

THEOLOGY, SCIENCE, AND RELATIONALITY:
INTERDISCIPLINARY RECIPROCITY IN THE WORK
OF WOLFHART PANNENBERG

by F. LeRon Shults

Abstract. The material anthropological proposals of Wolfhart Pannenberg are best interpreted in light of the methodological reciprocity that lies across and holds together his treatments of theology and science. In the context of a response to a recent book on Pannenberg by Jacqui Stewart, this article outlines a new interpretation of his theological engagement with the human sciences. I provide a model of the relationality that links these disciplines in Pannenberg's work and commend its general contours as a resource for the ongoing reconstruction of the interdisciplinary dialogue vis-à-vis the concerns of late modernity.

Keywords: image of God; methodology; Wolfhart Pannenberg; relationality; theological anthropology.

In a recent study entitled *Reconstructing Science and Theology in Post-modernity: Pannenberg, Ethics and the Human Sciences* (2000), British theologian Jacqui Stewart offers a strident critique of Wolfhart Pannenberg's interdisciplinary method and material anthropological proposals. Assessing Pannenberg's material treatment of the human sciences, she finds three problematic areas. These she sets out at the beginning:

The first is the role of reciprocity and mutual transformation, both in understanding and human relationality, which Pannenberg seems to neglect. The second is the relation between action and knowledge. Is Pannenberg epistemologically correct and morally right to exclude action from knowledge? The third is the role of

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human community in the accumulation of knowledge; has Pannenberg taken it into consideration sufficiently? (Stewart 2000, 4)

On the question of methodology, she claims that Pannenberg “seems rather like a magpie, picking up bits that will fit together in his theological nest, without examining whether they are truly fit for the purpose” (p. 99), and that his “rationalist agenda drives him to a Procrustean methodology, in which theory is made to fit by pragmatic amputations . . . oblivious to the social and political context of the scientific ideas selected, however unsuitable they may turn out to be” (p. 69).

Stewart is not the first to make the charge that Pannenberg’s method is “rationalist” and “modernist” and thus rendered useless in our postmodern culture. The burden of this article is to demonstrate that, and to explain why, Stewart makes the same interpretive mistakes that I traced in other authors in my book *The Postfoundationalist Task of Theology: Wolfhart Pannenberg and the New Theological Rationality* (Shults 1999b). There I defended Pannenberg against this kind of facile labeling and dismissal through an extensive textual analysis, outlining the dynamic structures of reciprocal relationality that lie across and link his various writings and illustrating how his methodology may be critically appropriated in a reconstructive dialogue that engages the concerns of late modernity. The material misinterpretations in Stewart’s book, I argue, are influenced by her inability to see the overlapping dynamics of Pannenberg’s interdisciplinary method.

After her introductory chapter, Stewart provides an interpretation of Pannenberg’s view of “Knowledge in Science and Theology” in chapter 2. Here she pays special attention to his reaction to Gadamer and Popper. The next three chapters form the bulk of her book and offer consecutive critiques of Pannenberg’s use of biology, psychology, and the social sciences. Her final chapter, “Rationality and Transformation,” summarizes her overall rejection of his approach; she concludes that Pannenberg ignores or contests “science that does not obviously fit with his intellectual objectives” (p. 146). Stewart’s passion about including the human sciences in the broader dialogue between theology and science is evident. Indeed, she admits that Pannenberg is one of the few theologians who have rigorously attempted to do precisely this. I share her passion here. She notes that Pannenberg has not deeply engaged the concerns of feminist, liberation, and other thinkers who are struggling with pressing ethical issues. I, too, believe we must expand and deepen theological anthropology to include these concerns. However, I argue that an adequate understanding of the relationality in Pannenberg’s method helps us see that his approach may facilitate (rather than inhibit, as Stewart suggests) a reconstructive dialogue between theology and the human sciences.

In the first part of this article, I summarize the role of relationality in Pannenberg’s method, demonstrating the reciprocity and sublation operative within and between his *Anthropology in Theological Perspective* ([1983]

1985; hereafter *ATP*) and chapter 8 of volume II of his *Systematic Theology* (1991–98; hereafter, *ST*). Stewart builds her material case almost solely on the analysis of these two writings; this narrow focus may partially explain why she fails to see the reciprocal relationality between them and their place in his overall corpus, which I have outlined and explained elsewhere.¹ In the second part, I offer a critical evaluation of Stewart's interpretation of Pannenberg's anthropological proposals, showing that many of her material misreadings are rooted in her misunderstanding of his method. Here I focus on the second and third of the issues she finds problematic in Pannenberg, namely the roles of "action" and "community" in knowledge, as well as on her assertion that he does not sufficiently emphasize the Trinity and Christology.

Stewart's mistakes fall into two broad categories: errors of commission and errors of omission. The misinterpretations of the first type are surprising, because she often contradicts herself and includes quotations in her text from Pannenberg that invalidate her own criticism, as we will see. Yet, the second type of mistake is even more surprising. She frequently makes unqualified claims about Pannenberg's position; for example, that he "does not deal with the psychology of human social relationships *at all*" (Stewart 2000, 71; emphasis added). Referring to *ATP*, Stewart asserts that Pannenberg "does not engage *here or elsewhere* in any discussion of the psychological or philosophical aspects of liberation, freedom or forgiveness from alienation and sin" (2000, 97; emphasis added). I express my surprise at these exaggerations because her book omits treatment of many of Pannenberg's anthropological writings that provide explicit counterexamples to her claims. Her lack of engagement with the whole Pannenbergian corpus compels me to point again to the relationality that lies across the breadth of his work, which I argue offers us a resource for the ongoing dialogue between religion and science.

RELATIONALITY IN PANNENBERG'S INTERDISCIPLINARY METHOD

How does Pannenberg relate the disciplines of scientific anthropology and theology? Some scholars believe that Pannenberg bases his theological proposals on allegedly rational science, which he takes at face value. Others assert the opposite, that he presupposes certain theological content and then molds anthropological science to fit his interpretation. Oddly, Stewart makes both of these mutually exclusive claims. On the one hand, she claims that "for Pannenberg, theology is the basis from which all other knowledge can be evaluated, and to which it must conform, in order to protect the Christian from error" (2000, 5). Those familiar with Pannenberg's broad interdisciplinary writings will find Stewart's claim that "Pannenberg does not generally accept any new insights from science" (p. 149) incredible at best. Yet, on the other hand, she says that "Pannenberg assumes science to be both true and good. Apart from criticizing atheist

assumptions within some science, he does not take issue with it on any other ground” (p. 25). She notes his acceptance of evolutionary biology’s challenge to the traditional doctrine of a historical Fall as the exception to the rule, which she finds “interesting, because he does not give such an epistemological priority to science anywhere else” (p. 68). Yet her exposition is full of examples of Pannenberg’s philosophical critique of scientific hypotheses. These contradictory statements suggest that Stewart has overlooked the possibility of a deeper dynamic relationality at work in Pannenberg’s methodology.

In chapter 2 of her book, Stewart addresses the issue of knowledge and rationality in Pannenberg; her concerns here guide her interpretation of his material proposals throughout. Unfortunately, Stewart’s summary of Pannenberg’s *Theology and the Philosophy of Science* (1976; hereafter *TPS*) so focuses on his relation to Gadamer and Popper that she fails to see the broader model of rationality that he proposes. This selective analysis leads her to make such assertions as: Pannenberg “regards the division of the natural and human sciences as basically unproblematic” (Stewart 2000, 34). Yet, Pannenberg explicitly treats this as a problem, noting that this dichotomy is rooted in the dualism of nature and mind (*Geist*), which buttresses a distinction between *Naturwissenschaft* and *Geisteswissenschaft*. He expressly states: “Today this dualism is unsatisfactory both in itself and as a principle of classification in the sciences” (*TPS*, 124).

Further, Stewart neglects other places where Pannenberg extensively treats the issues of knowledge and rationality; this neglect is a pattern in her book that I will illustrate in detail in a later section. Besides *TPS*, *ATP*, and *ST*, Stewart lists only eight other works by Pannenberg in her bibliography, and many of these are cited only once or twice in her book. Her overarching desire to label Pannenberg a rationalist leads her to claim that he “does not deal with any of the philosophies which have recognized that there is more to the human person than logic” (2000, 89). Elsewhere, she contradicts herself when she observes that Pannenberg does deal considerably with emotions, feeling, and imagination in human consciousness (pp. 115ff.). On the question of Pannenberg’s view of interdisciplinary rationality, she might have avoided unfortunate overstatements if she had included the relevant sections on hermeneutics and rationality that treat the key issue of the whole/part interplay in human knowing in, for example, *Metaphysics and the Idea of God* (1989, 130–52) and *Theologie und Philosophie* (1996, 364–67), neither of which appears in her bibliography. Stewart often claims that Pannenberg does not follow his own method (2000, 33, 37), but perhaps she has misunderstood it.

My thesis is that understanding Pannenberg’s interdisciplinary method requires a recognition of the dynamics of reciprocity and sublation that hold his anthropological works together in an asymmetric bipolar relational unity. Pannenberg does not start in a foundational sense either with

theology or science but rather holds the two together in a mutually conditioning relationship. I take this opportunity to outline these dynamics again² and illustrate both Stewart's failure to see them and the interpretive stumbles that follow this failure.

Reciprocity. Comprehending the relation between *TPS*, *ATP*, and *ST* is crucial for discerning the pattern of Pannenberg's methodology. In the first volume of *ST*, he refers back to his *TPS*, where he had "accorded fundamental theological rank to anthropology as the basis of a theology of religion" (*ST* I, 157–58; translation emended). He immediately continues, however, by insisting, "I naturally have in view only a methodological priority and am not treating anthropology as materially the basis of theology" (cf. *ST* I, 56–57, 417). Grasping this distinction between methodological and material priority is necessary for understanding Pannenberg. In *TPS*, he proposed a theology of religion in which anthropology (broadly conceived) is operative in both the (abstract) philosophy of religion and the (concrete) history of religion. These cannot be thought of apart from each other; they are mutually conditioning.

Stewart misses the fact that in *TPS* (p. 368 n) Pannenberg also defines theology as an overlapping or transcending (*ubergreifende*) category, that is, a discipline that moves between and holds together philosophy of religion and history of religion. Theology in this overlapping sense is like anthropology in its ability to move back and forth, thereby linking the concrete and the abstract. Pannenberg explains that this "theology of religions" will find its basis in a "general" anthropology; even in the case of systematic theology, the most "general foundations" will have to come from anthropology (*TPS*, 422). By "basis" he means methodological starting-point, not self-authenticating ground; by "anthropology" he means human self-understanding, not a science wholly alien to theology. Theology does not simply accept the findings of anthropology and build upon them. Rather, "theology broaches the anthropological phenomena with a view to their religious and theological implications" (*TPS*, 422). In this context, we have a clear allusion to what Pannenberg will try to accomplish a few years later in *ATP*.

Earlier Pannenberg had explained the relational dynamics between historical and dogmatic statements in the context of discussing the Christ-event: "what people have become accustomed to separate as historical and dogmatic statements are really [two] moments in a single cognitive process. . . . Both aspects . . . are so intertwined that the process of acquiring knowledge of this always passes from one to the other" (1970a, 199). He later describes this as a "relation of real mutual conditioning between an idea of God and a human self-understanding" and refers to "the actual reciprocal relation of theology and anthropology that characterizes human self-understanding" (*ST* II, 290, 291). His methodological decisions are

shaped by his belief that “the question about God and that about man can only be answered together” (1970a, 232).

The point for Pannenberg is that our human self-understanding (anthropology) and our idea of God (theology) are operative in both moments; these categories overlap both historical and dogmatic statements, or what he will later call fundamental theology and systematic theology. Theology and anthropology are not two separate operations that one must work to bring together. Rather, they are mutually conditioning, each unthinkable without the other. Pannenberg emphasized already in *ATP* that he rejects the view that anthropology stands “over against theology as something different from the latter, and theology, which in turn stands over against the anthropology as something different from it, is supposed to establish contact with this very different thing” (*ATP*, 19). The two tasks of fundamental (or “philosophical”) and systematic (or “historical”) theology are inseparable, though distinct, as are the two tasks of philosophy of religion and history of religion. Both anthropology and theology permeate both sides of the relation. However, we may still distinguish two tasks, one that focuses on the anthropological data (with theological concerns as the background), while the other presents the explanatory power of theological statements in relation to our lived human experience (here anthropology recedes to the background but stays in the picture).

Sublation. What are the concrete structural dynamics of the “reciprocity” between these two disciplines in Pannenberg’s methodology? In a section of *TPS* that Stewart does not carefully examine, Pannenberg explains that “in the detailed treatment of the phenomenon of religion the abstraction of the general concept of religion, which is unavoidable as a starting point, must be sublated [*aufgehoben*] in the complexity of the historical reality of religions” (*TPS*, 419). A few pages later, he proposes that “on the basis of general anthropology the theology of religion first elaborates, as a propaedeutic, the concept of religion (philosophy of religion) and then sublates [*aufzuheben*] it in the actual movement of the history of religion” (*TPS*, 423; translation emended). The reciprocal relation, then, involves “*Aufhebung*,” that is, a sublating dynamic. We have here the idea of something being negated, yet preserved, as it is elevated into something else.³ This is not the founding of one concept or belief upon another but a recognition of the dialectical relation between them. Neither theology nor anthropological science is immunized as a foundation for Pannenberg; his interest is in the dynamic interactive field in which they are embedded.

The two moments that explore this field, the “fundamental” and the “systematic,” are distinct but not separable. For Pannenberg, theology (as a whole) involves these two moments (or movements) in a complex relational unity, wherein the moment of systematic theology sublates the moment of fundamental theology. This plays itself out in *ST II*, where

Pannenberg sublates the work of *ATP*. He had announced his intention to do this already in *Grundlagen der Theologie—ein Diskurs* (Pannenberg et al. 1974, 29) and reiterated this intention in *Sind wir von Natur aus religiös?* (1986, 165–66). Neither of these texts appears in Stewart’s book.

Failing to note the reciprocal relation between *ATP* and *ST*, Stewart criticizes the former for not doing the work of systematic theology. She is surprised to find a systematic theological emphasis appear in Pannenberg’s treatment of the issues in *ST* II, because she missed it in *ATP* (Stewart 2000, 72 n. 2). She notes that *ATP* does not often speak of the content of Jesus’ life (p. 12) and wonders why it has only limited reference to the New Testament (p. 145). However, neither setting out a Christology nor providing exegesis was its task, as Pannenberg makes clear early on in *ATP* itself. He is careful to distinguish his task there from dogmatic anthropology, which develops the concepts of sin and image of God on the basis of what the Bible says.

... the studies undertaken here [*ATP*] may be summarily described as a *fundamental-theological* anthropology. This anthropology does not argue from dogmatic data and presuppositions. Rather, it turns its attention directly to the phenomena of human existence as investigated in human biology, psychology, cultural anthropology, or sociology and examines the findings of these disciplines with an eye to implications that may be relevant to religion and theology. (*ATP*, 21)

This fundamental-theological move in *ATP* does not presuppose the truth of a trinitarian conception of the reality of God but aims to thematize human openness to the world, showing that it requires an infinite reality.⁴ It remains to be shown, however, what this reality is. As Pannenberg put it in an earlier work, “the messages of the religions are to be tested on the basis of whether they conceal the infinite openness of human existence or allow it to emerge” (1970b, 11). This testing of Christian doctrine is not the task of *ATP* but of *ST*.

Not only does Stewart misunderstand the nature of the task of *ATP*, referring to it simply as “theological anthropology” (2000, 131), she also misses Pannenberg’s explanation of the role of sublation in *ST* itself. The general concepts of God, revelation, and religion (which all interface with anthropology) have a “transitional function” (*ST* I, 198). In chapter 3, Pannenberg makes explicit a critical methodological turn: “In the next sections we shall try to identify the anthropological elements of truth in the new theological approach in terms of the concept of religion. We shall do so in the interest of taking them up into [*Aufhebung*] the perspective of a theology that is oriented to the primacy of God and his revelation” (*ST* I, 128).

In the original German, Pannenberg puts “*Aufhebung*” in quotation marks for emphasis (*Systematische Theologie* I, 143). The significance of this is missed in the English translation. So here the argument in *ST* turns around

and becomes an exposition of revelation (from chapter 4 on), exploring how it illuminates the phenomena of religion and human experience generally.⁵

Although Pannenberg treats the three traditional loci of theological anthropology (personal unity, image of God, and sin) in chapter 8 of *ST II*, he makes it clear that these alone do not fulfill the task. A complete theological anthropology

would require more than a description of our destiny and the situation of alienation from it. A full theological anthropology would have to include as well the actualizing of this destiny, which is the theme of God's redeeming work, its appropriation to and by us, and its goal in the eschatological consummation. A full anthropology would also include not only the biological foundations of the human form of life, its nature, and its position in the world but also the social relations in which human life is lived and which help to condition individual identity in the process of socialization. (*ST II*, 180–81)

Here he is referring to both the explicit arguments of *ATP* and the dialogue with anthropology throughout *ST I–III*. The image of God (*imago Dei*) is crucial for Pannenberg, but “presentation of this doctrine needs a more general anthropological basis that will ensure the connection between theological anthropology and the doctrine of creation on the one side, and christology on the other” (*ST II*, 180). This quotation shows how chapter 8 (the focus of Stewart's analysis) can be understood only in light of chapter 7 (creation) and chapter 9 (Christology).

In a footnote, Pannenberg adds: “Christology and eschatology then of course must be brought into anthropology, the former as a basis for being in grace, the latter as its consummation. Nor must ecclesiology be left out, for it describes the community life within which our being in grace is actually lived” (*ST II*, 180). This means that in all of the remaining doctrines to be treated in *ST* (including vol. III) anthropological themes will be present (as sublated). Stewart misses this, as we can see from her assertion that Pannenberg does not treat the doctrine of creation in his anthropology: he “does not invoke classical theologies of creation *at all* in his discussion of what it is to be human” (2000, 20, emphasis added; cf. pp. 69, 72). She does not mention here that Pannenberg develops the doctrine of creation in chapter 7 of *ST II* in order to provide the context for anthropology proper (chapter 8). She does not understand why in *ATP* he fails to treat ecclesiology (p. 129) and is shocked that he does not appeal to New Testament criteria in his analysis of evolutionary or political theory (p. 123). This misunderstanding and surprise is due to the fact that she is expecting *ATP* to do the work of systematics. Unfortunately, she does not refer to the extensive sections in *ST III*, where Pannenberg does treat anthropological issues in light of ecclesiology and the other themes she misses in *ATP*.

Asymmetric Bipolar Relational Unity. My analysis so far has shown that, while Pannenberg does refer to the reciprocity as involving “subla-

tion,” this term alone does not adequately describe the relationality that shapes his method. We have seen a differentiated bipolarity, a clear asymmetry, and an actual relational unity. That is, first, we have a process that is constituted by two distinct “moments.” Second, although the fundamental moment may come first in a presentation (methodological priority), the systematic moment has material primacy. Third, these reciprocal dynamics constitute the one task of theological critical reflection, in which our self-understanding and ideas of God are mutually conditioning.

I aim to provide a heuristic picture that captures these aspects of Pannenberg’s method in chapter 4 of *The Postfoundationalist Task of Theology* (1999b). For this purpose, I adopt and adapt a model developed by James Loder and W. Jim Neidhardt in *The Knight’s Move: The Relational Logic of Spirit in Theology and Science* (1992). They appropriate the image of the well-known Möbius band as a model of what they call “asymmetric bipolar relational unity.” This band is a topological space discovered by August Möbius in the nineteenth century. Imagine a long strip of paper twisted once and then connected (seamlessly) at the ends. In M. C. Escher’s rendering of the band, six ants travel along the strip.⁶ For our purposes, the value of this figure is that it illustrates a true differentiated unity; one discovers this unity by following the path of the ants around the loop (or by drawing a single line with a pencil down the center of the constructed strip of paper). The simplified model in figure 1 may help clarify the unity of the two moments of theology in Pannenberg’s work.

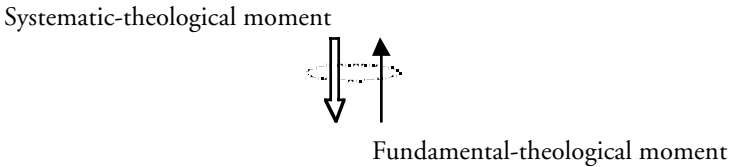


Fig. 1

The bipolarity of the “up” and “down” movements points to the real differentiation involved in the relation. The block arrow (pointing downward) represents the systematic movement, which implies the sublation as well as the illumination of the other movement. The line arrow (pointing upward) represents the fundamental movement, which can be described as “calling for” explanation at a higher level, “pointing to” religious themes, or, in Pannenberg’s words, “leading to” (*ATP*, 21) theological concepts.⁷ This captures the asymmetry of the reciprocity. The broken circle suggests the “twist” (better represented by the Möbius band) that unifies the movements and so aims at capturing the real relational unity of the entire theological task. Material issues treated in *ATP* and *ST II* may be plotted as shown in figure 2.

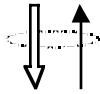
Spirit, *imago Dei*, sin (*ST II*)Personal identity, exocentricity, centrality (*ATP*)

Fig. 2

ST II, with its focus on doctrinal terminology, is not merely on the “top,” nor is the anthropological analysis of *ATP* only on the “bottom.” The value of this model is that it insists on the real coinherence of the movements; they are inextricably intertwined and overlapping. Only by taking in both movements (*ATP* and *ST*) at once can we grasp the relational unity of Pannenberg’s approach. In my book (1999b) I provided a synchronic presentation of the two treatments demonstrating their asymmetric bipolar relational unity. The fact that Stewart does not notice this reciprocity may be the root cause of her misconstrual of the role of rationality in his method.⁸ I turn now to an examination of the ways in which her misinterpretation of Pannenberg’s method may have led to her misreading of some of his material proposals.

RELATIONALITY IN PANNENBERG’S ANTHROPOLOGICAL PROPOSALS

The following sections examine Stewart’s concerns about Pannenberg’s view of the role of action (ethics), community, and Trinity in theological knowing.

Action and Knowledge. Stewart often makes sweeping generalizations about Pannenberg’s views. According to her, he “wishes to exclude all notions of action from knowledge” (2000, 22; cf. p. 158) and to “preserve the process of knowing from the contamination of action” (p. 114). She alleges that Pannenberg “denies the link between knowledge and action” (p. 156) and tries to buttress his position against relativism by “eliminating action or *phronesis* and conversational reciprocity from his account of knowledge” (p. 139; cf. p. 147). He views knowing as “separate from and prior to action” (p. 94), which supports his “concern for the exclusion of action from accounts of human rationality” (p. 72).

Stewart does not provide any quotations from Pannenberg’s writings to support her unqualified claims that he wants to exclude and eliminate and separate action from treatments of knowledge. Nor am I aware of any place where he says this. The sections to which she refers (*ATP*, chap. 6, and *ST II*, 192–93, 202) argue a much more subtle thesis: that action may not be taken as *primary* in understanding human knowledge, for the concept of action presupposes an agent who is the subject of the action. For this reason, action per se cannot be the theoretical *basis* of an anthropo-

logical explanation of human knowing; this opens up conceptual space for considering other explanations. Pannenberg's argument in *ATP* is that free human activity is made possible by an openness to the infinite that is constitutive of personhood; in *ST II*, this openness is explained through a "dogmatic" treatment of human creatureliness as participating in the self-differentiation of the Logos and as elevated toward fellowship with God by the power of the Spirit. This dynamic openness, which is mediated through the historical experience of the religions, is an explanation that renders intelligible both knowledge and action. Further, Stewart does not cite other places where Pannenberg clarifies his concern with *basing* anthropology on a theory of human action that ignores the role of divine subjectivity as that which makes human action and knowledge possible (for example, 1973a, 489ff.; 1967, 322ff.).⁹

We saw earlier that Stewart argues, in reference to *ATP*, that Pannenberg "does not engage here or elsewhere in any discussion of the psychological or philosophical aspects of liberation, freedom or forgiveness from alienation and sin" (2000, 97). This claim is surprising, since Pannenberg does treat these aspects of the human condition not only later in *ST II* and *III* but also in several other earlier works, such as *The Idea of God and Human Freedom* (1973c) and *Ethik und Ekklesiologie* (1977a; cf. also 1972a; 1975). Stewart says that Pannenberg "does not argue for any ethically based restrictions on arbitrary destruction of property in the light of communal needs" (2000, 123). Yet, he does in fact describe the mediation between the needs of the individual and community in chapters 12 to 14 of *ST III*, and he quite explicitly does argue for ethical restrictions in various sections of his book *Human Nature, Election and History* (1977b, 26ff., 38ff.), another text that makes no appearance in her monograph.

Stewart concludes that "love and transformation are completely absent" (2000, 150) from Pannenberg's discussions of human understanding and that this absence has deleterious effects on his ethical theory. She argues that "his view of humans as potentially unconstrained animals in need of the control of culture has curiously little of the positive, of love, of the constructive creativity of human relationships" (p. 78). Repeatedly, Stewart comes to places where Pannenberg does indeed treat transformation and love, but then she backpedals with comments like: "this is noteworthy in that it is one of the infrequent occasions when Pannenberg actually refers to love" (2000, 85; cf. pp. 94, 127). Speaking of *ST II*, chapter 8, Stewart is frustrated that Pannenberg spends so little time discussing "the reality of reconciliation and renewal" (2000, 102). Yet, she does not mention chapter 11 in *ST II*, which is all about reconciliation, or the chapters in *ST III*, which are full of depictions of community, love, and renewal. I am suggesting that much of Stewart's misreading of Pannenberg is due to her failure to see the nature and role of the relationality that ties together his whole corpus.¹⁰

Community and Knowledge. In Stewart's assessment of Pannenberg's treatment of sociality and community, we find the same tendency toward hyperbole. According to Stewart, by "ignoring the social dimension of culture" (2000, 155; cf. p. 46), Pannenberg is unable to evaluate its role in knowledge. Indeed, Pannenberg is accused of effecting a "dissolution of the social" (p. 152) and of having "eliminated any social component of knowledge" (p. 153). Stewart claims that Pannenberg "does not deal with the psychology of human social relationships at all" (p. 71), "does not mention the psychology of relationship, of forgiveness, reconciliation, conversion and transformation" (p. 159), and, summarily, "The whole of his treatment of psychology simply ignores the relation with the other" (p. 125). Yet, she herself quotes Pannenberg, who discusses "the determination of the ego itself by the community or, as the case may be, by the persons who serve as points of reference for individuals in their development" (*ATP*, 164; quoted in Stewart 2000, 73). Nine pages later, she quotes Pannenberg again: "Familiarity with 'oneself' is therefore mediated through trust in a sheltering and supporting context in which I originally awaken to myself" (*ATP*, 221). Indeed, in her own exposition, she notes Pannenberg's correction of Heidegger by trying to emphasize the dimension of community (2000, 80), and inevitably she must acknowledge his engagement with and appreciation of social theorists like Buber (p. 75) and Mead (p. 77).

Discussing his early *Revelation as History* (Pannenberg et al. 1968), Stewart claims that Pannenberg "does not engage with the controversies in contemporary philosophy of science about how truth and knowledge are affected by social and contingent factors" (2000, 45). In her own analysis earlier in the same chapter, however, she had already pointed out his approval of Gadamer's "assertion of the provisional, time-conditioned nature of knowledge" (p. 28). And later she notes that Pannenberg "has accepted a role for social conditioning in the development of the self" (p. 86) and that he praises this very thing in Jung (p. 93), critiques Tillich for not stressing it (p. 97), and engages various psychologists in order to argue for the mediation of knowledge through social relations (p. 99). Discussing *ATP*, she admits Pannenberg's "assertion of the essential role of community" (p. 101), but this is for her an "unexpected twist." Perhaps it is unexpected for her because she is expecting confirmation of her overarching criticism that "his treatment throughout is rationalist, individualist, and tending to an internally driven determinism" (p. 19).

Stewart regrets that Pannenberg does not engage thinkers (like Frankl and Tillich) who emphasize contextuality, but she fails to point out places where he does treat both these and others on the topic of the role of context in knowledge, for example, in his articles "Sinnerfahrung, Religion und Gottesfrage" (1984, 186ff.) and "History and Meaning in Lonergan's Approach to Theological Method" (1973b, 108f.). She views Pannenberg

as “providing a narrow defence of a politically right wing European *status quo*” (2000, 124) and in her discussion of his view of the ultimate unity of society claims that “Pannenberg does not say whether this is an ideal unity to be worked towards; or what kind of unity could exist in present societies, which exhibit so much empirical fragmentation” (p. 108). But a careful reading of Pannenberg shows that even in *ATP* he does say that this unity is an ideal that depends on divine action (*ATP*, chap. 9, 486ff., 507ff.). Further, he explicitly treats the issues that Stewart says he does not in articles like “Zukunft und Einheit der Menschheit” (1980b; cf. 1972b), and in various essays in *Faith and Reality* (1975, 105–38) and in *Theology and the Kingdom of God* (1969, 72–126; cf. 1977b, 28–41). None of these appears in Stewart’s bibliography.

Finally, in discussing *ATP*, Stewart claims that Pannenberg locates “sin in the essential structure of the human psyche” and that he desires “to avoid any explanation of original sin in community terms” (2000, 19). I suggest that her failure to see the relationality in Pannenberg’s method leads her to miss the dynamics of the *systematic*-theological move in *ST II* (where he discusses the role of community in sin), when she is focusing on the *fundamental*-theological movement of *ATP*. Yet, even in *ATP* Pannenberg explicitly denies what Stewart claims he affirms. Pannenberg states that even if sin is “closely connected with the *natural conditions* of our existence” this “does not mean that their nature as human beings is sinful” (*ATP*, 107). She makes the same mistake in her analysis of his view of the image of God as the destiny of human beings. To her, his position “seems a matter entirely of God’s decree; there is no sense of engagement between God and humanity” (2000, 11), and “the relationality which is such a prominent part of the Reformers’ view of the image of God seems to be suppressed” (p. 13). Here again, she misses the inherent relationality of Pannenberg’s vision of the exocentricity of human existence laid out in *ST II* and elsewhere.¹¹

Trinity and Knowledge. What seems to worry Stewart is that Pannenberg’s approach is not truly a “theological” anthropology. A recurrent theme in her analysis is that Pannenberg’s “rational” method keeps him from appropriately emphasizing the hermeneutical role of the Trinity; this includes his alleged lack of emphasis on the cross of Christ and on the interactive work of the Spirit in the life of the Christian community. Stewart dismisses Pannenberg as a resource for reconstruction because she believes that he fails in these areas. For example, she suggests that “a theological critique of Pannenberg’s undervaluing of the social is implied by relational understandings of God—for example, [Daniel] Hardy’s social trinitarianism” (Stewart 2000, 152). This suggestion is surprising, since Stewart does not discuss *ST I*, where Pannenberg offers an extremely robust trinitarian doctrine (chap. 5) and traces at length the importance of the concept of

relationality for theology in the last two centuries (chap. 6). Nor does she cite the many other places where he emphasizes Trinity, such as his article "Eine philosophisch-historische Hermeneutik des Christentums" (1992), where Pannenberg states that the Trinity is the "central illustration of the linking of historical and philosophical elements in Christian theology" (p. 43). In fact, Pannenberg is generally considered one of the most innovative contemporary contributors to the doctrine of Trinity.

Stewart misses a focus on Christ in Pannenberg's anthropology, arguing that for him Jesus is "almost a passive figure" (2000, 11) and that his theology lacks an emphasis on the relational aspects of the cross (p. 158). She believes this omission of forgiveness and freedom is "odd, to say the least," given "the centrality of the Cross as salvation in Christian theology" (p. 97). She prefers the approach of Anthony Thiselton, who "sees the source of creative transformation in the biblical tradition as the Cross. It is universally transforming because it acts itself as meta-critique." She seems bothered by the fact that Thiselton himself likes Pannenberg's approach (2000, 41, 140, 143), but perhaps Thiselton has seen more deeply the reciprocity of Pannenberg's work.¹² Stewart's claim that "the aspect of creative relationship, the re-creation of the individual empowered by the call of Christ . . . is not significant for Pannenberg's theological anthropology" (2000, 17) loses its credibility when we note that she does not attend to chapter 11 of *ST II*, where Pannenberg extensively treats the cross and the individual's relation to Christ, nor does she deal with his emphasis on the cross and the centrality of Christology in articles such as "A Theology of the Cross" (1988) and "Problems of Trinitarian Doctrine of God" (1987).¹³

Stewart also misreads his pneumatology. Discussing a section in chapter 8 of *ST II*, she notes that "here he connects the action of the Holy Spirit with human interactions, which makes one wish he had spent more time discussing the latter. As it is, it is hard to see the detail of exactly how the creative permeation of the world by the Spirit is to intersect with human fellowship" (2000, 87). First, she calls his treatment here a "restatement" of his views from *ATP*, which, as I showed earlier, does not grasp the reciprocity and sublation operative between these two books. Second, and more important, she does not refer here to chapter 7 in *ST II*, which goes into great detail on precisely the point of the relation of the Spirit to creatures in preparation for chapter 8. Nor does she point out that *ST III* spells out the relation between the Holy Spirit and human existence in more detail. Already in chapter 8 (*ST II*, 180) Pannenberg had explained the reciprocity of these doctrinal issues and the need to understand them in relation to each other.

CONCLUSION

Although Stewart makes an early comment that Pannenberg has taken on the issues of postmodernity (2000, 8), she believes that he does not offer

us much help in reconstructing science and theology in contemporary culture, except perhaps by pointing us in the right directions (p. 158). I have suggested that such a dismissal, which is based on a faulty understanding of Pannenberg's methodological and material proposals, would deprive us of a valuable resource for thinking about and doing theology today.

Even as we engage more deeply with the late modern fear of and fascination with "the other" and take more seriously the feminist and liberation critiques of many traditional dogmatic formulations and ecclesiastical practices, we may learn from Pannenberg's combination of a rigorous exploration of the conditions of our interpreted experience with an emphasis on the provisionality of theological truth claims. Paul Sponheim rightly sees *ATP* as aiming "To Expand and Deepen the Provisional" (1997) by engaging constructive scientific hypotheses without immunizing dogma from critique beforehand. In *ST I–III*, Pannenberg tests the illuminative power of Christian doctrine in dialogue with contemporary anthropological and cosmological understandings. Although we must surely go beyond Pannenberg, as others will go beyond us, we may critically appropriate the general structures of dynamic reciprocity operative in his interdisciplinary method as we seek to expand and deepen the trajectory of the dialogue between religion and science.

NOTES

1. See *The Postfoundationalist Task of Theology* (Shults 1999b). Although Stewart refers to my book in three different footnotes, she does not engage my interpretation of Pannenberg's basic motif or my analysis of the role of relationality in his thought. On the first page of her book, she indicates in a footnote that I equate "postmodernism" with the deconstructive approach of Richard Rorty and others. Yet, in several places, I expressly state the opposite (Shults 1999b, 25–29, 77–81, 237–47), and in the preface I explicitly distinguish between deconstructive, paleoconstructive, and reconstructive responses to postmodernism. Where I do treat Rorty (1999b, 30, 36–37) it is as one *type* of response to postmodernity. Yet, Stewart suggests that I have conflated all of these aspects of the "postmodern" into what she calls "absolute relativism," an odd phrase that I do not use. Stewart's only other material point about my treatment of Pannenberg is her claim that I do not discuss his appropriation of Gadamer (2000, 141), which in fact I do (Shults 1999b, 124, 136), although it is not my focus. She "wonders" if commentators in the United States (my name appears in the list) are aware that Pannenberg has conceded the failure of Enlightenment rationality (2000, 112). Yet, I treat his rejection of Enlightenment foundationalist rationality throughout my book, especially in chapter 3. Responding to Stewart's concerns provides me an opportunity to summarize my proposal for understanding Pannenberg's interdisciplinary method here in the pages of *Zygon*.
2. In chapters 3 and 4 of my methodology book (Shults 1999b), I provide an exposition of Pannenberg's method in general and a detailed synchronic presentation of his treatment of the material themes of theological anthropology (human nature, *imago Dei*, and sin) in both *ATP* and *ST II*.
3. The term rightly reminds us of Hegel, but Pannenberg's dialectic is different from Hegel's in important ways, as I explain in chapter 3 of *The Postfoundationalist Task* (1999b).
4. I treat this in my article "Is It *Natural* to Be Religious?" (1999a).
5. For a summary and evaluation of the whole pattern of Pannenberg's *ST I–III*, see my article "A Theology of Everything?" (Shults 1998).
6. For a pictorial representation, see Loder and Neidhardt 1992, 41, or Shults 1999b, 207.
7. Loder and Neidhardt use terms like "molds, sustains, motivates . . ." to describe the dynamics of the block arrow, and terms like "is responsive to, dependent upon, points to . . ." to

describe the line arrow. They use Polanyi's distinction between tacit and focal awareness in the unity of human knowledge as a key illustration (Loder and Neidhardt 1992, 57).

8. Stewart uses a model from Margaret Archer to criticize Pannenberg (see Stewart 2000, 105ff., 121, 137). Archer describes "upward" and "downward" conflation models, and Stewart sees both in Pannenberg. Perhaps this is related to her having overlooked the reciprocity operative in his work.

9. In many cases, Stewart is simply wrong about Pannenberg's position; she claims that he "thinks that consciousness of unity and differentiation within the psyche precedes awareness or experience of the world" (2000, 92). However, Pannenberg (who does not use the term "psyche" in this context) explicitly says the opposite: "I argue that awareness of the object precedes awareness of the self" (*ST II*, 193 n. 63).

10. Other unqualified claims include her assertions that Pannenberg "never refers to the questions" of practical application of wisdom treated by such scholars as Ellul (Stewart 2000, 47), and that he "does not mention the significance" of application in Gadamer (p. 32). Here again, Stewart misses places where Pannenberg does in fact treat these issues, even in *TPS*. In the last section of that book, Pannenberg argues extensively about the issues of application in practical theology. Further, Pannenberg explicitly treats the significance of "application" for Gadamer in *Basic Questions in Theology* (1970a, 133ff.).

11. It is hard to understand how Stewart misses the prevalence of an "engagement between God and humanity" when Pannenberg's treatment of anthropology in *ST I–III* is pervaded by this theme, which is in fact intrinsic to the *Grundmotif* of his entire theology, as I have argued elsewhere (Shults 1999b, 83–164). Further, in his doctrine of the image of God, Pannenberg emphasizes relationality at least as strongly as the reformers, if not more so. For analysis, see my "Constitutive Relationality in Anthropology and Trinity" (1997).

12. As I have shown elsewhere, Thiselton uses language reminiscent of "*aufheben*" in his own analysis of *TPS*, which he believes "constitutes a careful *metacritical* argument for the *unity* of knowledge which *incorporates hermeneutics*. . . . Pannenberg agrees with Habermas that positivism can be challenged only by some paradigm of critical knowledge which will *embrace* and *include* it; not by that which attacks it 'from without' or tries to by-pass it" (1992, 334; discussed in Shults 1999b, 160).

13. Pannenberg went into more detail about this central problem in christological method in his article "Christologie und Theologie" (1980a). Here he explicitly calls for overcoming the alternative between "from above" and "from below." This will require a "deepening and widening of the place from which concentrated theological reflection on the man Jesus of Nazareth begins" (p. 135; my translation). Stewart misses the fact that already in his *Jesus—God and Man* (1968) Pannenberg noted the need for an eventual sublation of that work into a full systematics. In the Afterword to the 5th German edition, he notes the element of truth in his critics' call for a supplementation by a Christology "from above," which points to the need for a systematic treatment beyond the task of his monograph. This would be possible "only within the context of the doctrine of God and thus within the overall framework of a comprehensive dogmatics. This poses the task of thinking about christology in connection with God's relation to the world in general and especially in connection with his relationship to humanity in the course of its history" (p. 406, 2nd English ed.).

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