

*"A further outstanding achievement on its author's part.
My admiration for John's work grows and grows." — J. I. Packer*

A HISTORY OF WESTERN PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY



JOHN M. FRAME

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WESTERN PHILOSOPHY
AND THEOLOGY

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John M. Frame


P U B L I S H I N G
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In Memory of
Cornelius Van Til
(1895–1987)

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding. His praise endures forever! (Ps. 111:10)

My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you, making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding; yes, if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures, then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God. For the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding; he stores up sound wisdom for the upright; he is a shield to those who walk in integrity, guarding the paths of justice and watching over the way of his saints. Then you will understand righteousness and justice and equity, every good path; for wisdom will come into your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul; discretion will watch over you, understanding will guard you, delivering you from the way of evil, from men of perverted speech, who forsake the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness, who rejoice in doing evil and delight in the perverseness of evil, men whose paths are crooked, and who are devious in their ways. (Prov. 2:1–15)

Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. (Prov. 3:5–6)

And coming to his hometown [Jesus] taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished, and said, “Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works?” (Matt. 13:54)

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! “For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?” “Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?” For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen. (Rom. 11:33–36)

For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.” Where is the one who is wise? Where is the

scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord." (1 Cor. 1:18–31)

Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him"—these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. "For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ. (1 Cor. 2:6–16)

Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written, "He catches

the wise in their craftiness,” and again, “The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile.” So let no one boast in men. For all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, and you are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s. (1 Cor. 3:18–23)

In [Christ] are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. (Col. 2:3)

See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. (Col. 2:8)

Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. (James 3:13–18)

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CORRELATION OF BOOK CHAPTERS WITH FREE ONLINE LECTURES

The chapters in this book are complemented by my free audio lectures on the History of Philosophy that are located at Reformed Theological on iTunes U. The table below correlates chapters in this book (column 1) with corresponding iTunes U lectures (columns 2 and 3). The second row of the table is the link to the free lectures. The “Listen Online” section at the end of each chapter in this book lists the appropriate lectures for that chapter. Information about Reformed Theological on iTunes U may be found here: <http://itunes.rts.edu/>.

Link to Lectures: <http://itunes.apple.com/us/course/legacy-history-philosophy/id694658914>

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FOREWORD

INTELLECTUAL CHANGE TAKES PLACE at different paces. Rarely has any model for intellectual change taken place with the velocity that is currently being experienced in Western societies and in the rest of the world as it is influenced by the West. This change is taking place before watching eyes to an extent that is largely misunderstood and vastly underestimated.

Some prophetic voices have recognized the scale and scope of the intellectual changes taking place in the West. Francis Schaeffer, for example, spent most of his ministry educating Christians about the worldview shift that was occurring around them as most people moved from a vaguely Christian worldview to one that was thoroughly secular. This new worldview was based on the idea that final reality is impersonal matter or energy shaped into its present form by impersonal chance.

Significantly, Schaeffer observed that Christians in his time did not see this new worldview as taking the place of the Christian worldview that had previously dominated European and American cultures either by personal conviction or by cultural impression. These two worldviews, one generally Christian and the other barely deistic, stood in complete antithesis to each other in content and also in natural results. These contrary ways of seeing the world would lead to disparate convictions on matters ranging from abortion to sexuality, economics to politics, as well as legislation and public policy.

In 1983, writing just a few years after Francis Schaeffer wrote of a worldview shift, Carl F. H. Henry described the situation and future possibilities in terms of a strict dichotomy:

If modern culture is to escape the oblivion that has engulfed the earlier civilizations of man, the recovery of the will of the self-revealed God in the realm of justice and law is crucially imperative. Return to pagan misconceptions of divinized rulers, or a divinized cosmos, or a quasi-Christian conception of natural law or natural justice will bring inevitable disillusionment.

Not all pleas for transcendent authority will truly serve God or man. By aggrandizing law and human rights and welfare to their sovereignty, all manner of earthly leaders eagerly preempt the role of the divine and obscure the living God of Scriptural revelation. The alternatives are clear: we return to the God of the Bible or we perish in the pit of lawlessness.¹

When Henry released the first volume of his magnum opus *God, Revelation, and Authority* in 1976, he began with this first line: “No fact of contemporary Western life is more evident than the growing distrust of final truth and its implacable questioning of any sure word.”² This obstacle to the return to the authority of a Christian worldview is really part of a vicious circle that begins with the departure from at least a cultural impression of God’s revealed authority: leaving a Christian worldview leads to a distrust of final truth and a rejection of universal authority, which then blockades the way back to the God of the Bible.

The rejection of biblical authority invariably leads to the secularization of society. *Secular*, in terms of contemporary sociological and intellectual conversation, refers to the absence of any binding theistic authority or belief. It is both an ideology and a result. *Secularization* is not an ideology; it is a theory and a sociological process whereby societies become less theistic as they become more modern. As societies move into conditions of deeper and more progressive modernity, they move out of situations in which there is a binding force of religious belief, and theistic belief in particular. These societies move into conditions in which there is less and less theistic belief and authority until there is hardly even a memory that such a binding authority had ever existed. Western culture has secularized beyond the authority of the God of the Bible and almost beyond the memory of any such authority.

The problem of authority is a problem of belief. In his book *The Secular Age*, Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor confirms this problem of belief in Western civilization in terms of three sets of intellectual conditions. Every society and every individual operates under certain intellectual conditions, self-consciously or not. On the question of God, Taylor traces three Western intellectual epochs: pre-Enlightenment impossibility of unbelief; post-Enlightenment possibility of unbelief; late modern *impossibility* of belief.³

After the Enlightenment, Western intellectual conditions changed to make it possible for one not to believe in God. For most of human

1. Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, vol. 6, *God Who Stands and Stays, Part 2* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1999), 454.

2. Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, vol. 1, *God Who Speaks and Shows, Preliminary Considerations* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1999), 1.

3. See Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

experience in Western civilization, it has been impossible not to believe in God. That does not mean that everyone was individually Christian or that everyone had experienced conversion and was a regenerate believer. And it does not mean that there were no skeptics or heretics. Before the Enlightenment, however, one could not explain the world without the Bible and its story. There was no alternative account of how the world had come to be. There was no naturalistic worldview available to people who lived in Western civilization throughout most of its centuries. Until Charles Darwin presented an alternative to Genesis, the Christian worldview prevailed without a serious rival. It was impossible not to believe: it was impossible to explain life, from order in the universe to justice between two individuals, without explicit reference to revealed truth.

But this situation changed with the Enlightenment and the availability of alternative worldviews by which one could frame a comprehensive account of the world set over against the Christian worldview. Any worldview must answer at least four central questions: Why is there something rather than nothing? What has happened and is broken in the world? Is there any hope, and if so, what is it? Where is history headed? With the Enlightenment came answers to these questions from a non-Christian framework (scientific naturalism, materialism, Marxism, etc.).

The intellectual conditions of Western culture have now secularized such that it is seemingly impossible for those operating under such conditions to believe in God. As Charles Taylor observes, to be a candidate for tenure at a major American university is to inhabit a world in which it is virtually impossible to believe in God or to acknowledge that belief. Under the first set of Western intellectual conditions, not everyone was a Christian, but all were accountable to a Christian worldview because there was no alternative. Secularization in American culture has reversed the conditions: not everyone is a non-Christian, but all must apparently operate under a secular worldview that denies the legitimacy of a Christian worldview. In a mere three hundred years, Western intellectual conditions have moved from an impossibility of unbelief to an impossibility of belief.

Significantly, Charles Taylor pinpoints this unbelief as a lack of cognitive commitment to a self-existent, self-revealing God. Secularization is not about *religion*. Taylor urges that people in the current hypersecularized culture in America often consider themselves to be religious or spiritual. Secularization, according to Taylor, is about belief in a personal God, One who holds and exerts authority. He describes the secular age as deeply “cross-pressured” in its personal experience of religion and rejection of the personal authority of God.⁴ The issue is binding authority.

4. See *ibid.*

Change does not emerge from a vacuum. This is certainly true of Western culture's rejection of binding authority. In order to understand the ideological confusion of the Western mind in this postmodern age, we must look at its intellectual history and come to terms with the significant ideas that shaped its thought and produced its worldview. Without this, ideas appear without context and meaning.

The role of history in the life of a Christian is indispensable. To cut ourselves off from the past is to rob ourselves from understanding the present. We know that this is true, yet few of us ponder the consequences of this deliberate ignorance. But beyond this deliberate ignorance is the sometimes nondeliberate or accidental misunderstanding of history that can come to us in ways that are almost equally injurious. Getting the past wrong is almost as problematic as not getting the past into our minds at all. Christians have a particular stewardship of the mind and of the intellect that should lead us to understand that our discipleship to Christ is at stake in terms of our understanding of the past. Furthermore, the history of philosophy traced so well in this volume is a monumental cultural and intellectual achievement—and one that Christians have both shaped and been shaped by.

As we consider the issues and developments in Western philosophy, there is real debate to be had—and a real risk of misunderstanding. But part of this is a theological debate, part of it is a historical debate, and much of it is a cultural and political debate. It takes a good, intellectually rigorous historian of philosophy such as John Frame to present these issues in a manner that allows the past to speak to us as authentically as possible.

On the other hand, history is not the end of the story—it is not the final authority. For our final authority, Christians must consider the facts of history and then turn to theology and to our understanding drawn from the Scriptures to understand how we should live today in light of the past. John Frame points to this reality in powerful ways.

Reading a book such as this is to enter a world of intellectual conversation that involves a cast of hundreds by the time you finish this book. But you also enter into a narrative that gets clearer and more important as it becomes more accurate and more fully understood. We cannot go back to the past, and given the vast array of controversies and struggles that have occurred, we probably would not want to. Indeed, our task is not to go back, but rather in the present to consider what an understanding of the past now gives us the opportunity to do: to think more clearly and live more faithfully in light of God's authority over our lives.

R. Albert Mohler Jr.

President

The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

PREFACE

IN THE CURRICULUM of Reformed Theological Seminary, where I have taught since 2000, there is a required course called History of Philosophy and Christian Thought. The course has been taught by a number of my colleagues as well as by me over the years. This book represents my version of it.

I am better known as a theologian than a philosopher, though as the book indicates I don't see a very big difference between these two disciplines. But I did major in philosophy at Princeton University, studied philosophical apologetics with Cornelius Van Til at Westminster Theological Seminary, and did graduate work in the philosophical theology program at Yale University. Over forty-five years I have taught philosophical subjects in both theological and apologetics courses, and my publications have often dealt with philosophical topics.¹ So although I tend to write in ways more typical of theologians than philosophers, philosophy is never far from my mind.

What should be included in a course called History of Philosophy and Christian Thought? The first part, "History of Philosophy," is a fairly standard course designation. There is a widespread consensus as to what thinkers should be discussed under that topic. "Christian Thought," however, is not easy to circumscribe for pedagogical purposes. Christians have written on all sorts of subjects and in all kinds

1. My first book, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1987), attempted to develop an epistemology based on Scripture. Similarly the other books in my Theology of Lordship series: *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002) deals with such issues as divine sovereignty, human freedom, and the problem of evil. *The Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008) deals with three traditions of non-Christian philosophical ethics. *The Doctrine of the Word of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2010) returns again to epistemology, as does my *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013). And of course, there is a lot of philosophical reflection in my apologetics books, *Apologetics to the Glory of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1994) and *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1995). The appendices at the end of this volume include some of my philosophical reviews and papers.

of genres. One could argue that in a course such as this, the students should hear about Ignatius of Antioch, Dante Alighieri, Isaac Newton, John Donne, John Milton, John Wesley, Charles Hodge, Herman Bavinck, Dorothy Sayers, J. R. R. Tolkien, George MacDonald, G. K. Chesterton, Malcolm Muggeridge, Billy Graham—the list could go on and on. Christians have participated in all walks of life and have influenced all of them. But we must have a plan that will narrow the list.

My plan leads to the exclusion of all the names in the preceding paragraph. Not that I disrespect any of these people; indeed, they are all impressive thinkers and wonderful servants of God. But this book needs to “tell a story,” as we like to say today, and it needs to be a philosophical story. So I have chosen to deal with those Christian thinkers who have either made substantial contributions to the general history of philosophy or developed distinctive philosophical ideas that have influenced the theology of the church.

But what mainly provides the continuity of the story is my attempt to analyze and evaluate this whole history from a Christian point of view. I believe that the Bible should govern our philosophical thinking, as indeed it must govern every other area of human life (1 Cor. 10:31). Some, to be sure, doubt that the Bible has anything to say about philosophy. The best way of replying to these doubts is to show what in fact the Bible does say on this subject. That will be the main theme and emphasis of this book.

In any case, this will not be an “unbiased” account of the history before us. Some will say that it is propaganda, rather than an objective study. Certainly I have tried to get the facts right, though my work is not, on the whole, individual research into original source documents. You won’t find in this book many (if any) new interpretations of the philosophers and theologians. I have followed, for the most part, the consensus interpretations, because I want to mainly assess the impact that each thinker has had on the consensus. But in this book there will be many *evaluations* of thinkers that I suspect will be found unconventional. My whole idea is to expose the fact that the history of philosophy and theology is nothing less than spiritual warfare in the life of the mind.

So this book will differ from most other histories of thought, even Christian ones, especially in these ways: (1) Its Christian perspective is quite overt; I’ve made no effort to be subtle about it. (2) Indeed, it can be understood as an extended apologetic, making the case that non-Christian systems of thought, even inconsistent Christian ones, inevitably lapse into the intellectual bankruptcies of rationalism and irrationalism. (3) It deals with philosophy and theology in the same volume, to make the point that these two disciplines are profoundly

interdependent even if they are distinguishable. (4) It focuses on the modern period more than most other books of this kind, because I want to prepare students for the spiritual warfare as it exists in their own time, without neglecting the background of this battle in earlier times. Chapters 5–8 deal with “modern” thought, and 9–13 with the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

To make this book as useful as possible as a textbook for class, group, and individual study, I have included the following chapter-specific teaching and study helps at the end of each chapter: Key Terms, Study Questions, a Bibliography (print and online resources), Read for Yourself (a list of primary sources), Listen Online, and Famous Quotes. The Listen Online sections correlate the appropriate free audio lectures in my History of Philosophy series with the current chapter (see “Correlation of Book Chapters with Free Online Lectures” immediately before this book’s Foreword). The Famous Quotes sections provide links to well-known quotations on Wikiquotes (and occasionally on Goodreads and Wikipedia) from the philosophers and theologians discussed in the current chapter.² Additionally, at the end of this volume, a Glossary, an Annotated Bibliography of Philosophy Texts, a General Bibliography, and three indices provide additional help.

My dedication is to the memory of Cornelius Van Til, who has had more influence on my philosophical thought than any other noncanonical writer. The theological and philosophical public has not begun to make use of the brilliant and profound insights of Van Til. He is not a mere apologist, but a substantial thinker with, I think, a great many cogent answers to our current questions. His often-obscure language should not be used as an excuse for dismissing him. Van Til is one thinker who repays diligent efforts to understand.

All my books are deeply influenced by Van Til, and I reflected on the nature of that influence especially in *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought*. The present volume is the first book, however, that I have explicitly dedicated to him. The reason is that in this book I am seeking to reflect some particular emphases of Van Til’s teaching. Van Til was a professor of apologetics, but his apologetics was unique, not only in “method,” as he liked to say, but also in emphasis. Most apologists write for the man on the street. That is fine, and there is still great need for that. Van Til did that occasionally.³ But most of Van Til’s work aimed at the great thinkers who have had the most impact on Western civilization. And so his apologetic writing and teaching emphasized

2. In chapters 1 and 13, I quote directly from several P&R Publishing publications.

3. As in the fascinating booklet “Why I Believe in God,” available at http://www.thehighway.com/why_I_believe_cvt.html.

PREFACE

the history of philosophy and theology.⁴ He believed that if you can deal seriously with such thinkers as Plato, Aristotle, Kant, and Hegel, you will be in much better shape to deal with the village atheists who capture the popular mind for a week or two. Interaction with the greatest thinkers does much to explain the intellectual developments of our own time, and only such debate can display the full strength of the Christian position. In that conviction I agree with Van Til, and I hope in this book to follow his lead.

My thanks again to P&R Publishing, with which I have worked for many years, and especially to John J. Hughes, my longtime friend, who shepherded this volume through the publishing process and who has helped me much on my past writing projects. In this book, he has worked together with Karen Magnuson, an outstanding copyeditor who has also done excellent work on my past projects. Thanks also to my RTS colleague John Muether, who has produced the Index of Names, Index of Subjects, and Index of Scripture. And I also acknowledge the work of Joseph E. Torres, who checked through all the URLs of my online sources.⁵ Thanks also to my students at the two Westminster Seminaries and at Reformed Theological Seminary who have provided valuable encouragements and challenges over the years, and to my wonderful family: dearest Mary, Debbie, Doreen and Dennis, Skip and Sharon, Justin and Carol, Johnny, and all the grandkids.

4. See especially his treatment of Greek philosophy in his *Survey of Christian Epistemology* (Philadelphia: Den Dulk Foundation, 1969). This emphasis of Van Til underscores the silliness and ignorance of William Lane Craig's comment in Steven B. Cowan, ed., *Five Views on Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000): "Van Til, for all his insights, was not a philosopher" (235). Van Til earned a Ph.D. in philosophy from Princeton University, and his writings are full of references to philosophers and close analyses of philosophical ideas. Although I criticized Craig's comment, he has not retracted it or apologized, to my knowledge.

5. All URLs were rechecked May 29, 2015.

ABBREVIATIONS

<i>AJCB</i>	John M. Frame, <i>Apologetics: A Justification of Christian Belief</i> (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2015)
<i>CD</i>	Karl Barth, <i>Church Dogmatics</i> (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936)
<i>CSR</i>	Common Sense Realism
<i>CVT</i>	John M. Frame, <i>Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought</i> (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1995)
<i>DCL</i>	John M. Frame, <i>The Doctrine of the Christian Life</i> (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008)
<i>DG</i>	John M. Frame, <i>The Doctrine of God</i> (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002)
<i>DKG</i>	John M. Frame, <i>The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God</i> (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1987)
<i>DWG</i>	John M. Frame, <i>The Doctrine of the Word of God</i> (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2010)
<i>ESV</i>	English Standard Version
<i>Institutes</i>	John Calvin, <i>Institutes of the Christian Religion</i> , ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960)
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>

ABBREVIATIONS

KJV	King James Version
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NOG	John M. Frame, <i>No Other God: A Response to Open Theism</i> (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2001)
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament
RO	Radical orthodoxy
ST	John M. Frame, <i>Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief</i> (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013)
WCF	Westminster Confession of Faith
WTJ	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>

A History of Western Philosophy and Theology

Spiritual Warfare in the Life of the Mind

I

PHILOSOPHY AND THE BIBLE

THE WORD *PHILOSOPHY* means, etymologically, “love of wisdom.” *Wisdom*, in turn, is “a kind of heightened knowledge, a knowledge that penetrates to deep significance and practical relevance.”¹ In the ancient world, there was a genre called *wisdom literature* found in the biblical books of Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon,² but also in many cultures outside Israel. The method of the wisdom teachers was to gather the sayings of the wise, from many generations and locations, for the guidance of their own communities. What distinguishes wisdom in Israel from that of other cultures is the conviction that “the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom” (Ps. 111:10).

Philosophy, however, should not be understood as an extension of the tradition of wisdom literature. In many ways, as we will see, philosophy is historically a revolt against traditional wisdom.

I define *philosophy* as “the disciplined attempt to articulate and defend a worldview.” A *worldview* is a general conception of the universe. The sciences generally seek understanding of particular aspects of the universe: chemistry the chemical, biology the biological, and so on. But philosophy deals with the most general truths of reality: what is, how we know it, how we should act. The term *worldview*, therefore, is an appropriate designation for the subject matter of philosophy.

Today, many prefer the term *metanarrative* when they wish to refer to such a comprehensive vision. *Metanarrative* sees the universe as an ongoing *story*, *worldview* as a collection of things, facts, or processes.

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1. *DG*, 505. See my discussion there on 505–9.

2. Other parts of Scripture also have characteristics of wisdom literature—for example, Psalms 1; 104; Matthew 11:25–30; 1 Corinthians 1–3; and the Letter of James.

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- Absolute
Tripersonality
- Lordship

**Perspectives of
Human Knowledge****Sin and Philosophy****Christian and
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Metaphysics**

There might seem to be a kind of circularity in presupposing what I argue for. But that is inevitable when we are dealing with worldviews. Lyotard assumes his worldview when he argues for it. Rationalists defend their rationalism by appealing to reason.

But the two ideas presuppose each other. If there is a narrative, it must be about something—namely, things (including persons), facts, or processes. If there are things, facts, or processes, then they have a history and can be described in a narrative, however dull that narrative might be at times.

Some have denied that worldviews and metanarratives are possible, or that if they do exist (perhaps in God’s mind), we have no access to them. Jean-François Lyotard defined “postmodern” thought, which he embraces, as “incredulity toward metanarratives.”³ Certainly we can understand why some would think arrogant the claim to know the general structure of the universe. On the other hand, we should also be able to understand that worldviews are quite indispensable, at least as working assumptions. For example, why should we engage in discourse at all if we are not assuming that the universe is accessible to rational thought? Why should even postmodernists believe that there is some value in writing books, making rational arguments to defend their postmodernism? Inevitably, we make at least the assumption that the world is accessible to the human mind. And that assumption is a belief about the world as a whole, a worldview.

Lyotard may argue against it, but in doing so, he necessarily assumes a different world—a world in which most of the universe is irrational, not accessible to the mind, but in which, unaccountably, there are little pockets of rationality (“little narratives”) that enable us to live and talk together. The irrational vastness, plus the pockets of rationality, constitutes Lyotard’s worldview. He has not done away with metanarratives, but has only substituted one for another.

As a Christian, I am committed to a worldview that comes from the Bible: God the Creator, the world as his creation, man made in his image, sin and its consequences as our predicament, Christ’s atonement as our salvation, his return as the consummation of all things. I will be presupposing that worldview in this volume, but also arguing for it in dialogue with the philosophers whom we will consider. There might seem to be a kind of circularity in presupposing what I argue for. But that is inevitable when we are dealing with worldviews. Lyotard assumes his worldview when he argues for it. Rationalists defend their rationalism by appealing to reason. Idealists defend their idealism by constructing arguments informed by idealism. Empiricists, in the end, must defend empiricism by appealing to sense experience, though they rarely try to do that, and it is hard to imagine how that defense could be successful. That’s the way it is in philosophy and in all of life: we can’t step out of our skins. The best we can do is to show one another

3. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 7.

why our worldview makes sense to us and makes sense (to us) of all of life. And of course, we have the right to suggest that another person's worldview might not make sense and might even deconstruct upon examination.⁴ That is an example of a philosophical discussion.

WHY STUDY PHILOSOPHY?

One doesn't study philosophy these days with the goal of landing a high-paying job. What use is it? Aristotle's answer, at the beginning of his *Metaphysics*, is perhaps best: "all men by nature desire to know." As Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay climbed Everest "because it is there," so all normal human beings have a desire to understand their environment. Some confine their search to Lyotard's "little narratives," but as we've seen, it is not easy to observe that restriction. Socrates, the great saint of philosophy, said that "the unexamined life is not worth living."⁵

But let's make the question more specific: why should anyone study the *history* of philosophy? And since this book seeks to look at questions from a Christian perspective, let me ask why a Christian, specifically, should study the history of philosophy.

Of course, not all Christians are obligated to study this topic. Not all are suited to it by ability, education, interest, and calling. But for those who are, the subject promises a number of benefits:

1. Philosophers are in the business of thinking clearly, cogently, and profoundly. To understand and evaluate their work is excellent mental exercise. People involved in nonphilosophical fields can benefit from exposure to the rigor of philosophical formulations and arguments. That includes Christians. And in my view, Christian theologians, preachers, and teachers generally need to improve the quality of their thinking, particularly their argumentation.⁶
2. Philosophy over the centuries has had a major influence on Christian theology. The concepts *nature*, *substance*, and *person* found in the doctrines of the Trinity and the person of Christ, for example, are philosophical terms, not found in the Bible. This is not necessarily a bad thing. When we apply Scripture to situations and controversies, we must often translate Scripture

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4. I have discussed this type of circularity in more detail in many places. See *DKG*, 130–33; *AJCB*, 10–15; *DWG*, 24–25.

5. Plato, *Apology*, 38a.

6. Many theologians seem to think that in a dispute it is sufficient to take issue with an opponent's *conclusions*, without refuting the *arguments* that led to those conclusions. That is one reason why theological literature today is often unpersuasive, and divisions persist unnecessarily.

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into language relevant to those situations.⁷ Of course, fields of study other than philosophy have also influenced Christian discourse: science, history, literature, and so on. But remember that the work of philosophers is to formulate and examine worldviews. Insofar as Christian theology is also the articulation of a worldview, its interaction with philosophy is especially important.

3. Sadly, through most of the history of Western civilization, philosophy has been governed by non-Christian assumptions. The dominance of these presuppositions was interrupted during the medieval period, and there have been Christian philosophers since the beginning of the church. But from around 600 B.C. to A.D. 400, and from around 1650 to the present, the dominant influences in philosophy have been non-Christian.

Now, since the business of philosophy is to think clearly, cogently, and profoundly about the world, the hardest challenges to Christian thought have come from the discipline of philosophy. So when Christians study philosophy, they become acquainted with the most formidable adversaries of the gospel: non-Christian thought in its most cogent form. Acquaintance with these is very beneficial for gospel witness.

In this book, I will be especially concerned to describe the interaction, the dialogue, between Christian theology and non-Christian philosophy.

PHILOSOPHY, THEOLOGY, AND RELIGION

Sadly, through most of the history of Western civilization, philosophy has been governed by non-Christian assumptions.

I define *theology* as “the application of the Word of God, by persons, to every aspect of human life.”⁸ On this definition, and on my previous definition of *philosophy*, there is a strong affinity between the two disciplines. The Word of God is, among other things, the authoritative statement of the Christian’s worldview. And because it describes a historical sequence, it may be called a *metanarrative* as well. *Application* in my definition of *theology* includes the “formulation” and “defense” in my definition of *philosophy*. So we may say that Christian theology is Christian philosophy, or philosophy with a Christian worldview.

It might be argued that philosophers, unlike theologians, do not work from authoritative texts. But if that is true, it is true only for secular philosophers, not for Jewish, Muslim, or Christian ones. And even secular philosophers, as we have seen, presuppose worldviews, so that the worldview becomes for them the authoritative text.

7. Even the translation of Scripture from, say, Greek to English is an application of Scripture to a group of situations, the situations encountered by English speakers.

8. For exposition and defense of this definition, see *DKG*, 76–85; *DWG*, 272–79; *ST*, chap. 1.

I define *religion* as “the practice of faith,” as in James 1:26–27:

If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person’s religion is worthless. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

I do not follow theologians such as Barth and Bonhoeffer, and many preachers, who use *religion* to refer to self-righteousness, man’s attempt to justify himself before God by his works. Dictionaries never define it that way. More commonly, dictionaries equate the term with *faith*, *belief*, or *creed*, as does the definition of Clouser, to be discussed later in this chapter. But my definition catches, I think, the nuance of James 1:26–27—not faith as such, but its outworking in godly speech and compassionate behavior. *Religion* is a perfectly good word, and there is no justification for redefining it in order to make a theological or rhetorical⁹ point.

On my definition, then, Christian philosophy is part of the Christian religion, an outworking of Christian faith. Christians are servants of Jesus Christ. He is their Lord. Scripture calls them to “do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31). Their thinking, their philosophizing, is part of that. It is remarkable that Christians so readily identify the lordship of Christ in matters of worship, salvation, and ethics, but not in thinking. But as I indicated by the great number of Bible verses prefacing this book, God in Scripture over and over demands obedience of his people in matters of wisdom, thinking, knowledge, understanding, and so forth. Whenever the Christian engages in study, of philosophy or anything else, his first question must be: “How is this related to Christ?” And of course, everything is related to him, for he is the Creator of all (John 1:3), and

he is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all

9. I have in mind here the rhetoric of some young evangelists: “You hate religion? Well, I do, too. I hate religion, but I love Jesus.” I agree with the point and, to some extent, the attitude. But there are better ways of stating it. Don’t criticize “religion,” but criticize formalism, traditionalism, church bureaucracy, and the like.

On my definition, then, Christian philosophy is part of the Christian religion, an outworking of Christian faith. Christians are servants of Jesus Christ. He is their Lord. Scripture calls them to “do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31). Their thinking, their philosophizing, is part of that.

Whenever the Christian engages in study, of philosophy or anything else, his first question must be: “How is this related to Christ?” And of course, everything is related to him, for he is the Creator of all (John 1:3).

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things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. (Col. 1:15–20)

So Paul is able to say that in Christ “are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:3).

So we normally distinguish Christian from “secular” philosophy. *Secular* usually means “nonreligious.” But is there such a thing as nonreligious philosophy?¹⁰ “Secular” philosophies, of course, do not demand church attendance or participation in religious ceremonies. But in other respects, they are religious. Roy A. Clouser, in *The Myth of Religious Neutrality: An Essay on the Hidden Role of Religious Belief in Theories*,¹¹ discusses the difficulty of defining *religion*. What, he asks, do the great religions of the world have in common? That question is more difficult than it might seem, Clouser argues.¹² We might think that all religions include ethical codes, but Shinto does not. We might think that all religions acknowledge a personal supreme being, but Buddhism and Hinduism do not. Or we might propose that all religions demand worship. But Epicureanism and some forms of Buddhism and Hinduism do not. Clouser concludes, however, that it is nevertheless possible to define *religious belief*,¹³ and he suggests the following:

A religious belief is any belief in something or other as divine.

“Divine” means having the status of not depending on anything else.¹⁴

A religious belief is any belief in something or other as divine. . . . “Divine” means having the status of not depending on anything else.

Clouser’s definition of *divine* does not suffice to fully define the biblical God—or, for that matter, the gods of other religions. But it does define an attribute of the biblical God,¹⁵ an attribute also ascribed to absolutes of other religious traditions. All systems of thought include belief in something that is self-sufficient, not dependent on anything else. In Christianity, the self-sufficient being is the biblical God. In Islam, it is Allah; in Hinduism, Brahma. Clouser points out that in Greek polytheism the gods are not divine according to his definition, because they depend on realities other than themselves. The flux from which all things come, called Chaos or Okeanos, is the true deity of the

10. The next three paragraphs are taken from my *DCL*, 55–57.

11. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991.

12. See his discussion in *ibid.*, 10–12.

13. Note that Clouser’s question is not the meaning of *religion*, as I discussed it earlier, but the nature of a *religious belief*, that is, a belief that is religious in character.

14. *Ibid.*, 21–22.

15. Called *aseity* in *DG*, chap. 26.

ancient Greek religion.¹⁶ Even purportedly atheistic religions such as Theravada Buddhism have deities in Clouser's sense. Theravada holds that the Void, the ultimate Nothingness, sometimes called Nirvana, is not dependent on anything else.¹⁷

But such a definition of *religion* makes it impossible for us to distinguish sharply between religion and philosophy, or indeed between religion and any other area of human thought and life.¹⁸ Philosophies also, however secular they may claim to be, always acknowledge something that is divine in the sense of "not depending on anything else." Examples would be Thales's water, Plato's Form of the Good, Aristotle's Prime Mover, Spinoza's "God or Nature," Kant's noumenal, Hegel's Absolute, the Mystical of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*. In the epistemological sphere, also, philosophers typically acknowledge human reason as self-sufficient in the sense that it requires no justification from anything more ultimate than itself. When they appear to deny autonomous reason (as with the Sophists, Duns Scotus, Hume, existentialism, and postmodernism), they typically exalt autonomous will or feeling, as we will see later, so that will or feeling becomes divine.

The biblical point to be made here is that nobody is really an atheist, in the most serious sense of that term. When people turn away from worship of the true God, they don't reject absolutes in general. Rather, instead of the true God, they worship idols, as Paul teaches in Romans 1:18–32. The great division in mankind is not that some worship a god and others do not. Rather, it is between those who worship the true God and those who worship false gods, idols. False worship might not involve rites or ceremonies, but it always involves acknowledgment of aseity, honoring some being as not dependent on anything else.

So I will argue through this book that the basic questions of philosophers are religious in character. Both philosophers and religious teachers explore the great questions of metaphysics (being), epistemology (knowledge), and value theory (value). Under metaphysics, both philosophers and religious teachers discuss the question of God and the world. Under epistemology, they both concern themselves with the justification of truth claims. Under value theory, both are interested in how we should live and what we should regard most highly.

16. Clouser, *Myth*, 25.

17. *Ibid.*, 26–27.

18. The same result follows from some other recent attempts to define *religion*, such as Paul Tillich's definition of *religion* as "ultimate concern," and William Tremmel's "affirmation of unrestricted value." Clouser opposes these definitions in *ibid.*, 12–16, but they also imply that all human thought is religious. I defined *religion* earlier as "the practice of faith," and that definition coincides with Clouser's, when we understand that to accept anything as "not depending on anything else" is an act of faith, though not necessarily Christian faith.

Such a definition of religion makes it impossible for us to distinguish sharply between religion and philosophy, or indeed between religion and any other area of human thought and life.

I will argue through this book that the basic questions of philosophers are religious in character. Both philosophers and religious teachers explore the great questions of metaphysics (being), epistemology (knowledge), and value theory (value).

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*In a truly free society,
people in every field
would be free to
express their views
whether called reli-
gious or not, and the
marketplace of ideas
would be free to sort
them out.*

In current culture, there is a strong bias against “religious” views, in science, politics, and literature. If my argument above carries weight, we should reprove such bias. Insofar as *religion* is a meaningful category, it cannot be sharply distinguished from philosophy or science. When people oppose the teaching of “religious” concepts, they are not presenting a criterion that can logically distinguish between true and false ideas. Rather, they are using the term *religion* as a club to arbitrarily exclude consideration of viewpoints that they don’t happen to like.

That is, of course, blatantly unfair, indeed “un-American,” as we say in the States. Some, of course, appeal to the “separation of church and state” as formulated in the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. But that amendment (courts to the contrary notwithstanding) does not require a total separation of religion from the political sphere. It does not even forbid government-established churches, except on the federal level. When the Constitution was written, a number of the colonies had established churches, and the purpose of the amendment was not to forbid these, but to forbid the federal government from establishing a church in competition with the state churches.

In a truly free society, people in every field would be free to express their views whether called religious or not, and the marketplace of ideas would be free to sort them out.

SUBDIVISIONS OF PHILOSOPHY

Metaphysics

Let me say some more about the three subjects mentioned in the previous section. *Metaphysics* is the study of the most general features of the universe. Philosophers have sometimes called it “the study of being itself” or “the study of being qua being.” That is to say, other disciplines including the sciences explore different sorts of *beings*, various types of being or various kinds of beings, but philosophy asks what is meant by *being* in general, in distinction, of course, from *nonbeing*.

This is a difficult set of questions. Hegel proposed this thought-experiment: close your eyes and think of *being*; then close your eyes and think of *nonbeing*. Notice any difference? It seems that whenever we try to think of nonbeing, we are thinking of *something*, and therefore of being. Same when we try to define *nonbeing*, or list things that are not beings. When we do that, they all turn out to be beings of some kind. Unicorns, for example, don’t exist in jungles, but they do exist in literature. If being cannot be distinguished from nonbeing, however, how can it be anything at all?

Yet philosophers should be admired for their courage in fielding such apparently impossible questions.

Metaphysics includes the question “why is there something rather

than nothing?”—which Heidegger thought was the most central question of all philosophy. It also asks about the present configuration of being: “why are things the way they are?” And “what are the most basic features of reality?”

Philosophers have varied in their appreciation of and interest in metaphysics. Since Kant, many secular philosophers have rejected metaphysics as baseless speculation. The language analysts of the twentieth century often said that the only function of philosophy was to clarify language, that philosophers had no means to know the structure of the universe beyond the methods of science. But some of the analysts differed with this assessment, saying that a careful analysis of our language in fact reveals metaphysical truths.¹⁹ And process philosophy carries on a vigorous discussion of metaphysics to this day.

Specific questions discussed by metaphysicians, and their varying answers, include these:

1. Is the universe one or many? Parmenides, Plotinus, Spinoza, and Hegel said that beneath all the apparent plurality in the world there is a oneness, and the world is that oneness. These are called *monists*. Others, such as Democritus, Leibniz, and the early Wittgenstein, thought that the world was made of tiny components, distinct from one another and each irreducible to anything else. These are called *pluralists*. Still others, known as *dualists*, hold that the world is made up of two more or less equally ultimate realities; typically one is good and the other is evil, and they fight for supremacy. Examples of this are found in the Zoroastrian religion and the Manichaean sects that sought influence among early Christians. There are also other mediating positions. Some philosophers, such as Aristotle and Locke, have held the commonsense view that there are many things in the world, but that these things can be understood in general categories, so that the universe has both unity and plurality.
2. What is the basic composition of the universe? Thales said water, Anaximenes air, Anaxagoras something “indefinite,” Heraclitus fire, Pythagoras number. Democritus thought the world was composed of tiny, indestructible material bits called *atoms*. These, and later thinkers such as Karl Marx, are called *materialists*, because they believed that everything in the world is material in nature. Plato and Aristotle said that the world is a combination of matter and form. Berkeley, Leibniz, and Hegel said that the world is mind and that matter is an illusion. This

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19. One example is Peter F. Strawson, *Individuals: An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics* (London: Methuen, 1959).

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David Hume denied that there was any necessary connection between cause and effect. Immanuel Kant said that there was such a connection, but that the connection is imposed by the human mind, not to be found in nature.

view is called *idealism*. Plotinus, Spinoza, and Hegel said that the world is divine, a view called *pantheism*.

3. Are universals real, or only particulars? In our language, some terms refer to general or abstract realities: *redness, triangularity, manhood, virtue*. These are called *universals*. They are contrasted with *particulars*, which refer to individual things: *this man, this tree, this cookie, this bear*. Some philosophers (as William of Occam) have said that only particulars exist. These are called *nominalists*, for they say that universals are only names, words by which we refer to a lot of particulars at once. Others (Plato, Aristotle) say that universals have a distinct existence (if they don't, what do universal terms mean?). These are called *realists*. Some of these, such as Plato, questioned whether material things have any reality at all, so they believed that only universals are real. Among those who think universals exist, there is some disagreement as to *where* they exist: In another world (Plato)? As a component of things in this world (Aristotle)? In God's mind (Augustine)?
4. Do things in the universe change, or are they static? Parmenides said that the universe was entirely unchanging. Heraclitus said the opposite, that everything was constantly changing, in flux. Plato and Aristotle taught that some things were unchanging (forms), others constantly changing (matter).
5. Do the events of nature and history work toward goals (teleology), or do they simply occur, without any rationale or direction? Plato and especially Aristotle taught that the course of nature was teleological, that every motion or process had a purpose. Bertrand Russell and Jean-Paul Sartre denied that any purposes exist, except those that human beings themselves create.
6. What is the connection between cause and effect? Some, like Democritus, Hobbes, and Spinoza, have been *determinists*: that is, they taught that every event is necessitated by another event, forming an inexorable causal chain. Epicurus, the Church Fathers, Descartes, Arminius, Whitehead, and others have held to a view of *libertarian freedom* in which human beings are capable of performing acts that are not caused by other events. David Hume denied that there was any *necessary connection* between cause and effect. Immanuel Kant said that there was such a connection, but that the connection is imposed by the human mind, not to be found in nature.
7. Do human beings have souls? Minds distinct from their bodies? Plato said yes, followed by most traditional Christians, such as Augustine and Aquinas. Descartes agreed. Aristotle, however, said that the soul is "the form of the body." Thales, Epicurus, Thomas Hobbes, Karl Marx, and Bertrand Russell

were *materialists*, believing that all events can be explained in terms of matter and motion. On this view, there is no immaterial soul. If there is something that we can call *soul*, it is either material (the Stoic view) or an aspect of the body.

8. How does the human mind operate? How should it? Philosophers have made various distinctions within the sphere of human thought and experience: intellect, will, emotions, imagination, memory, intuition, perception, ideas, impressions, and so on. *Intellectualists* (such as Plato, Aquinas, Descartes, Hegel, Gordon H. Clark) believe that when the mind is working properly, all aspects of the mind are subject to the intellect. *Voluntarists* (Duns Scotus, William of Occam, Arthur Schopenhauer, Friedrich Nietzsche) note that believing something often if not always requires a choice, a decision of will. For them, will, not intellect, is fundamental. *Subjectivists* (such as the Sophists, Hume, Schelling, and Schleiermacher) believe that the mind does and should follow its feelings. Others develop more sophisticated theories of the interaction of these “faculties.”
9. Is there a god? As I said earlier, in the most important sense there are no atheists. But there are great differences among philosophers as to *what kind* of god there is. Some, such as Xenophanes, Spinoza, and Hegel, believed that the world was god. (That view is called *pantheism*.) Whitehead and Hartshorne believed that the world was divine, an aspect of god, but that god was somewhat more than the world. (That view is called *panentheism*, “everything is in god.”) Some seventeenth- and eighteenth-century thinkers held that God created the world to run according to “natural laws” and never again intervened. They are called *deists*. Plato used theological terms to describe his Idea of the Good, and in reference to the “Demiurge” who formed the world in the image of the Forms. Aristotle applied the term *god* to his Prime Mover. Anselm defined *God* as “that than which nothing greater can be conceived” and defined that, in turn, in biblical terms. People who hold a biblical view of God are called *theists*.

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Typically, philosophical epistemology deals with the subject of knowledge (a person), an object of knowledge (what he knows), and some sort of rule that determines whether the subject knows the object.

Epistemology

Epistemology is theory of knowledge. It asks: “What is knowledge?” “How is knowledge possible?” “How should we go about knowing?” “How do we distinguish truth from falsity, reality from appearance?”

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In my analysis, there are three general types of secular ethics: deontologism, teleologism, and existentialism.

described that rule as an *account*, so he defined *knowledge* as “true belief with an account.” More recently, the account has been called *justification*, and, still more recently, *warrant* (Alvin Plantinga).

Epistemologists have differed over the question to what extent knowledge is possible. Parmenides was sure that knowledge was possible, so that if anything appeared unknowable, it could not exist. But the Sophists denied that we had any knowledge, at least any knowledge that is objective and universal. One of them, Protagoras, said that “man is the measure of all things,” referring to the individual man. For him, there is no universal truth, nothing that is true for everybody, only truth for the individual—truth for me and truth for you.

Those who are optimistic about the prospect of knowing truth, such as Parmenides and Plato, are often called *rationalists*. That is, they believe that human reason is the final judge of what is true and false, and that therefore it is always trustworthy. Others, such as the Sophists, have less confidence in reason. They may be called *irrationalists* or *skeptics*.

Epistemologists also differ as to the *ground* of knowledge. In the previous section, I distinguished a number of “faculties” of the human mind. Theories of knowledge discuss the interaction of these faculties, one of the overlaps between metaphysics and epistemology. In the quest for the most fundamental ground of knowledge, the main contenders are reason, sense experience, and our general subjectivity (including feelings, will, intuition, mystical insight). *Rationalists* (see above) believe that human reason is the final judge of what is true or false. *Empiricists*, such as John Locke and David Hume, believe that sense experience has the ultimate word and that all reasoning must be based on that. *Subjectivists*, such as the Sophists and perhaps modern existentialists, believe that we find meaning and knowledge within ourselves.

Value Theory

Value theory, or *axiology*, includes ethics, aesthetics, and other kinds of value insofar as they are of interest to philosophers (e.g., some aspects of economic value). It asks, “What should we value most highly?”—the question of the *summum bonum* or highest good. Also, of course: “How should we make value judgments?” “Are values objective or subjective?” “What things, events, actions are good and bad? Right and wrong?” and so on.

In my analysis, there are three general types of secular ethics: deontologism, teleologism, and existentialism. *Deontological* ethicists such as Kant (and to some extent Plato) believe that we should make our decisions based on *duty*. *Teleological* ethics (such as that of Bentham, Mill, and to some extent Aristotle) argues that we should make our decisions first by identifying an ethical goal (usually individual or

corporate happiness) and then seeking the best means of reaching that goal. *Existential* ethics (Sophism, Sartre) tells us to do what we most want to do in our heart of hearts, to express what we really are.

I will not be discussing value theory to a great extent in this book, because I need to conserve space, and I have discussed ethical philosophy in some detail in *DCL*: non-Christian ethics in chapters 5–8, Christian ethical philosophy in chapters 9–21. But the reader should take note (in the following section) of the importance of integrating metaphysics and epistemology with ethics. I will be emphasizing that point throughout this book.

RELATIONS OF THE THREE SUBDIVISIONS

A novice philosopher might look at these three disciplines—metaphysics, epistemology, and value theory—and wonder where to start. Perhaps he thinks that he might study metaphysics exclusively for a year, learning all he can about the structure of the world, and only after that turn to epistemology and ethics. After all, it seems, the subjects and objects of knowledge are part of the world. So you need to know the world before you consider those specific parts.

On the other hand, how can you gain a knowledge of metaphysics if you have no knowledge about knowledge? So evidently metaphysics presupposes epistemology, as epistemology presupposes metaphysics.

What about value theory (focusing specifically on ethics)? Well, if you have no sense of right and wrong, no sense of obligations or rights, you really won't get far in a study of knowledge or being. For metaphysics and epistemology are human activities, human studies, and every human activity can be ethically evaluated. There are right and wrong ways to study philosophy, and these are expressed in ethical values. The ethics of study include discipline, diligence, respect for truth, avoidance of falsehood, honesty in reporting conclusions, humility in admitting error and inadequacy, acceptance of responsibility to give evidence for one's claims, where evidence is rightly demanded. When someone rejects or fails to exemplify such virtues, his philosophy (as a metaphysician or epistemologist) will suffer correspondingly. So the proper conclusions of philosophical study are the conclusions that we *ought* to have; and that *ought* is an ethical *ought*.

My general conclusion is that metaphysics, epistemology, and value theory are not independent of one another. Rather, they presuppose one another and influence one another. So, for example, one type of epistemology will lead to one kind of metaphysics, another to another kind. To Aristotle, for example, knowledge is a knowledge of individual things (epistemology), so in his metaphysics the world is a collection of

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things. To the early Wittgenstein, knowledge is a knowledge of facts expressed in propositions, and as he said, “The world is the totality of facts, not of things.”²⁰ So for him as well, epistemology and metaphysics determine one another.

Indeed, all epistemologies presuppose that the human subject is somehow connected to the world so that knowledge is possible; that is a metaphysical presupposition. Similarly, value theory makes little sense unless there is a source of value. But to affirm that there is such a source and to identify it is a metaphysical task.

Another way of putting it is that metaphysics, epistemology, and value theory are *perspectives* on the whole discipline of philosophy.²¹ We may picture that whole discipline as a triangle, and the three subdivisions as corners of the triangle; see fig. 1.1.

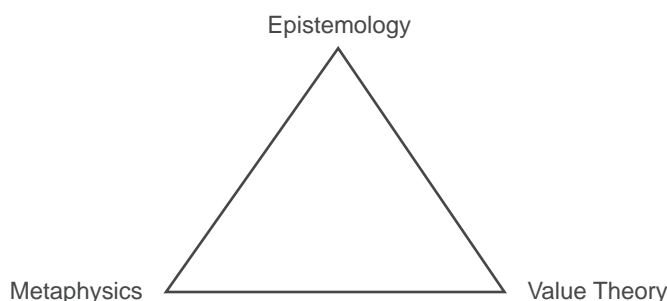


Fig. 1.1. Perspectives on the Discipline of Philosophy

You can begin the philosophical task at any corner of the triangle. But shortly you will run into content emanating from one of the other corners. In practice, you will go round and round the triangle: enriching your metaphysics with epistemological insights, enriching your epistemology with value theory, and so on. So metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics are not best understood as *parts* of philosophy, but as *aspects*. Each is a *perspective* on the whole discipline of philosophy.

BIBLICAL PHILOSOPHY

In our historical approach to philosophy, we should begin at the beginning. And on a Christian view of things, the beginning is the

20. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (London: Empire Books, 2011), 1.1.

21. Readers familiar with my previous books know that I use quite a number of triangular perspectival diagrams. Usually they form a pattern derived from God’s lordship attributes, which we will consider later in the chapter. The present diagram does not align easily with the lordship pattern, but in general I see metaphysics as the “situation,” epistemology as furnishing the “laws” or “norms” of thought, and value theory as bringing the person into the equation. But I’m aware that value theory also contains laws, that persons are a component of metaphysics, and so forth.

Another way of putting it is that metaphysics, epistemology, and value theory are perspectives on the whole discipline of philosophy.

creation of the world by God. The biblical doctrine of creation establishes a worldview that antedates the views of all other religions and philosophies and is also unique among them.

Creator and Creature

The first element of this worldview is the Creator-creature distinction itself. In the biblical metaphysic, there are two levels of reality: that of the Creator and that of the creature. Van Til illustrated this relationship by two circles, the larger one representing God, the lower (and smaller) circle creation; see fig. 1.2.

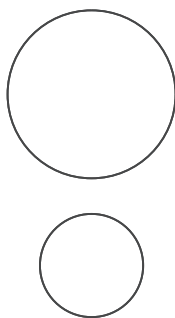


Fig. 1.2. The Distinction between Creator and Creature

These may never be confused (as in Spinoza, who believed that nature could be called God: *Deus sive natura*): the Lord is always Lord, and the creatures are always his servants. In Christianity, creation is *ex nihilo*, “out of nothing.” The world is not an emanation from God’s essence, a piece of God, as it were (as in Gnostic philosophy, for example). It is entirely and irrevocably distinct from God. But as a creature of God, it is capable of fellowship with God.

Nor is there anything in between the two levels (also as in Gnosticism, which posited a continuum of mediators between the highest being and the material world). Van Til did sometimes put two vertical lines between the two circles, meaning that God was able to “connect with” his creation, that he was free to act in the world and communicate with it. But there is no third level of being, only two.²²

Someone might object that this distinction between God and the world is not compatible with the union of God and man in Jesus Christ. But it is in Christology that the church has made the most zealous efforts

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Someone might object that this distinction between God and the world is not compatible with the union of God and man in Jesus Christ.

22. My good friend Peter Jones has noted that violation of the Creator-creature distinction is rife in modern neopaganism (“New Age thought”), which (parallel to ancient Gnosticism) tries to argue that all things are one. In that context, he describes the Christian worldview as *Twoism* and neopagan pantheism as *Oneism*. That distinction enables him to clearly communicate some of the major problems in modern culture. See Peter R. Jones, *Capturing the Pagan Mind* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 2003); Peter R. Jones, *One or Two: Seeing a World of Difference* (Escondido, CA: Main Entry Editions, 2010).

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I believe that the doctrine of creation ex nihilo is unique to biblical religion. Judaism and Islam give some respect to it, but that is because of the influence of the Bible on those faiths. Among "secular" thinkers, creation ex nihilo is nowhere to be found.

to keep God and man distinct. The Council of Chalcedon (A.D. 451) declared that in Jesus there are two distinct natures, divine and human:

So, following the saintly fathers, we all with one voice teach the confession of one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ: the same perfect in divinity and perfect in humanity, the same truly God and truly man, of a rational soul and a body; consubstantial with the Father as regards his divinity, and the same consubstantial with us as regards his humanity; like us in all respects except for sin; begotten before the ages from the Father as regards his divinity, and in the last days the same for us and for our salvation from Mary, the virgin God-bearer as regards his humanity; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only-begotten, acknowledged in two natures which undergo no confusion, no change, no division, no separation; at no point was the difference between the natures taken away through the union, but rather the property of both natures is preserved and comes together into a single person and a single subsistent being; he is not parted or divided into two persons, but is one and the same only-begotten Son, God, Word, Lord Jesus Christ, just as the prophets taught from the beginning about him, and as the Lord Jesus Christ himself instructed us, and as the creed of the fathers handed it down to us.²³

Notice the four Greek adverbs that are translated “no confusion, no change, no division, no separation.” In Christ there is the most intimate possible union between God and man, which the *Chalcedonian Declaration* expresses by saying that in him there is “no division, no separation.” But even in Christ, God and man are distinct. They are not “confused”; neither is “changed” into the other.

I believe that the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* is unique to biblical religion. Judaism and Islam give some respect to it, but that is because of the influence of the Bible on those faiths. Among “secular” thinkers, creation *ex nihilo* is nowhere to be found.²⁴

Absolute Tripersonality²⁵

Let us look now at the upper level of reality according to Scripture. What sort of being has created the world out of nothing? Of course,

23. *Dogmatic Definition of the Council of Chalcedon*, available at <http://www.ewtn.com/faith/teachings/incac2.htm>.

24. My exegetical argument of creation *ex nihilo* is in *DG*, 298–302.

25. At this point I begin to expound the *triperspectival* understanding of the world that I have previously argued in *DKG* and elsewhere. It can also be accessed in the writings of my friend Vern S. Poythress, for example in his *Redeeming Philosophy: A God-Centered Approach to the Big Questions* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014). I will discuss Poythress at the very end of this book.

many things can be said about the nature of God. But of particular philosophical importance is that God is *absolute personality*. To say that he is absolute is to say that he is self-sufficient, self-existent, or, as theologians say, *a se*. He therefore does not depend on anything else,²⁶ but everything else depends on him. He is, as the doctrine of creation implies, the origin of all things, the First Cause.

Absolute beings are fairly common in religious and philosophical literature. The Greek Fate, the Hindu Brahma, Parmenides' Being, Plato's Idea of the Good, Aristotle's Prime Mover, Plotinus's One, and Hegel's Absolute may fairly be described as absolute beings, possessing the attribute of *aseity*.²⁷

But the biblical God also has the attributes of *personality*. He is not only absolute, but personal: he knows, loves, speaks. So not only is he the fundamental cause of everything, but our relationship with him is the most important of all our personal relationships. He not only makes us, but tells us his will, expresses his love, provides salvation from sin, and tells us what he has done to redeem.

Belief in personal gods can be found in many religions.²⁸ The old polytheisms of Greece, Rome, Egypt, Babylon, Canaan, India, Scandinavia, Germany, and elsewhere are religions of personal gods. But those personal gods are never absolute beings. Zeus and Hera, for example, had parents, and were subject to fits of anger and jealousy. The gods of polytheism are not *a se*, not all-powerful, and certainly not paragons of morality and truth.

Only biblical religion acknowledges an absolute being who is also personal.²⁹ So for the Christian, the Creator of the universe is also our Lord, our ultimate Judge, and our dearest friend. So the God of the Bible is not only the First Cause, but also the ultimate standard of truth and of right.

More than this: the biblical God is not only personal, but tripersonal.³⁰ He is one God in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. His oneness is important philosophically: the world has only one First Cause, one ultimate standard of truth and right. But God's threeness is

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26. Recall that this is Clouser's definition of *divine*.

27. Recall Clouser's definition of God as a being who is "not depend[ent] on anything else." The term *aseity* comes from the Latin *a se*, "from himself."

28. Not, however, in many philosophies. Of course, philosophies associated with religions that honor personal gods sometimes acknowledge them. (Epicurus admitted their existence, but did not allow them to play any role in his philosophy.) But even that is rare in the history of philosophy.

29. Of course, that includes Christianity, which in my view is the only true interpretation of the Bible. But as I noted earlier, there are also religions, such as Judaism, Islam, and the Christian heresies such as the Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses, that carry some vestige of absolute-personality theism.

30. For my exegetical account of the doctrine of the Trinity, see *DG*, 619–735.

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also important. As we saw earlier, philosophical metaphysicians have argued among themselves about monism and pluralism: whether the universe is one or many. Van Til’s view was that because God is both one and many, he has made a world that is both one and many: that is, no unity without particulars, nor vice versa. Philosophical attempts to reduce the universe to one something, or to chop the world into “ultimate constituents,” either procedure as an attempt to gain exhaustive knowledge of the world, are bound to fail.³¹

Lordship

What, then, is the relationship between Creator and creature, between the absolute tripersonality and those who depend on him? I believe that the most fundamental biblical description of this relationship is *lordship*: God is Lord, and creation is his servant.³² In my analysis, the nature of God’s lordship can be summarized by the terms *control*, *authority*, and *presence*. God’s control is his power to bring all things to pass according to the counsel of his will (Eph. 1:11). His authority is his right to be obeyed, so that his control has a moral basis. His presence is his nearness to his creation and his intimate relationships with it. The most profound relationship is the covenant, in which God says, “I will be your God, and you will be my people” (Ex. 6:7; Lev. 26:12; Rev. 21:3).

I describe these three terms as the *lordship attributes*, and they are perspectively related; see fig. 1.3.

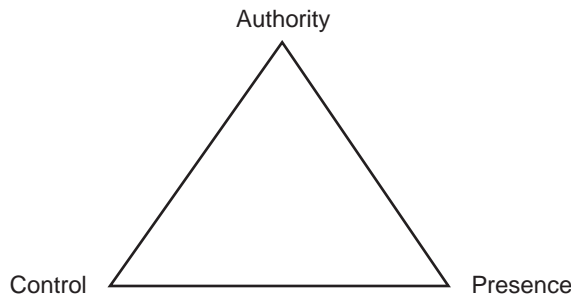


Fig. 1.3. The Lordship Attributes

Each of these attributes implies the others. If God is in control of all things, then he controls the standards for truth and right, so his control

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31. I will discuss this in more detail in my discussion of Van Til in chapter 13.

32. For my argument for the centrality of lordship in Scripture and the nature of lordship in terms of control, authority, and presence, see *DG*, 21–115, and *ST*, chaps. 2–6. Other biblical designations of God are also important, especially *King* and *Father*. In my view, these are perspectively identical with *Lord*.

implies his authority. And if he controls all things, he exercises his power everywhere, and (for an immaterial being) that constitutes his presence.

If God has authority over all things, then he has control, for he has the right to command anything (personal or impersonal), and it must obey. For example, even in the original creation he made the world by issuing commands. He commanded even nonexistent things to spring into existence (“let there be light,” Gen. 1:3; cf. Rom. 4:17). And his authority implies his presence, for his authority extends to all things.

His presence means that nothing in the universe can escape from his control or authority (Ps. 139).

The threefold pattern suggests that this account of God’s lordship may be importantly related to God’s Trinitarian nature, and I believe it is. The three persons of the Trinity are, of course, “distinct but not separate.” They work together in all of world history. But they do play distinct roles, particularly in their relation to the world, in the meta-narrative of creation, fall, and redemption. In general, God the Father is prominent in biblical accounts of God’s eternal plan. The Son, not the Father, becomes incarnate to implement that plan in obedience to the Father. Then the Spirit comes to be “with” and “in” God’s people as he bears witness to the work of Christ. These distinctions suggest that the Father is the “authority,” the Son the “controller,” and the Spirit the “presence” of God.

Of course, in all aspects of God’s work, the three persons are involved together. The Son is “in” the Father and the Father in him. The Spirit is in the Father and the Son, and they are in him. This mutual indwelling is what theologians call *circumcessio* or *perichoresis*.

PERSPECTIVES OF HUMAN KNOWLEDGE

If God is Lord, then human beings are persons subject to his lordship: servants, children, friends, citizens. In all our decisions and activities, the first consideration is our relation to God.

So in the study of epistemology, for example, our knowledge is related to God’s lordship in three ways: it must take account of God’s control, authority, and presence. To take account of God’s lordship attributes, in my view, is to think according to certain *perspectives*. Earlier we considered the discipline of philosophy made up of the perspectives of metaphysics, epistemology, and value theory. Now I focus on epistemology and note important perspectives within that field.³³

When we take account of God’s *control* of nature and history, we can see that our entire situation is governed by his foreordination and

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33. In a perspectival understanding of knowledge, there are perspectives within perspectives within perspectives.

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providence.³⁴ As we explore that situation (both our individual situations and the whole course of nature and history), we are seeking to know the world by the *situational perspective*.

When we consider the world as standing under the *authority* of God, we can learn that everything in creation reveals him and his will (see my study of Romans 1 in the following section). To study the world this way is to focus on the *normative perspective*.

When we consider the world as the locus of God’s *presence*, both outside us and within us, we are focusing on the *existential perspective*; see fig. 1.4.

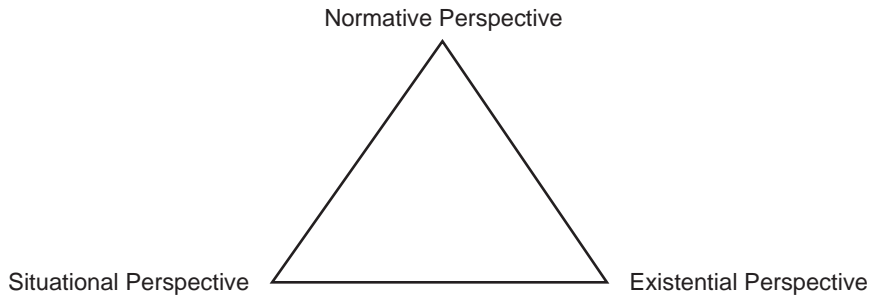


Fig. 1.4. Perspectives on Human Knowledge

I describe these as *perspectives* because they cannot be separated from one another. If we are to understand the situation rightly, we must understand it as the location of God’s revelation, his norms; so the situational includes the normative. To understand God’s norms rightly, we must understand how they apply to situations and to ourselves; so the normative includes the situational and existential. To understand God’s relationship to ourselves rightly, we must understand ourselves as part of a God-created environment (situational) and as covenant subjects made to live under God’s law (normative); so the existential includes the normative and the situational.

Though none of these perspectives can be separated from the others, it is helpful to distinguish them, if only to maintain a balanced view of things. A Christian philosopher should understand that we cannot have a philosophy based on *fact* (situational) unless those facts are interpreted by God’s norms (normative) and through the faculties of our minds (existential). Nor can we maintain a philosophy that reduces all reality to *forms* or *logic* (normative) without relating these to the

34. *Foreordination* includes God’s eternal plan and decrees for the course of history. *Providence* is God’s action within history to bring his plan to fulfillment. See DG, chaps. 14, 16. In foreordination, God rules “from above”; in providence, he rules “from below.” So his sovereignty envelops his creation.

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facts of the world and the inwardness of the human subject. Same for philosophies of *feeling* (existential), which often fail to do justice to norms and to objective facts.

So no one of these three concepts is competent to be the foundation of a philosophy, separated from the others. Each is a perspective on the whole of reality and therefore a perspective on all philosophy. Each includes the other two, and none is intelligible apart from the other two.

SIN AND PHILOSOPHY

We have seen that the Bible teaches a distinct and unique worldview: the Creator-creature distinction, God as absolute tripersonality, and divine lordship as his relation to the world. But many fail to acknowledge the biblical worldview. The Bible itself gives a reason for this, namely, sin. In Romans 1:18–32, the apostle Paul says this:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of

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*In the unbelieving
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only to his own law.*

God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

As I indicated earlier, God's lordship applies to all human activities, and knowing is one of those. So abandoning God's lordship leads to the corruption of human life in ethics and worship, but also in knowledge. In this passage, we learn that God has revealed himself clearly to human beings (Rom. 1:19–20). If people claim to be ignorant of him, they cannot claim innocence: their ignorance is their own fault. The revelation is clear, but they have willfully repressed it (vv. 18, 21, 23, 25, 28). For that repression they have no excuse (v. 20).

The sin of these people begins, then, in the area of knowledge. When they repress the knowledge of God, that leads to the sin of idolatry (Rom. 1:22–23), then to sexual sins (vv. 24–27), and then to "all manner of unrighteousness" (vv. 28–31). They not only do wrong themselves, but also approve of others who do the same.

Here, metaphysics (recognition of God's lordship), epistemology (knowing God from his revelation), and ethics (sins of all sorts) are intertwined. So it is not surprising that sinners reject the tenets of biblical philosophy that we have discussed earlier and substitute other ideas for it.

Sinners at heart do not want to live in God's world, though they have no choice about it. They recognize the truth to some extent, because they need to get along and to make a living. But they would very much like the world to be different, and often they either try to make it different or pretend that it is. In the unbelieving fantasy world, the Lord of the Bible does not exist, and man is free to live by his own standards of truth and right. In a word, the unbeliever lives as if he were *autonomous*, subject only to his own law. Nobody can be really autonomous, because we are all subject to God's control, authority, and presence. But we pretend that we are autonomous; we act as though we were autonomous, in the unbelieving fantasy world.

In Van Til's illustration, the first person who sought to live this way was the first woman, Eve, the mother of us all. God had told her not to eat of a certain fruit. But she thought about it:

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. (Gen. 3:6)

At some level, she knew that she should obey God and reject the contrary words of Satan. But she preferred to trust her own senses and judgments, to make her decision as though she were autonomous. It was as though God had his opinion, Satan had his, and Eve was to cast the deciding vote. So the fall was first an event in Eve's mind, only second an event in her mouth and throat. It was philosophical before it was practical. We are cautioned again that God must be Lord of our thought, not just of our behavior.

Eve judged by her own metaphysic (the tree was "good for food"), aesthetic (a "delight to the eyes"), and epistemology ("desired to make one wise"), and she embarked on carrying out her own ethic: disobedience.

So the history of non-Christian philosophy is a history of would-be autonomous thought. And of course, if people presuppose their own autonomy, they cannot acknowledge God as the absolute-personal Creator, the Lord.

I should note that although the fall involved Eve's thinking about metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics, the fall itself was in one sense ethical and *not* metaphysical. Most non-Christian philosophers and religions recognize that there is something wrong with the human condition. But they tend to think that the problem is with our metaphysical finitude, or even our failure to attain deity. But in Scripture, the human plight is personal, relational. It is based on our own disobedience to God.

CHRISTIAN AND NON-CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY

Because of the fall, there is an antithesis between believers and unbelievers in every area of life: believers seek to glorify God in all areas of life (1 Cor. 10:31), while nonbelievers seek to live autonomously (Gen. 8:21; Isa. 64:6; Rom. 3:10, 23). That includes the area of thought, reasoning, seeking wisdom. If "the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom" (Ps. 111:10), then those who do not fear God do not even have the beginning of wisdom. So Paul argues that "the wisdom of this world is folly with God" (1 Cor. 3:19; cf. 1:20) and that the wisdom of God is foolishness to the world (1 Cor. 1:18, 21–22). The larger context of these verses is instructive, and the summation is in 2:14–16:

The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. "For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ.

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Antithesis does not mean that Christians and non-Christians disagree on every proposition. Believers and unbelievers can readily agree that the sky is blue, that the earth revolves around the sun, and so on. But the intellectual activities of each must be seen in the context of their life purpose. The believer seeks to know the world in order to glorify God. The unbeliever seeks to know God in order to oppose God's kingdom, by exalting his own autonomy.

Neither, of course, is fully consistent with his life project. Believers are sometimes unfaithful to their Lord and must seek forgiveness (1 John 1:9). Unbelievers must seek to survive and prosper in a world that, contrary to their desire, is God's world, so they must often recognize God's reality despite themselves. God will not allow them to be perfectly consistent with their sinful impulse, for if they were, they would destroy themselves and create chaos around them. And if they did not continue to recognize the truth at some level, then they would no longer be without excuse (Rom. 1:20). Their continuing knowledge serves as a basis for their moral responsibility. So God regularly restrains sin and its effects, as in the Tower of Babel episode (Gen. 11:1–8).

When the believer, the unbeliever, or both are inconsistent with their general life-direction, they can agree. But such agreements may be short-lived. In any case, both agreements and disagreements are part of the larger context of spiritual warfare, the battle between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. Sometimes even Satan serves his purposes by speaking truth, as when he quotes Scripture in Matthew 4:6.³⁵

The history of philosophy, therefore, describes one phase of spiritual warfare, as it has developed over the centuries.

THE ANTITHESIS IN METAPHYSICS

Let us then consider the antithesis in philosophy as it appears in the three subdivisions of philosophy that I distinguished earlier in the chapter: metaphysics, epistemology, and value theory. First, metaphysics.

As I mentioned, the biblical worldview emphasizes the Creator-creature distinction, the absolute tripersonality of God, and his lordship over the world, understood as control, authority, and presence. Non-Christian philosophy, though it takes many forms, uniformly seeks to oppose the biblical worldview, though it might paradoxically express agreement with it at various points and for various purposes.

I have found it useful to describe the antithesis in metaphysics by use of the terms *transcendence* and *immanence*. These terms are commonly used in Christian theology as representations of two biblical emphases.

35. For more discussion of the nature of antithesis, please see my discussions of Kuyper and Van Til in chapter 13, also *DKG*, 49–61, and *CVT*, 187–238. It is not easy to describe the ways in which nonbelievers do and do not “suppress the truth.”

Transcendence evokes the biblical picture of God as “high,” “lifted up,” “exalted,” and so on (Pss. 7:7; 9:2; Isa. 6:1). *Immanence* draws on biblical language about God’s being “near” and “with us” (Gen. 21:22; 26:3, 24, 28; 28:15; Deut. 4:7; Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:23).

In theological writing, *transcendence* sometimes takes on the meaning that God is so far removed from the creation that we cannot know him or speak truly of him. But the God of Scripture is not transcendent in that sense. In the Bible, God is eminently knowable; indeed, eternal life is knowing him in a certain way (John 17:3). And in the Bible, God speaks to his people, so that they can speak truly of him (17:17). When Scripture speaks of God’s being high or lifted up, it refers to his position on the throne of the universe as Lord and King. If we use the term *transcendence* for his exaltation in this sense, then it refers to his lordship, particularly his control and authority.

Immanence in theology is usually used to refer to God’s omnipresence, which is uncontroversial among Christians, but I think it is better to use the term with more covenant nuance. God is omnipresent, yes, but with personal intentions toward people, either blessing or judgment. God’s immanence is his covenant presence.

What we must strenuously avoid is what some theologians do: to say that God becomes so “near” that he cannot be distinguished from the world, and that he therefore abandons his divine nature. That either reduces God to the level of man or raises man to the level of God, in either case violating the Creator-creature distinction.³⁶

These biblical and nonbiblical concepts of transcendence and immanence may be illustrated by the following diagram; see fig. 1.5.

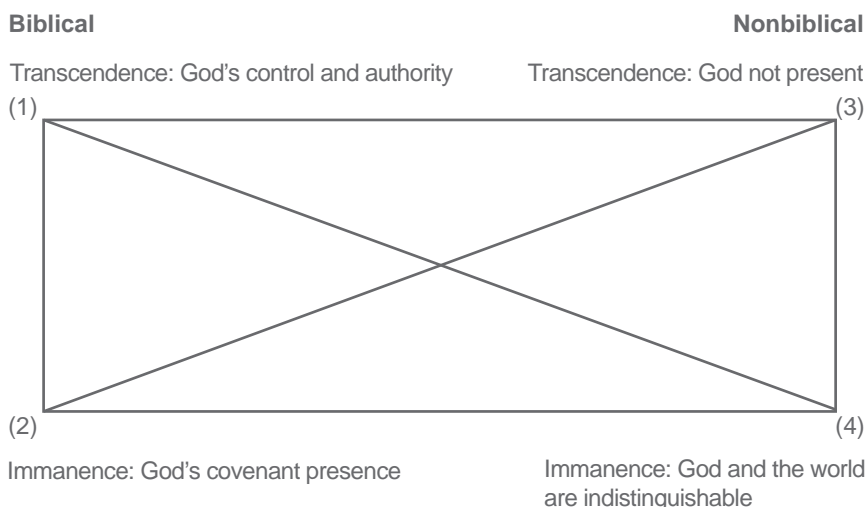


Fig. 1.5. Concepts of Transcendence and Immanence

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36. This kind of argument led Thomas Altizer to his *Christian atheism* in the 1960s. See chapter 10.

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If God is the nameless beyond, then necessarily we are left as masters of our own destiny. For, practically speaking, he cannot rule us. We cannot take account of him in our values, our decisions, or our worldviews. Still, we cannot live without ultimate values, so we become god ourselves.

The left side of the rectangle³⁷ represents the biblical views of transcendence and immanence that we have discussed. (1) is biblical transcendence: God's rule. Included in God's rule are his lordship attributes of control and authority. (2) is biblical immanence: God's covenant presence. The right side of the rectangle represents the nonbiblical views that we have noted. (3) is nonbiblical transcendence: that God is so far "above" us that we cannot know him or identify him in history. As Barth would say, he is wholly hidden or wholly other. (4) is nonbiblical immanence: that the immanence of God is in effect the autonomy of creatures, God as wholly revealed. On this view, man in effect becomes God, or God is reduced to the level of man.

The diagonal lines are lines of opposition. (1) and (4) are contradictory, for to say that creatures are autonomous (4) is to contradict the assertion that God is the supreme ruler of the world (1). (2) and (3) are also opposed, because to insist that God cannot be identified in history (3), that he is unknowable and unspeakable, contradicts the biblical teaching concerning God's presence (2).

The vertical lines draw our attention to the relative consistency of the two approaches. The biblical view is consistent and without tension.³⁸ The nonbiblical view is full of tension: How can God be both ineffable and identical with the world, as in Gnosticism? How can he be wholly hidden and wholly revealed, as in Barth? But although this system is contradictory, we can understand how this view of transcendence *generates* this particular view of immanence, and vice versa. If God is the nameless beyond, then necessarily we are left as masters of our own destiny. For, practically speaking, he cannot rule us. We cannot take account of him in our values, our decisions, or our worldviews. Still, we cannot live without ultimate values, so we become god ourselves. The universe cannot exist without ultimate powers of causation, so it becomes its own cause. Removing God from the world enables human autonomy. And conversely, if our goal is to be autonomous,³⁹ then we either must deny God's existence altogether⁴⁰ or must convince ourselves that God is too far beyond us to have any practical influence in our lives. So (3) and (4) require each other in a sense, even though bringing them together creates tension and paradox.

The horizontal lines lead us to consider the similarity of the two ways of thinking at the verbal level. Both views of transcendence may appeal

37. The next four paragraphs are taken from *ST*, chap. 3.

38. This is not to deny that there is mystery. Our knowledge of God is not exhaustive. But what God reveals of himself is not contradictory.

39. Remember that Scripture teaches that autonomy is always the goal of fallen man. So it is not arbitrary to ascribe this sort of thinking ultimately to human rebellion against God.

40. Atheism is an extreme version of transcendence (3). For it asserts that God is *so far* from the real world in which we live that he should not even be counted among real beings.

to the biblical language of God's exaltation and height. Both views of immanence describe his involvement in all things. But beneath the verbal similarity, there are enormous conceptual differences, indeed contradictions, as we have seen, between the two systems. The verbal similarities indicate why the nonbiblical positions have attracted many Christians. But these issues are so important that we must penetrate beneath the surface similarities to recognize the antithesis between these two ways of thinking.

How, then, is the antithesis relevant to the philosophical questions I outlined earlier in the chapter?

1. Is the universe one or many? The reason why this question has been important is that philosophers have wanted to find an absolute *in* the world, belonging to the world, that is, rather than the God of Scripture. Non-Christian philosophers have wanted such an absolute to serve as a comprehensive explanation for everything (which indicates the connection between metaphysics and epistemology). They have tried to do that in two ways: (a) by identifying a *oneness* to which everything can be reduced (as Thales's "all is water") and (b) by seeking an ultimate *plurality*: chopping things down into their smallest parts to detect the ultimate constituents of the universe (Democritus's "atoms"). But Christians believe this cannot be done (Rom. 11:33–36). To have a comprehensive explanation of everything is to have a kind of knowledge available only to God himself. That is impossible for human beings. The impossibility of it is displayed by the fact that, as with the Trinity, there is in the world no oneness without plurality and no plurality without oneness. The world is both one and many, because God, who is one and many, has made the world in such a way that it reflects him.

In non-Christian thought, it is difficult to relate the ultimate oneness to the pluralities of the world. Thales evidently understands "all is water" to state the discovery of a transcendent principle, a principle that explains everything. But this transcendent water cannot be real water, the stuff that makes other things wet. It is an abstract concept that combines all the qualities of everything else in the universe, but somehow stands apart from them. The big question for Thales is: How does water as a superprinciple give rise to the rest of the world? Does it somehow get transformed into other things? Or are the other things, in the end, illusory, as Parmenides claimed for his own superprinciple, Being? Plato struggled with the

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Philosophers who believe that the world is essentially one need to explain what that oneness is like, what kind of oneness it is. Is it divine, mental, material, or what?

question of how the world of perfect, changeless Forms could give rise to the changing, imperfect world. In other words, on these views, how can the principle of oneness, defined by its transcendence over the world, become immanent enough to account for the many, without itself becoming many?

The same is true for philosophers who seek an ultimate plurality as the final explanation for everything. The “atoms” of Democritus, though plural, are transcendent in an important way. Nobody has ever seen an atom. These, as much as Parmenides’ Being or Plato’s Forms, are abstractions from the flow of our ordinary experience. So atomists need to explain how the atoms give rise to the world of that ordinary experience. The atoms are too transcendent to explain the world, and at the same time too immanent, too worldly, to provide the world with governance.

2. What is the basic composition of the universe? This question is the same as the previous one, but more specific. Philosophers who believe that the world is essentially one need to explain what that oneness is like, what kind of oneness it is. Is it divine, mental, material, or what? Same for philosophers who believe that the universe is essentially many. And as with the previous question, there is an overlap between metaphysical and epistemological concerns. For the philosophers who ask these questions are seeking exhaustive knowledge of the world.

But again, the qualities singled out as the comprehensive nature of the world (water, air, fire, number, form, matter . . .) take on an abstract quality when used as philosophical ultimates. When Thales uses water as a transcendent principle, he is thinking of it as something different from the ordinary stuff that we drink and wash with. Essentially, he is using water to play the role of God, to serve as the ultimate explanation of everything. But Scripture calls this *idolatry*. And idols cannot do the job of God. The notion that trees, planets, people, minds, lungs, music, fish are “really” water is ludicrous on its face. So either water becomes a transcendent reality that cannot be described or it is an immanent reality that cannot perform any transcendent function.

3. Are universals real, or only particulars? Let us consider apples as an example. Every apple is different from every other. But all apples are alike in some respects. Same for lemons and pears, men and women, political theories, scientific laws, literary movements, moral virtues, subatomic particles, galaxies . . . same for all objects. All classes of objects exhibit samenesses and

differences, and that, as we have noted throughout this book, generates the “problem of universals and particulars.” Plato thought that the samenesses among things had to be located in a special place, the world of Forms. Aristotle thought that these samenesses were aspects of things here on the earth.

But the relation between sameness and difference, form and matter, has always been problematic. Both Plato and Aristotle, known as “realists,” thought that the real nature of an apple, its essence, is its sameness to other apples. The differences were “accidental.” Indeed, in one sense, the differences don’t really exist.⁴¹ Hegel, too, thought that sameness was the essential thing, and that the dialectic, in the end, would wipe out all differences, exposing them as merely apparent. And what is merely apparent is incapable of rational analysis.

Others, philosophers in the nominalist tradition, say that the samenesses of things are merely a verbal shorthand. It is easier to talk about a bushel of apples by referring only to their samenesses (they are “apples”) than by describing all the differences among them: this one has a bump two inches from the stem, for instance. But in reality, the differences make everything what it is. To understand a particular apple is to understand the location of every bump and the composition of every bruise. To the nominalist, reality is particular and concrete, not general and abstract. So it is the differences that really exist. The samenesses are only conceptual and verbal.

The biblical philosophy I outlined evades both realism and nominalism. In that worldview, God is equally one and many. He is always the same, one God, but among his three persons there are real differences. In him there is no sameness without difference and no difference without sameness.

Similarly, he has made the world to be one and many. Reality in the world exhibits sameness and difference. It is one world, with many genuinely different aspects and objects. We cannot advance our understanding of the world by seeking, as Hegel did, how it is all the same, discarding the differences. For the general realities—apple, tree, man, woman, solar system, law of gravitation, virtue—are what they are because of the particulars that constitute them. And we can identify the particulars only with the use of general concepts. To identify the bump two inches from the stem of the apple requires us to think of the general concepts *apple*, *stem*, and *bump*. Particulars are collections of generalities, and generalities are collections of things. Universals and particulars define one another.

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41. Both Plato and Aristotle located differences in “matter.” But they defined *matter* as that which lacks form, and without form there is no being, no reality.

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Since God is the authority of all things, he is the ultimate criterion of truth and falsity, right and wrong (normative). If it is possible for human beings to know anything, their knowledge must meet these criteria.

So we cannot accurately understand the universe by reducing it to generalities (as Plato, Aristotle, Hegel), or by dividing it into ultimate particulars (Democritus, Epicurus, Roscellinus, Occam, the early Wittgenstein). Universals and particulars are perspectively related. I believe this fact destroys any human dreams of achieving exhaustive knowledge. There is no ultimate universal or ultimate particular that explains everything. Exhaustive knowledge is the prerogative of God alone.

Similar things can be said in response to the other questions I referred to earlier, about change, teleology, cause, mind, mental faculties, and God. I will take them up in the course of our historical discussions. In general, the questions themselves reflect the antithesis: non-Christian philosophers are seeking alternatives to God, making the discipline of philosophy an exercise in idolatry.

Christians, when they are consistent with their faith, seek answers to these questions within the biblical worldview: (1) The world is both one and many, reflecting the Trinity. There is no unity without plurality, and no plurality without unity. (2) The universe cannot be reduced to any single type of object.⁴² The human body, for example, contains chemical fluids, bones, brain matter, nerves, nails, hair, and so forth, but it cannot be reduced to any of these. Nor can human thought be reduced to some faculty of the mind, such as reason or will. Thinking is an act of the whole person. Man is essentially the image of God. It cannot be said that he is “only” something else. Similarly for the creation as a whole. It is essentially God’s creature.

THE ANTITHESIS IN EPISTEMOLOGY

As I indicated earlier, the Bible has much to say about wisdom, knowing, understanding, foolishness. The biblical doctrine of human knowledge comes out of the general biblical worldview. God’s lordship has clear epistemological implications.

Since God is the *controller* of all things, it is for him to determine whether or not we gain knowledge, and under what conditions. The objects of knowledge are God himself and the world he has made. The human subject of knowledge is God’s creature and God’s image. Can the subject (existential) enter into a fruitful relation to the object (situational) so that knowledge takes place? That is for God to determine.

Since God is the *authority* of all things, he is the ultimate criterion of truth and falsity, right and wrong (normative). If it is possible for human beings to know anything, their knowledge must meet these criteria.

It is the *presence* of God, however (existential), that makes human knowledge actual. For part of the biblical meaning of God’s presence is

42. That includes those objects of scientific discussion, such as quarks, bosons, and superstrings.

that he reveals himself to his creatures, specifically to human beings. We know God and the world because he has taken the initiative to reveal himself. Otherwise, we could have no knowledge at all.

So epistemology as well as metaphysics depends on God's transcendence (control and authority) and immanence (presence). And the non-Christian distortions of transcendence and immanence also create distortions in epistemology. If the absolute being is transcendent in the nonbiblical sense of being inaccessible to the world, then of course we cannot know him. And we cannot know the world either because God furnishes the only criteria by which we can discover truth. Similarly, if the absolute is immanent in the nonbiblical sense of being identical with the world, then our knowledge is autonomous and human reason becomes an absolute.

So we can interpret our rectangular diagram in epistemological terms; see fig. 1.6.

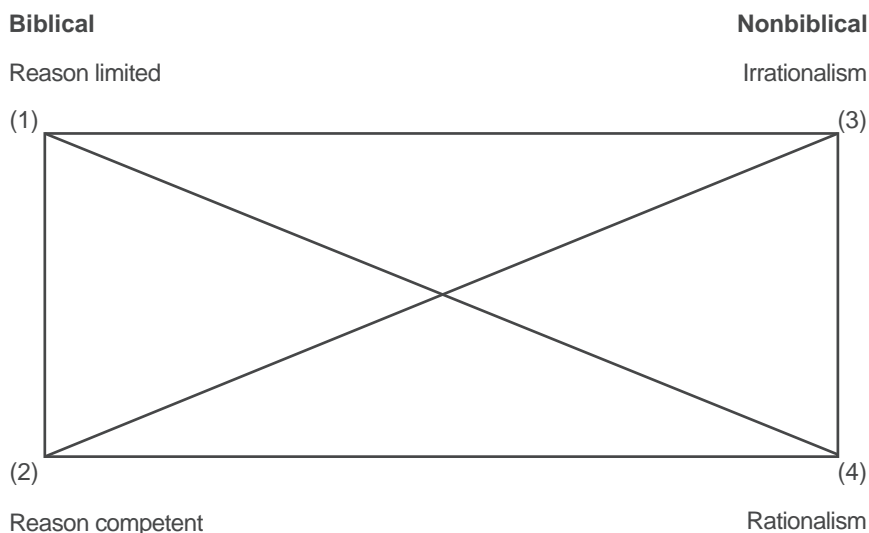


Fig. 1.6. Concepts of Rationalism and Irrationalism

(1) tells us that our reason is limited because of God's transcendence. He, not we, is the ultimate controller of and authority for knowledge. Our knowledge is an aspect of our discipleship, that is, a *servant knowledge*. It is subject to God's control, and his authoritative revelation constitutes the highest laws of thought for us.⁴³

43. In philosophy, the *laws of thought* are generally identified as the basic laws of logic: the law of noncontradiction (nothing can be both A and not-A at the same time and in the same respect), the law of identity (everything is what it is), and the law of the excluded middle (everything is *either* A *or* not-A; nothing can be both at the same time and in the same respect). What I am claiming is that God's revelation has higher authority even than any human system of logic.

If the absolute being is transcendent in the nonbiblical sense of being inaccessible to the world, then of course we cannot know him. And we cannot know the world either because God furnishes the only criteria by which we can discover truth.

If the absolute is immanent in the nonbiblical sense of being identical with the world, then our knowledge is autonomous and human reason becomes an absolute.

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When a Christian speaks of the limits of human thought, the need to bow to God's revelation, non-Christian respondents are appalled at their surrender of autonomy.

(2) tells us that although our reason is limited, it is competent to know truth. It is competent because God has become immanent and has revealed himself and has revealed truths about the world, history, and ourselves.

(3) is an epistemological corollary to the non-Christian understanding of transcendence. If the absolute is so far from the world that we cannot know it, then human beings have no reason to think that they have access to truth, that their reason is competent to know the world.

(4) is an epistemological corollary to the non-Christian understanding of immanence. If the immanence of the absolute establishes human wisdom as absolute, then the human mind is the final determinant of truth and falsity. That is, we are autonomous.

Now, non-Christians routinely speak of Christian thought as rationalistic and irrationalistic. When a Christian speaks of the limits of human thought, the need to bow to God's revelation (1), non-Christian respondents are appalled at their surrender of autonomy. To non-Christians, to surrender autonomy is to abandon reason itself. Kant made much of this argument in his *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*.

But when a Christian speaks of the competence of human reason to know truth, non-Christians regard him as a rationalist. To postmodernists, for example, the very claim to know absolute truth is necessarily wrong. It is an arrogant claim.⁴⁴

So both Christians and non-Christians charge each other with being rationalist and irrationalist. As a Christian, I believe that the non-Christians are guilty of this criticism, the Christians nonguilty, for reasons that should be evident from my description of these two positions.

To consider the non-Christian position more fully: As we look at the history of philosophy, we will see that the non-Christian intellectual traditions vacillate between rationalism and irrationalism. As with the metaphysical tension of transcendence and immanence, non-Christian rationalism and irrationalism are inconsistent with each other, but they also, paradoxically, reinforce each other.

Parmenides' rationalism failed to impress later generations of thinkers, leading to the skepticism and relativism of Sophism and the Middle Academy. But few could rest content with skepticism and relativism, leading to a new form of rationalism in Neoplatonism. So the philosophical community over the centuries has vacillated from rationalism to irrationalism and back again.

The greatest philosophers have tried to combine rationalistic and irrationalistic principles in a single system. So Plato is rationalistic

44. In the postmodernist narrative, the modernists claimed that Christians were irrational because they did not have sufficient evidence for their claims. The postmodernists claim that Christians are rationalist because they claim to know absolute truth.

about the Forms, irrationalistic about the material world. Same for Aristotle and Plotinus. Kant is rationalistic about phenomena, irrationalistic about the noumenal world. Wittgenstein is rationalistic about his perfect language, irrationalistic about his “mystical” world. We will see other examples throughout this book.

The dynamic between the two positions is as follows: If rationalism is true, the mind should not make errors in its quest for knowledge. But it does. When it does, philosophers do not want to blame their autonomous reason (the subject of knowledge). Rather, they blame the world, the object of knowledge. The mind cannot attain perfect knowledge because the world is not perfectly knowable. So rationalism leads to irrationalism. But how do we know that the world is irrational? By our would-be-autonomous knowledge, of course. So irrationalism leads back to rationalism. Or, to shorten the discussion: Philosophers assert rationalism irrationally, for there is no adequate ground for asserting it. And philosophers assert irrationalism rationalistically, on the basis of their autonomous intellect. So in the end, the two positions, inconsistent as they are, are based on each other and are in one sense identical.

It was Van Til’s great accomplishment to narrate the history of philosophy as a movement from rationalism to irrationalism and back again, a description of non-Christian thought and a critique of it at the same time. I will frequently mention this pattern in the historical chapters of this volume.

THE ANTITHESIS IN VALUES

As I said earlier, I will not be focusing on value theory in this book, having dealt with it in much detail in *DCL*. But values are an important aspect of metaphysics and epistemology, since perspectives are inseparable from one another. So I want to sketch a bit in this section how value theory functions in my critique of philosophy.

I mentioned earlier that epistemology presupposes ethics, since the quest for knowledge requires ethical values: “discipline, diligence, respect for truth, avoidance of falsehood, honesty in reporting conclusions, humility in admitting error and inadequacy, acceptance of responsibility to give evidence for one’s claims.” And I have also argued that ethical values presuppose God.⁴⁵ In brief: nothing impersonal has the authority to impose ethical norms. Only a person can do that (e.g., a mother, father, teacher, policeman), and only an absolute person can impose ultimate, universal norms.

Irrationalism leads back to rationalism. Or, to shorten the discussion: Philosophers assert rationalism irrationally, for there is no adequate ground for asserting it. And philosophers assert irrationalism rationalistically, on the basis of their autonomous intellect.

Nothing impersonal has the authority to impose ethical norms. Only a person can do that (e.g., a mother, father, teacher, policeman), and only an absolute person can impose ultimate, universal norms.

45. *AJCB*, 95–123; John M. Frame and Paul Kurtz, “Do We Need God to Be Moral?” *Free Inquiry* 16, 2 (1996). Courtesy of the Council for Secular Humanism, <http://www.secularhumanism.org>. Also available at http://www.frame-poythress.org/frame_articles/1996Debate.htm.

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Many non-Christian thinkers (such as Paul Kurtz, in the dialogue referenced below) think they can affirm absolute ethical norms without God. But their attempt inevitably fails. That failure can be remedied either by embracing the ethic of biblical theism or by denying that absolute norms are possible. So non-Christian ethical absolutism (a form of rationalism) leads to non-Christian ethical relativism (a form of irrationalism). But again, irrationalism is based on rationalism and vice versa.

The Christian finds ethical certainty in God’s revelation. But he often runs into difficulty trying to apply that revelation to the issues of life. He accepts that he doesn’t have all the answers, and bows the knee to God’s mystery. So in the area of values, the rectangle looks like this; see fig. 1.7.⁴⁶

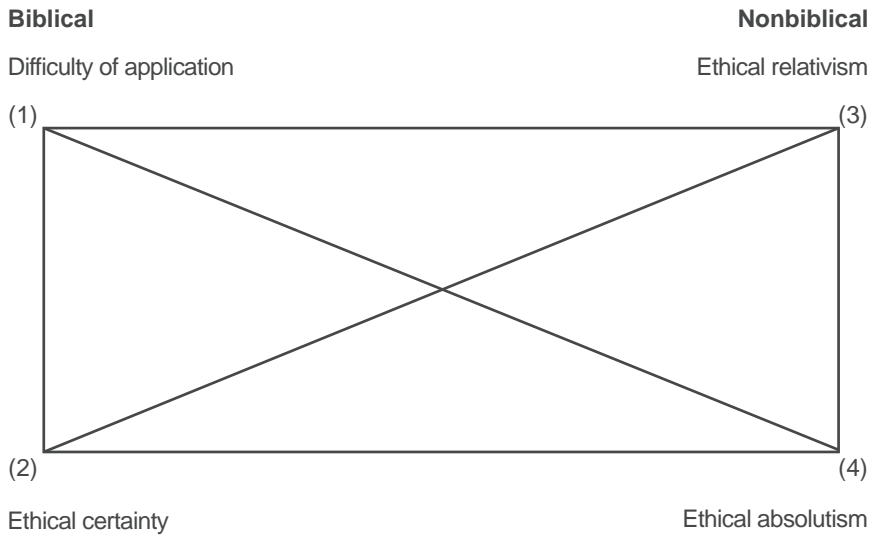


Fig. 1.7. Ethical Relativism and Absolutism

Earlier I mentioned the three perspectives of Christian thought: situational, normative, and existential. These three perspectives play important roles in Christian ethics. (1) Christian ethics is normative, applying the moral laws of God given in Scripture and nature. (2) It is also situational, in that it analyzes the world that God has made to know how best to apply God’s norms to a given situation. And (3) it is existential, in that it deals with the ethical agent to understand his role in making ethical decisions, how he takes the norms of God

46. For other applications to ethics of the rectangular diagram, see *DCL*, 45–49. These include the absoluteness and relevance of the moral law, divine sovereignty and human responsibility, objectivity and inwardness, humility and hope, and freedom and authority in society.

The Christian finds ethical certainty in God’s revelation. But he often runs into difficulty trying to apply that revelation to the issues of life. He accepts that he doesn’t have all the answers, and bows the knee to God’s mystery.

and applies them to his situation. In making decisions, the Christian goes round and round the triangle, interpreting the situation by the moral law, applying the moral law by investigating the situation, and understanding both of these through his subjective faculties; see fig. 1.8.

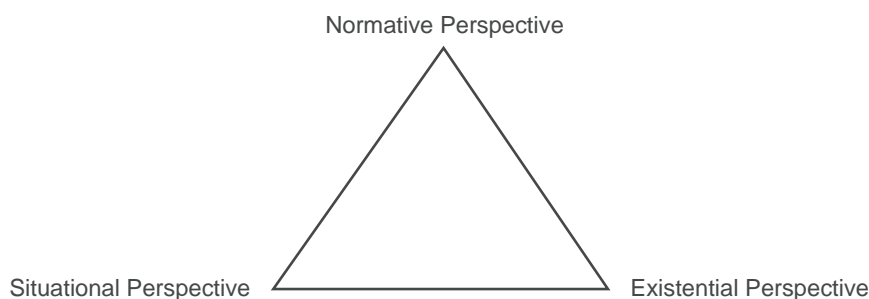


Fig. 1.8. Perspectives on Ethics

Non-Christians live in the same ethical world as Christians (situational), surrounded by God’s laws (normative), made in God’s image (existential). But they choose not to follow God, “exchang[ing] the truth about God for a lie” (Rom. 1:25). As philosophers, they develop systems of ethics that do not acknowledge God’s laws, his world, and themselves as his image. They do not want to be confronted with God, but prefer an ethic that honors their own autonomy.

I mentioned earlier that there are three general types of secular ethics: deontologism, teleologism, and existentialism. These correspond, more or less, to the three perspectives of Christian thought: deontological to the normative, teleological to the situational, and existentialist to the existential. But in Christian ethics, there is no tension between the law, the situation, and the person, because the same God has made all three. God has made the person to live in his world, under his norms. We might have difficulties in applying his ethical norms to ourselves and our situations, but we may not blame that problem on the nature of God’s creation.

Non-Christians, however, do not generally recognize the need to reconcile the three perspectives. They assume that because the biblical God does not exist, there may be inconsistency between the moral law, the world situation, and the moral agent. So many non-Christian philosophers adopt one or two of these perspectives and deny the other(s). So Kant the deontologist embraces the moral law and claims that morality has nothing to do with our environment

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In philosophy itself, thinkers today discuss essentially the same questions that Plato and Aristotle did. That interesting fact suggests that the history of philosophy might be to an extent a history of wrong turns.

or our personal inclinations. Mill the teleologist embraces what he considers to be the goal of ethics (human happiness) and denies that we are bound by rules or personal inclinations that fail to make people happy. And Sartre the existentialist says that ethics is the expression of personal integrity, but not the affirmation of moral law or the objective world.

I argued in *DCL* that these systems are incoherent. My point here is that ethical philosophy is subject to the same difficulties as epistemology and metaphysics. In my earlier discussion of the metaphysics of the human mind, I mentioned the division among philosophers between intellectualists, voluntarists, and subjectivists. In discussing schools of thought in epistemology, I mentioned rationalism, empiricism, and skepticism. In Christian philosophy, the members of each triad are best seen as perspectively related. In the epistemological triad, human beings understand the world as whole persons. *Intellect* refers not to some faculty of the mind separate from others that wars with others for supremacy. Rather, it refers to the capacity of the person to reason and gain knowledge, which is, of course, influenced by will and subjectivity. *Will* refers not to an adversary of the intellect, but to the whole person from another perspective: the person as making choices and decisions. Those choices are influenced by his knowledge, and they in turn influence his thought processes. But non-Christian philosophy, which does not recognize divine coordination of these faculties, often feels that it must choose which one is “primary.”

Same for the triad rationalism, empiricism, skepticism. In Scripture, this triad also describes the whole person in his quest for knowledge. Reason takes sense experience and feelings into account; sense experience can be defined only by reason; and so on. The Christian can trust that God has designed these faculties to work as one. But non-Christian thinkers cannot assume that, so for them one must choose which member of the triad to follow if and when there is conflict. This leads to philosophical partisanship and division.

That partisanship is what drives the history of philosophy. As in politics, one party prevails at first. But then another party scores argumentative points against the first and becomes dominant.

Yet in secular philosophy, none of these questions is ever answered. In other disciplines, such as astronomy, history, geology, and linguistics, one can trace progress to some extent (except when their questions are linked to philosophical questions). But in philosophy itself, thinkers today discuss essentially the same questions that Plato and Aristotle did. That interesting fact suggests that the history of philosophy might be to an extent a history of wrong turns.

KEY TERMS

Philosophy (etymology)	Philosophy (Frame's definition)
Wisdom	Wisdom literature
Worldview	Metanarrative
Theology	Religion (Frame)
Religion (Clouser)	Divine (Clouser)
Secular	Aseity
Metaphysics	Epistemology
Value theory	Being
Monism	Dualism
Pluralism	Atomism
Materialism	Idealism
Universals	Particulars
Nominalism	Realism
Teleology	Determinism
Libertarian freedom	Necessary connection
Intellectualism	Voluntarism
Subjectivism	Theism
Pantheism	Panentheism
Deism	Demiurge
Subject of knowledge	Object of knowledge
Account	Justification
Warrant	Rationalism
Irrationalism	Skepticism
Autonomous reason	Ground of knowledge
Empiricism	<i>Summum bonum</i>
Creator-creature distinction	Creation <i>ex nihilo</i>
Emanation	Oneism
Twoism	Council of Chalcedon
Absolute	Tripersonality
Lordship	Control
Authority	Presence
Lordship attributes	<i>Circumcessio</i>
<i>Perichoresis</i>	Situational perspective
Normative perspective	Existential perspective
Antithesis	Transcendence (biblical)
Immanence (biblical)	Transcendence (nonbiblical)
Immanence (nonbiblical)	Laws of thought
Ethical relativism	Ethical absolutism
Deontologism	Teleologism
Existentialism	Law
Situation	Person (ethics)

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STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What distinguishes the wisdom literature in the Bible from that outside of it?
2. What is the difference between *worldview* and *metanarrative*? Why does Frame think that these are indispensable? How does he reply to Lyotard?
3. Summarize the Christian worldview.
4. Why study philosophy?
5. "Theology is Christian philosophy." Explain; evaluate.
6. How does Frame differ from Barth on "religion"? Evaluate these positions.
7. Many argue that religion must be separated from philosophy, education, or politics. What do you think? Discuss the arguments pro and con.
8. "Nobody is really an atheist." Explain; evaluate.
9. "The basic questions of philosophers are religious in character." Explain, using examples.
10. Why is it difficult to study "being qua being"?
11. Why is there something rather than nothing?
12. Of the metaphysical questions listed in this chapter, which do you find the most intriguing? Present your own analysis.
13. Same for the epistemological questions.
14. How are metaphysics, epistemology, and value theory related in the study of philosophy? Is there one of these that you should study before the others?
15. "Someone might object that this distinction between God and the world is not compatible with the union of God and man in Jesus Christ." Reply.
16. Define and discuss the four adverbs used in the *Chalcedonian Declaration* to describe the relation of Christ's divine and human natures. Why is this important for Christian philosophy?
17. Frame says that the doctrine of God's absolute tripersonality is unique to biblical religion. Is that true? Consider some non-Christian religions in this regard.
18. How do Van Til and Frame relate the doctrine of the Trinity to philosophical discussions of oneness and manyness?
19. How are the persons of the Trinity related to the lordship attributes?
20. Explain and evaluate Frame's distinction between three epistemological perspectives.

21. What does Romans 1:18–32 say about the effects of sin on human knowledge? On human philosophy? Show how the fall of Eve in Genesis 3 affected her philosophy.
22. “The fall itself was on one sense ethical and *not* metaphysical.” Explain; evaluate.
23. “The history of philosophy, therefore, describes one phase of spiritual warfare.” Explain; evaluate.
24. Show on Frame’s rectangular diagram the opposing views of transcendence and immanence. How do the lines in the diagram display the relationships between these?
25. Describe and evaluate Frame’s responses to the metaphysical questions of “the one and many” and the “basic composition of the universe.”
26. Show how the lordship attributes of God are related to human epistemology. Expound the Frame rectangle in terms of rationalism and irrationalism.
27. Frame says that non-Christian thought vacillates between rationalism and irrationalism. Explain; evaluate.
28. Interpret the rectangle in terms of ethical relativism and absolutism.
29. Show how non-Christian ethics violates the triperspectival character of ethical choice.

BIBLIOGRAPHY OF PHILOSOPHY TEXTS

I have listed here texts in philosophy that I consider to be useful for the student, beyond those in the footnotes. I am including some comments about their distinctive content and approaches. Some of these volumes are historical, some topical, some readings translated from primary sources. The list begins with general philosophic texts that bear on all the chapters of this book. I will also, after every chapter, list some texts particularly relevant to the content of the chapter.

Histories of Philosophy: General

- Allen, Diogenes. *Philosophy for Understanding Theology*. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985. Allen analyzes the thought of various philosophers to show how their work bears on the concerns of Christian theology.
- Audi, Robert, ed. *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995. Reference work on philosophers, ideas, and movements. Secular.
- Edwards, Paul, ed. *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. New York: Macmillan/Free Press, 1967. Eight volumes of essays (later published as four) by experts on philosophical issues, movements, and thinkers. Highly

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authoritative, as of its publishing date. Most of the writers approach their subjects from secular points of view.

Gottlieb, Anthony. *The Dream of Reason: A History of Philosophy from the Greeks to the Renaissance*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2002.

Kenny, Anthony. *A New History of Western Philosophy*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. A secular thinker, Kenny is well known as a philosopher in his own right.

Palmer, Donald. *Looking at Philosophy: The Unbearable Heaviness of Philosophy Made Lighter*. Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing, 1994. Accurate secular history of philosophy written in an engaging, witty style, illustrated with cartoons. I have often used it as a text in my seminary course on the history of philosophy.

Placher, William. *Readings in the History of Christian Theology*. 2 vols. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1988. Primary source readings for many of the thinkers discussed in this book.

Strimple, Robert. "Roman Catholic Theology Today." In *Roman Catholicism*, edited by John Armstrong, 85–117. Chicago: Moody Press, 1994. An accurate and concise summary of post-Vatican II Roman Catholicism.

Stumpf, Samuel Enoch, and James Fieser. *Socrates to Sartre and Beyond: A History of Philosophy*. Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2003. Definitive, detailed, and often difficult secular treatment. Later, this book was combined with a group of primary-source readings in *Philosophy: History and Readings*. 8th ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2011.

Tarnas, Richard. *The Passion of the Western Mind: Understanding the Ideas That Have Shaped Our World* (NY: Ballantine Books, 1993). Tarnas is a non-Christian writer who is highly respected among academic philosophers. His explicitly pagan work provides an interesting contrast with the historic Christian viewpoint.

Thilly, Frank, and Ledger Wood. *A History of Philosophy*. New York: Henry Holt, 1957. This was the textbook used at Princeton where I first studied the history of philosophy. It is a comprehensive secular text, very clearly written, judicious in its selections, generally well organized.

Online

Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. <http://www.iep.utm.edu>.

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. <http://plato.stanford.edu>.

Readings in Philosophy: General

Abel, Donald C., ed. *Fifty Readings in Philosophy*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2011. Readings in primary sources with brief introductions. A companion volume to the text in the next entry.

Abel, Donald C., and Eric O. Springsted. *Primary Readings in Philosophy for Understanding Theology*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992.

Christian Analyses of the History of Philosophy

Bartholomew, Craig G., and Michael W. Goheen. *Christian Philosophy: A Systematic and Narrative Introduction*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013. An analysis of the whole history of philosophy, with an emphasis on Christian philosophy in the modern period. Bartholomew and Goheen are most indebted to the Christian philosophy of Herman Dooyeweerd, discussed briefly in chapter 13 of the present volume.

Brown, Colin. *Christianity and Western Thought: A History of Philosophers, Ideas, and Movements from the Ancient World to the Age of Enlightenment*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010.

———. *Philosophy and the Christian Faith*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1968. Excellent textbook written from a Christian point of view. Brown says, “The aim of this book is to make a survey of the main thinkers and intellectual movements of western thought of the past thousand years, with a view to showing how they affect Christian belief.” His limitation to the past thousand years keeps him, in my view, from giving sufficient attention to the thinkers from Thales to Plotinus, who certainly had a major effect on Christian belief. Deals with some modern theologians as well as philosophers.

Clark, Gordon H. *Thales to Dewey: A History of Philosophy*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957. Clark was a Reformed Christian philosopher who defended biblical inerrancy. He sought to encourage more respect for logic and reason. See chapter 13 of the present volume. Clark’s book is clearly written and focuses somewhat more on epistemology than on other areas of philosophy. It contains a fairly subtle Christian apologetic.

Copleston, Frederick C. *A History of Philosophy*. 9 vols. Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1962–65. Nine-volume work by a scholarly Roman Catholic priest.

Hicks, Peter. *The Journey So Far: Philosophy through the Ages*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003. Discussion of the history of philosophy as a dialogue between Christian thought and philosophical schools.

Hoffecker, W. Andrew, ed. *Revolutions in Worldview: Understanding the Flow of Western Thought*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2007. Generally excellent essays on the history of Christian thought as it responds to the developments of intellectual history.

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- Moreland, J. P., and William Lane Craig. *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003. Large, thorough discussion of philosophical problems from a Christian point of view. Topical rather than historical.
- Nash, Ronald H. *Life's Ultimate Questions: An Introduction to Philosophy*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999. Christian interpretation of several major philosophical issues and several major philosophical thinkers.
- Naugle, David K. *Philosophy: A Student's Guide*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012. A brief topical discussion of philosophical issues (prolegomena, metaphysics, philosophical anthropology, etc.) from a Christian point of view. Quite valuable.
- Schaeffer, Francis A. *How Shall We Then Live?* Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005. Schaeffer was an evangelist rather than an academic scholar, but he popularized a broadly presuppositional apologetic that frequently appealed to the history of philosophy and culture. Many came to believe in Christianity through his work. He wrote many books, but this one summarizes his use of the history of philosophy.
- Sire, James W. *Habits of the Mind*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000.
- . *The Universe Next Door: A Basic World View Catalogue*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1975. Sire influenced many to think of the Christian faith as a worldview, in competition with other worldviews.
- Van Til, Cornelius. *A Survey of Christian Epistemology*. Philadelphia: Den Dulk Foundation, 1969. Van Til's work has had much influence on the present volume. Van Til often refers in his many books to philosophers and philosophical issues. But this one, a revision of his early *Metaphysics of Apologetics*, is one of the few that deals with the history of philosophy in a systematic way. This book deals extensively with Plato, and then with Plato's repercussions through history.
- . *Who Do You Say That I Am?* Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1975. This is much shorter than the previous title, and gives the gist of Van Til's critique of non-Christian philosophical thought. The three sections deal with ancient, medieval, and modern replies to the titular question.
- Wolterstorff, Nicholas. *Reason within the Bounds of Religion*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984. Note the reversal of Kant's title. This is a very important work on the nature of Christian thought. I discuss Wolterstorff in chapter 13 of the present volume.

READ FOR YOURSELF

After each chapter of this book, I will list some primary source materials from the writers discussed in the chapter. Usually these will be the writings of historical figures. But since chapter 1 is primarily a systematic rather than a historical discussion, the “read for yourself” titles for this chapter will suggest books and articles that you can read to become more familiar with the approach to philosophy described here.

Frame, John M. *Apologetics to the Glory of God*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1994.

———. *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1995.

———. *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1987.

Frame on the Web: <http://www.frame-poythress.org>.

Poythress, Vern S. *Inerrancy and Worldview: Answering Modern Challenges to the Bible*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012.

———. *In the Beginning Was the Word: Language: A God-Centered Approach*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009.

———. *Logic: A God-Centered Approach to the Foundation of Western Thought*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013.

———. *Philosophy, Science, and the Sovereignty of God*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2004.

———. *Redeeming Philosophy: A God-Centered Approach to the Big Questions*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014.

———. *Redeeming Science: A God-Centered Approach*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006.

Poythress on the Web: <http://www.frame-poythress.org>.

Van Til, Cornelius. *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*. Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1969.

———. *The Defense of the Faith*. Edited by K. Scott Oliphint. 4th ed. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008.

———. *A Survey of Christian Epistemology*. Philadelphia: Den Dulk Foundation, 1969.

———. *Who Do You Say That I Am?* Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1975.

Van Til on the Web: <http://www.vantil.info>.

LISTEN ONLINE

After each chapter of this book, I will list the related free audio lectures on the History of Philosophy that are located at the Reformed Theological Seminary iTunes University website. (See the table “Correlation of Book Chapters with Free Online Lectures,” found earlier in this book, for the complete list.) These are lectures that I have

OUTLINE

Why Study
Philosophy?

Philosophy,
Theology, and
Religion

Subdivisions of
Philosophy

Metaphysics
Epistemology
Value Theory

Relations of the
Three Subdivisions

Biblical Philosophy

Perspectives of
Human Knowledge

Sin and Philosophy

Christian and
Non-Christian
Philosophy

The Antithesis in
Metaphysics

The Antithesis in
Epistemology

The Antithesis in
Values

given as part of RTS's online learning program, and they are described at the link below this way:

Spanning the timeframe from centuries before Christ to the present day, . . . [this course] explores the intersection between philosophical and Christian theological reflections in the ancient Greeks, early Christian Fathers, Medieval Christianity, the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and post-Enlightenment periods. This course will guide the listener through the thoughts and writings of major philosophical and theological thinkers, enabling the student to become more conversant with what has developed in these areas over the centuries.

Link: <http://itunes.apple.com/us/course/legacy-history-philosophy/id694658914>

- Why Study Philosophy—Metaphysics, Epistemology, and a Biblical Worldview: 53:51 minutes.
- Comparison of Biblical and Nonbiblical Worldviews: 31:42 minutes.

FAMOUS QUOTES

- **Aristotle:** <http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Aristotle>
- **Clouser:** <http://www.metanexus.net/essay/excerpt-myth-religious-neutrality>
- **Frame:** Theology is “the application of the Word of God by persons to all areas of life.” (*Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* [Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1987], 81)
- **Frame:** Nobody is really an atheist, in the most serious sense of that term. (This chapter)
- **Frame:** So I will argue through this book that the basic questions of philosophers are religious in character. (This chapter)
- **Lyotard:** http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/126575.Jean_Fran_ois_Lyotard
- **Van Til:** Arguing about God's existence, I hold, is like arguing about air. You may affirm that air exists, and I that it does not. But as we debate the point, we are both breathing air all the time. (*Why I Believe in God* [Chestnut Hill, PA: Westminster Theological Seminary, 1976], 3)
- **Van Til:** We always deal with concrete individual men. These men are sinners. They have “an axe to grind.” They want to

suppress the truth in unrighteousness [Roms 1:18]. They will employ their reason for that purpose. (*The Defense of the Faith*, ed. K. Scott Oliphint, 4th ed. [Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008], 107)

- **Van Til:** Seeking to string beads that cannot be strung because they have no holes in them, with string of infinite length neither end of which you can find; such is the task of the educator who seeks to educate without presupposing the truth of what the self-attesting Christ has spoken in the Scriptures. (*Essays on Christian Education* [Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1971], 16)
- **Van Til:** But the best and only possible proof for the existence of such a God is that his existence is required for the uniformity of nature and for the coherence of all things in the world. We cannot *prove* the existence of beams underneath a floor if by proof we mean that they must be ascertainable in the way that we can see the chairs and tables of the room. But the very idea of a floor as the support of tables and chairs requires the idea of beams that are underneath. But there would be no floor if no beams were underneath. Thus there is absolutely certain proof for the existence of God and the truth of Christian theism. Even non-Christians presuppose its truth while they verbally reject it. They need to presuppose the truth of Christian theism in order to account for their own accomplishments. (*The Defense of the Faith*, 126)
- **Van Til:** In other words, the non-Christian needs the truth of the Christian religion in order to attack it. As a child needs to sit on the lap of its father in order to slap the father's face, so the unbeliever, as a creature, needs God the Creator and providential controller of the universe in order to oppose this God. Without this God, the place on which he stands does not exist. He cannot stand in a vacuum. (*Essays on Christian Education*, 89)

A History of Western Philosophy and Theology is the fruit of John Frame's forty-five years of teaching philosophical subjects. No other survey of the history of Western thought offers the same invigorating blend of expositional clarity, critical insight, and biblical wisdom. The supplemental study questions, bibliographies, links to audio lectures, quotes from influential thinkers, twenty appendices, and indexed glossary make this an excellent main textbook choice for seminary- and college-level courses and for personal study.

"This is the most important book ever written on the major figures and movements in philosophy. We have needed a sound guide, and this is it."

—**Vern S. Poythress**, Professor of New Testament Interpretation, Westminster Theological Seminary; Editor, *Westminster Theological Journal*

"I have never read a history of Western thought quite like John Frame's. Professor Frame unabashedly tries to think through sources and movements out of the framework (bad pun intended) of deep-seated Christian commitments and invites his readers to do the same. These commitments will make this work invaluable to students and pastors . . . Agree or disagree with some of his arguments, but John Frame will teach you how to *think* in theological and philosophical categories."

—**D. A. Carson**, Research Professor of New Testament, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

"Few in our day champion a vision of God that is as massive, magnificent, and biblical as John Frame's. For decades, he has given himself to the church, to his students, and to meticulous thinking and the rigorous study of the Bible. He has winsomely, patiently, and persuasively contended for the gospel in the secular philosophical arena as well as in the thick of the church worship wars and wrestlings with feminism and open theism. He brings together a rare blend of big-picture thinking, levelheaded reflection, biblical fidelity, a love for the gospel and the church, and the ability to write with care and clarity."

—**John Piper**, Founder and Teacher, desiringGod.org; Chancellor, Bethlehem College and Seminary