, if they refer to personal beings as if they were merely things. Persons must be treated as persons if our thoughts of them are to be properly objective. Reason is our capacity for objectivity in this sense. *To be rational, therefore, means to behave not in terms of our own nature, but in terms of our knowledge of the world outside of us, of things and persons, in accordance with their own natures. Clearly this objectivity or reason cannot be confined to the intellect alone, but characterizes every aspect of our human life and activity as rational persons* – indeed it is the essential characteristic of personal consciousness. It is what distinguishes rational, personal activity from all inorganic, impersonal activity. Genuine objectivity must never be confused with objectivism – that would be a form of irrationality. It is the nature of persons to be reasonable, to relate themselves objectively to the world around them, in action as well as in reflection, in emotion as well as in volition. Thus if in natural science we develop a knowledge of things in their objective reality by learning to act in accordance with the nature of the world around us, so in the sphere of the ethical and social life we develop a capacity to act objectively in relation to other persons, by behaving towards them in accordance with their natures, not in terms of the natures of things and not in terms of our own subjective determinations. That is why love occupies such an essential place in these inter-personal relations, for the capacity to love objectively is the capacity in which we live as persons. Indeed, it is the ultimate source of our capacity to behave in terms of the nature of the object. Hence it would also be irrational to treat things as persons. Strict respect for the nature of what is other than ourselves is the very core of rationality.⁴²

Here, so early in Torrance's writing career, we see not only his scientific ethic interwoven with epistemology, but also with the the Christian concept of love and, by virtue of the essay in which this paragraph appears, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and the importance of ecumenism. Ethical thinking is a vital strand woven into every facet of Torrance's theology.

Torrance makes the connection between epistemology and ethics explicit in several places. Here are three such passages.

In a science we know some given reality strictly in accordance with its nature, and we let its nature determine for us the form and content of our knowledge of it. We cannot assume that we already know what its nature is, *for we learn what it is only through inductive questioning in which we try to let it declare itself to us in spite of, and often in contradiction to, what we tell ourselves about it.* This is a process in which we find ourselves being stripped of our preconceived ideas.

42 *Theology in Reconstruction* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1965), 232.

Our main difficulty in learning is undoubtedly with ourselves and our built-in habits of thought which we stubbornly carry over from the past or from another area of knowledge into our inquiries but which can only obstruct and distort our apprehension of what is really new. *In scientific activity we let ourselves and what we think we already know be called in question*, so that as far as possible we may know the given reality out of itself and in accordance with its own nature . . . In scientific activity of this kind *we try to ground our knowledge of the given reality squarely upon the reality itself and articulate what we know out of a compelling and exclusive relation with it*. This means that we must distinguish what we know from our subjective states and conditions and that in proportion as we know something in accordance with its own nature we allow our presuppositions to be suspended or set aside. But it also means that we must learn to distinguish what we know from our knowing of it, so that we may not confuse our forms of knowledge with the realities we apprehend through them. What all this adds up to is the principle of scientific objectivity, which is simply an extension of our fundamental rationality *in which we think and act in accordance with what is the case*. Is it needless to stress once again that this is the antithesis of objectifying modes of thought in which we project upon what we seek to know elaborations out of our own consciousness?⁴³

Scientific knowledge of this kind implies that we must learn to distinguish what we know from our subjective states and conditions. This is one way to state the basic scientific principle of objectivity, but it is only an extension of our fundamental mode of rationality. *We are rational when we act in accordance with the nature of the object*. To behave as though this table were not there or as though it were a personal being would be quite irrational, for it would not be treating what is 'there' in terms of what is the case. Since scientific thinking rejects all irrationality and unreality of this sort it will not allow us to impose upon any object we claim to know ideas of our own invention or ideas that we have transferred to it from some other kind of thing. This is why the scientific thinker *must be ruthlessly critical of himself and his preconceptions*, in order to prevent himself from overlaying the object of his knowledge with stuff that does not belong to it and which only obscures and distorts genuine knowledge of it.⁴⁴

Thus we find ourselves in a situation where the intelligibility manifest in and through the universe seems to lay hold of us with a power which we cannot rationally resist. *It is part of our rationality that we act under the compulsion of the nature of things and assent to it in a positive way*, but here there is a

43 *God and Rationality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 92 (hereafter G&R).

44 G&R, 115-116.

relation of transcendent reference which catches up on us and requires of us the same kind of assent, for somehow we are already committed to it in the correlation of our mental operations and the open structures of the universe of being. While it is certainly true that the semantic reference of the intelligible system of the universe breaks off and can only point brokenly beyond, so that the intentionality it involves in virtue of its contingent nature does not terminate upon an identifiable rational ground, nevertheless we are aware of coming under an imperious constraint from beyond which holds out to us the promise of future disclosure and summons us to further heuristic inquiry *which it would be irresponsible of us to evade*. It is important to note, however, that the force of this constraint is inseparably bound up with *the obligatoriness of being* and its immanent rationality that bear upon us in the universe, and therefore with the cataleptic consent which we are bound to yield to the given reality of things beyond our conceptual control or manipulation.⁴⁵

In light of such passages, it seems clear that Torrance does not see epistemology and ethics as separate but conceives them both in a unitary way that overcomes the dualism between is and ought.

It is conceivable that these passages are readily seen by readers as being about epistemology, and this interpretation would seem to be encouraged by Torrance's obvious stress upon epistemology. However, we must not allow the fact that such passages are clearly about epistemology blind us to the fact that they are clearly *equally* concerned with ethics. Several passages reveal that Torrance has woven ethical considerations into his notion of rationality. Other passages make it clear that we must be epistemically rigorous if we are to behave appropriately and that we must be committed to ethical behavior if we hope to know and understand things adequately. Both are required if the principle of *kata physin* is to be our guide.

Many more passages could be added to those already cited to show the many and varied ways the unitary relationship between epistemology and ethics works itself out in Torrance's thought.⁴⁶ The evidence presented above, though, should be sufficient to demonstrate that, far from being any kind of afterthought or neglected topic, ethical considerations form one vital strand of Torrance's whole theological and scientific project.

While it is clear that Torrance does not present his ethical convictions in an orderly way and devotes no substantial publication to their exposition beyond

45 *R&ST*, 53-54.

46 See, for some examples, *Theology in Reconstruction*, 163-164, 275; *Theological Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 26, 216, 331, 341; *G&R*, 52-53, 114-115, 198; *CT&SC*, 27-30; *R&ST*, 48, 50, 69; *T&C*, 222.

the occasional short essay,⁴⁷ this is not evidence that Torrance neglected ethics. Rather it shows that he proceeded consistently with his overarching scientific and theological convictions and integrated it within his other discussions. For Torrance, ethics finds its proper place as an important component of all human thought and behavior. To separate it out as if it could be discussed intelligibly in isolation from other concerns would be to fail to allow the *content* of his ethical concerns to inform the *form* of their presentation.⁴⁸ If this is so, it would seem that Torrance provides us with an example of a theologian whose ethic is robust and effective precisely because it does not set itself up as an independent discipline but resides at the heart of all human life.

47 Such as, for example, *JL&PL*, "The Ethical Implications of Anselm's *De Veritate*," and his pamphlet on abortion. *The Being and Nature of the Unborn Child* (Scottish Order of Christian Unity, 2000).

48 For a discussion on Torrance's insistence on the integration of form and content, see Elmer Colyer, *How to Read T. F. Torrance: Understanding His Trinitarian and Scientific Theology* (Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 2001), 345-363.